‘The Mindful Manifesto helps us to “be” more and to “do” less. It’s old wisdom backed by modern science, beautifully described.’

– Professor Richard Layard, Well-Being Programme Director, London School of Economics

‘This book is really important. Mindfulness is the way forward for dealing with depression and anxiety, and for general wellbeing.’

– Ruby Wax, comedian

‘Every single person, from Prime Ministers and Presidents up to “ordinary men and women”, would benefit from practising mindfulness and stillness in their lives. This wisdom has been known for thousands of years and now the science has at last caught up with it. This book makes the case admirably clearly.’

– Dr Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College and author of Blair, Blair Unbound: The Biography Part II, Brown at 10 and Trust: How We Lost It and How to Get It Back

‘Wise, sensible and helpful for all forms of emotional disorders from depression to anxiety and addiction. This book on mindfulness is a great step towards finding peace of mind.’

– Sally Brampton, author of Shoot the Damn Dog: A Memoir of Depression

‘The Mindful Manifesto offers a fresh perspective on ancient wisdom. It is authentic, timely and hugely needed.’

– Peter J. Conradi, author of Going Buddhist: Panic and Emptiness, the Buddha and Me and Iris Murdoch: A Life
'A lucid and highly practical guide to how the Buddhist techniques of mindfulness can be of enormous benefit to our health, relationships and peace of mind.'

– Mick Brown, author of The Spiritual Tourist: A Personal Odyssey Through the Outer Reaches of Belief and The Dance of 17 Lives: The Incredible True Story of Tibet’s 17th Karmapa

‘Is there anything worth doing that wouldn’t go better if you practised mindfulness? Ed and Jonty have written a wonderful, accessible book that could save your health and change your life.’

– Michael Chaskalson, co-author of Mindfulness and Money, honorary research fellow at the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice, Bangor University

‘A thoroughly well-written book that will serve as an excellent guide for anyone wishing to understand or practise mindfulness.’

– Dr David Hamilton, author of How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body and Why Kindness Is Good for You
THE MINDFUL MANIFESTO
THE MINDFUL MANIFESTO

HOW DOING LESS AND NOTICING MORE CAN HELP US THRIVE IN A STRESSED-OUT WORLD

DR JONTY HEAVERSEDGE & ED HALLIWELL

www.themindfulmanifesto.com
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There comes a time when any secret will get out into the world. No matter how hard we try to keep it hidden, it will be revealed, made manifest. For centuries, the principles and practices of mindfulness meditation were pretty much hidden away. You had to travel a far distance, perhaps to Asia, to see a teacher who might help you with the inner work of this meditation.

In the 1960s there was some excitement when certain forms of concentration meditation were taught in the West. Western scientists were intrigued: What were the psychological and physiological effects of such practices? The new scientific instruments of the day were used to measure bodily reactions such as heart rate and minor fluctuations in sweating. They showed that these meditations were as effective as deep relaxation techniques in calming the mind and body, and bringing about states of wellbeing.

But that’s as far as it went. Because commonly used relaxation procedures were just as effective, anything ‘extra’ about the meditation was deemed to be unnecessary. Why recite mantras when identical effects could be found without them? Meditation as a ‘technique’ for reducing stress was reduced to a minority activity within science, and pursued by a relatively small group of distinguished Western scientists.
Then something changed. Because we are still living through the effects of this change, we can’t be sure exactly what happened, but the dispersion of Tibetan and Vietnamese monks in the second half of the 20th century may lie at its root. The West had been prepared for this, in some ways, from the interest in Zen that had been an important cultural influence in the United States from the 1950s onwards. Also influential were some Western teachers who travelled to Asia (especially Thailand and Burma) and brought back to the West a different emphasis – what they called Insight (or Mindfulness) Meditation.

Mindfulness meditation doesn’t just emphasise focusing and refocusing attention on a single point, but invites people to combine this training with a receptive, open awareness that might, if cultivated, offer a direct sense of what is arising, moment by moment, in the external and internal world. It also offers a way of responding to these events, and our reactions to them, with open-hearted compassion.

Gradually the message became clearer: we don’t need to ‘get rid’ of our stress, tiredness and sadness, but to see its patterns clearly, and meet it with an open and friendly curiosity. This is different from our habitual reaction, which is to react to something we don’t like by either pushing it away or brooding about it. Because we have never been taught any other way to meet our distress, we don’t realise how much our habits of avoidance or brooding are making things worse, turning momentary tiredness into exhaustion, momentary fear into chronic worry, and momentary sadness into chronic unhappiness and depression. So it isn’t
our fault that we end up exhausted, anxious or depressed. We have been given only one tool to deal with things we don't like: get rid, work harder, be better, be perfect – and if we fail to make things different, we too easily conclude that we are a failure as a person. This is a recipe for a troubled world. As Jon Kabat-Zinn has said, we need, literally and metaphorically, to come to our senses.

What seems to be changing is that people are grasping this new way of understanding – the way of mindfulness. People are seeing more clearly the origin of much of our suffering, how our own reactions can compound our distress, and the path that can free us. People are returning to some of the original Buddhist texts and, more importantly, the practices that have been passed down over 25 centuries. These, taught in a secular context, have been found in recent scientific studies to liberate people from their stress, anxiety and unhappiness in ways that seem to go beyond the usual results of existing psychological treatments. These studies find that mindfulness not only reduces negative mood and prevents future episodes of clinical depression, but also enhances wellbeing and quality of life, even in the most tragic circumstances, by allowing people to let go of avoidance and brooding, and by cultivating self-compassion.

This is ancient wisdom in the East. But it is a new discovery for the West, and brings with it all the challenges that come when the West ‘gets’ a ‘new thing’. Yet there is something we can say for sure: something that was hidden is now being revealed. We can now grasp it, we can hold it in our hands … and the word for this (from manus – hand, and festus – grasped) is the familiar word: ‘manifesto’. 
It is wonderful that Jonty Heaversedge and Ed Halliwell have written this book to give freely of their own experience, and to share the tremendous possibilities that come with training the mind and body to do less and to notice more. Their manifesto, like all manifestos, is both a statement of the potential that lies in all of us and a call to action to realise that potential. In the case of mindfulness, this call to action is to live life, moment by moment, as if it really mattered.

– Professor Mark Williams, University of Oxford
Author of *The Mindful Way through Depression*
Our intention in writing this book is to offer some insight into what is meant by ‘mindfulness’ – its roots in meditation and Buddhism, its relevance to modern-day life and the increasing scientific basis for its use in optimising health and wellbeing. We would also like to share with you the experiences of some people who have benefitted from practising mindfulness, and to encourage you to try it for yourself.

We have tried to strike a balance between East and West, Buddhism and psychology, secular and spiritual, theoretical and experiential to make it as interesting as possible to as wide an audience as possible. We hope you will find this approach engaging and challenging in equal measure, and that it will stimulate you to investigate the subject further.

This is not a ‘Buddhist’ book and is not meant to challenge any religious (or non-religious) beliefs you may have. However, given how connected the practices of meditation and mindfulness are with the Buddhist tradition, we felt it important to offer some context and to show how current ideas about mindfulness evolved out of it. By combining both Buddhist philosophy and current scientific research in the fields of psychology, immunology and neuroscience, we hope you find what we have written both authentic and current.
We are only at the beginning of discovering how mindfulness could help us to live happier, more productive, compassionate and meaningful lives. Not only could the development of greater mindfulness help to reduce physical and mental health problems, free us from unwanted behaviours and improve our functioning in our relationships and jobs, but it is also a basis for understanding how to develop our potential as human beings. The Mindful Manifesto, then, is not just for people experiencing ‘illness’; it is for anyone who wants to be happier and healthier and to live in a wiser, more peaceful, genuine and compassionate world.

Ed Halliwell and Jonty Heaversedge
August 2010
CHAPter one

A CALL to BEING

Just ‘be’ for a moment – focus your attention on what is happening in your body, in your mind, in the world around you – be inquisitive about whatever your experience is, and allow yourself to slow down enough to notice.

We live in an overactive world. From the moment we wake up, many of us are already started on a frantic round of relentless striving that ends only when we crash, exhausted, into bed at night. Whether we’re trying to make money, raise kids, help friends, build a career, save the world, get a bigger house, faster car, stronger body or more attractive partner, it seems we are forever on the go, constantly trying to propel ourselves into a better future. We are doing, doing, doing – and we get stressed. Around 7 million adults in the UK are so tense that, if they saw a doctor, they’d be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.¹
There is nothing actually wrong with doing – it has enabled humanity to achieve some amazing feats. People have created machines that connect us to someone on the other side of the planet. They have made beautiful art, inspiring music, great literature and magnificent architecture. They have accumulated vast storehouses of knowledge that we can use to predict the weather, fly across the sky and carry out heart transplants. In the last 100 years especially, the speed at which we have made scientific and technological progress is astonishing. And that progress has given us the capacity to do even more, even faster. We can click a mouse, flick a switch, press a button and accomplish tasks that would have taken previous generations many times longer – if they could have managed them at all. Because of all this accomplishment, many of us lead lives that seem healthier, safer and more comfortable than our ancestors could have dared hope for.

But there is a problem. Despite all these incredible advances, are we really happy? After all, isn’t the point of all this doing to make our lives easier, more enjoyable? Every time someone invents a quicker computer or develops a new medical treatment, isn’t he or she trying to reduce the amount of hassle or suffering that we have to cope with in our lives? Unfortunately, the evidence speaks for itself: even for those of us who live in the Western world, in countries which boast the highest levels of material comfort, suffering is everywhere. Our health services are overwhelmed by patients with chronic illness. We are scared of crime and terrorism. Our relationships break down. Our children don’t ‘perform’ at school. We get into conflict with neighbours. We work too hard, or not at all, or in a job we don’t like.
And then there are the huge global challenges we face – threats of war, poverty and environmental devastation, for which we have yet to invent a solution. Sometimes our inventions make the suffering even greater. The tremendous technologies of the 20th century have undoubtedly saved and improved lives, but they have also been used to kill millions of people, as well as potentially creating a climate catastrophe that threatens our very survival as a species.

Even on a mundane level, surveys tells us that the devices designed to help us get things done faster (and therefore give us more time) actually end up making us feel more stressed. We use gadgets to try and multitask, as fast as we can, urgently processing the huge volumes of information thrown at us from every direction. Speedy technology can make us rush even faster, bombarding us with so much choice we can no longer give anyone, or anything, our undivided attention. We walk around with our headphones in, send text messages to one friend while chatting to another, answer the phone when we’re eating a meal and reply to office emails from the beach. We are so often distracted.

We want to relieve the stress in our lives and the suffering in our world, because we want to be happy. We want to be less anxious and in less pain, we want to feel safe in our neighbourhoods, we want a good relationship, we want our children to do well at school and we want to have a good career. We want to flourish. And so perhaps we do even more, hoping that will make us feel better. We might go to a different doctor, move house, change partners, or get a new job – perhaps one that pays more money so we can
buy more ‘stuff’ which we think will bring us satisfaction. We’ll take pills and potions, bend, stretch, diet and detox … if we only make enough of an effort, surely we will find the solution to our pain? We grit our teeth. Or perhaps we get busy in the other direction – distracting ourselves from our problems by drinking, smoking, taking drugs or overeating.

Some of us decide we want to do something to help other people. We want to cure cancer, so we decide to become a doctor or health researcher. We want to beat crime, so we join the police. We want to stop global warming, famine and war, so we recycle our plastic bags, give money to charity or go on marches. As the saying goes: ‘Don’t just sit there, do something.’

A few people want to do something so much that they go into politics. They devise and carry out programmes designed to solve our problems from above – improving the lot of communities, countries or even the planet. These programmes come from the left, right and middle of the political spectrum – from communists to capitalists, anarchists to army generals, religious people to humanists. The plans may differ in content, but the underlying message is usually the same: if we want to make the world a happier place, we need to do something – right now!

But what if all this doing is actually part of the problem? What if, rather than needing to take more action, we need to take less? What if our compulsive habit of striving so hard to make things better is actually part of the reason we are so anxious? What if we don’t need technology to speed up, but ourselves to slow down? Could it be that by
doing less, not more, we might actually begin to relieve our chronic illness and stress? What might happen if we decided just to accept things as they are, to just ‘be’ for a while? By learning how to slow down and pay more attention to our world, might we then see more clearly how to make it a happier place?

LEARNING TO BE

Learning how to be – doing less and noticing more – is what the Mindful Manifesto is all about. It isn’t the usual kind of manifesto – there is no great plan to solve all our problems instantly. Instead, it is an invitation to stop doing, at least for a time, and learn how to be, right now, in the present moment.

The word ‘manifesto’ derives from the Latin verb *manifestare*, which means ‘to show plainly’. In English, to manifest means ‘to become apparent’. Our suggestion is that by learning how to be, we might start to release a deep wisdom that can show us plainly how things really are, and what we need to do, without the need for agendas of any kind. Things can become apparent, our deepest values will become clearer and we will begin to know what to do. By using the word manifesto in this way, we are reclaiming its true meaning – not a plan of action, but a call to being.

By learning how to be, we take our foot off the gas pedal of activity, come out of overdrive and restore some mental and physical balance. Rather than desperately searching for a cure for our problems, we let go and begin to let a natural
wellbeing, wakefulness and wisdom emerge. We stop seeking answers, and let them come to us. We give up the fight – and the stress that comes with it.

This could relieve some of the chronic illness that afflicts so many of us. Mental health problems like depression and anxiety make up around 30 per cent of the average family doctor’s caseload,\(^3\) and the World Health Organisation has predicted that, within 20 years, depression will have become the planet’s most burdensome illness.\(^4\) And then there are the masses of stress-related physical symptoms that doctors are unable to diagnose or treat effectively. These ‘medically unexplained illnesses’ – such as chronic back, stomach or chest pain, irritable bowel syndrome and fatigue – are a factor in up to a third of GP consultations.\(^5\)

Neither doctors nor patients like feeling powerless, and so we often try to deal with illnesses like these with more doing – trying a new drug or treatment, arranging a visit to a specialist or having tests done. Unfortunately, because stress and overactivity frequently cause these conditions, all this doing can actually make things worse, and everyone – doctor and patient – just becomes more and more frustrated.

Even when doctors can diagnose our problems, there’s no guarantee of a cure. There are good treatments for infections and a number of cancers these days, but most illnesses that trouble us are chronic – we just have to learn to live with them. Unfortunately, the common assumption that doctors can ‘fix’ us is false.
So, instead of struggling with illness, perhaps we could accept it as a natural part of life? We may still take drugs, have surgery or try some other form of therapy – but by learning how to be with our condition, rather than fighting it so hard, we could reduce our stress, giving treatments the best chance to work, and ourselves the best chance of recovery.

Learning how to ‘be’ could improve more than just our health. It could impact our wellbeing on every level, as individuals, couples, families, communities, nations and as a world. Whether it’s a difficult relationship, an addiction or the threat of war, we can allow space for solutions to emerge. As the dust created by our stress begins to settle, we can open up, relax into our situation and see more clearly. Wisdom can start to dawn, and we can begin to act creatively, decisively and appropriately, more spontaneously in tune with our world.

It sounds simple, doesn’t it? And in a sense, it is – if we can truly relax, we will start to see things as they are, be fully ourselves, act more skilfully and find greater contentment. It doesn’t even cost any money. Unfortunately, although it is simple, manifesting in this way is not easy. Try it for yourself and you might see what we mean. For the next two minutes, put this book down and don’t do anything. Wherever you are, just ‘be’.

THE HABIT OF BUSY-NESS

So, how was it? Maybe you were confused (‘I’m not sure what I’m supposed to be doing – should something be happening here?’), irritated (‘What a pointless exercise! Of course I
know how to be – I’m being all the time, aren’t I?’) or excited (‘Ah great, we’re getting to the part where they tell me how I get better!’)? Perhaps you got interrupted by someone who thought you were acting strangely, or who desperately wanted you to talk to them. Maybe you were distracted by the noise of a car, a beautiful flower, remembering you’d left the gas on, or a stomach ache. Or maybe you didn’t do the exercise at all – you couldn’t wait to get onto the next paragraph, or you just couldn’t be bothered.

Whatever happened, we bet you didn’t instantly find yourself feeling naturally wise, open and relaxed, or spontaneously in tune with your world. Why is ‘being’ so difficult? Surely it shouldn’t be so hard to stop doing, just for two minutes?

It is difficult because we are not used to it. From the day we were born, we have been bombarded with stimuli that tell us we should keep busy. We have learned it from our parents, who were probably busy trying to keep it all together while we were growing up, and from our schools, which probably taught us that the way to survive in a busy world is to get busy ourselves. And we learn it from the media, which provides a constant stream of information, entertainment and drama, telling us all about how other people are busy – especially influential ones like politicians, sportspeople and celebrities. If we are busy, the message goes, we can become rich, and if we are rich we can afford things that will make us happy.

Most of us know that all this busy-ness is not the way to be happy. When someone actually stops and asks us what
makes us feel content, we are prompted to reflect and we respond wisely. According to a Mental Health Foundation survey, 81 per cent of us agree that ‘the fast pace of life and the number of things we have to do and worry about these days is a major cause of stress, unhappiness and illness in our society,’ while 86 per cent agree that ‘people would be much happier and healthier if they knew how to slow down and live in the moment.’ But still we don’t do it – our busy-ness has become a habit. Meanwhile, the cult of doing is everywhere, making its lure difficult to resist. So we just carry on being speedy, even though somewhere deep down we know there is something wrong.

We are not only busy bodies, we are busy minds. In the same Mental Health Foundation survey, more than half the people said they ‘find it difficult to relax or switch off, and can’t stop thinking about things I have to do or nagging worries’. The messages telling us to keep busy are so powerful that they get ingrained in our thought patterns and drive our behaviour, even when it makes us mentally or physically ill. Even when we say we are ‘doing nothing’, what we often mean is that we are tuning out in front of the TV.

No wonder that one of the frequently heard cries from early 21st-century citizens is for some ‘headspace’. We get stressed because there is often so little space in our minds. Unfortunately, because there is so little space, and because we are stressed, there is no room to reflect on how to find a way out of our predicament. The faster we go, the more we tend to react impulsively, following our unconscious, habitual patterns. It is a nasty vicious circle. And in order to release ourselves from it, we need help. We need a powerful antidote to speed. We need a method.
One powerful method is mindfulness. In mindfulness meditation, we practise paying attention and notice what is happening in our body, our mind and the world around us. We slow down, deliberately and gently bringing awareness to our experience, over and over again. Gradually, as we practise, we begin to see how we get caught up with being on automatic pilot, unconsciously playing out habitual patterns of thought, feelings and behaviour that create stress and suffering. In mindfulness meditation, we start being fully present to our thoughts and feelings, and we create space in our mind and body.

By calmly, quietly and kindly observing our mind, we see our repetitive, negative thinking patterns, our uncomfortable feelings – anger, perhaps, sadness or fear – and we notice how they impel us towards reactions which cause us suffering, even though we hope they will make us happier.

In mindfulness meditation, we let go of action and watch our mind, with curiosity and friendliness. We notice how everything in it arises and passes away naturally – and we see that we don’t have to be so caught up in everything we think, feel and do – we simply watch it all in a friendly, compassionate and interested way. We begin to see that we are not our thoughts and feelings, and that they do not have to dominate us – we stop taking things so personally. This is the foundation for a wiser, gentler, more compassionate and confident relationship with our minds, and with our lives.
Compare this mindful mode to our usual, overactive way of operating. When we are rushing through life, most of us aren’t paying much attention at all. Instead, we’re swept away by thoughts and feelings, shunted into reactions that are based on habit, the powerful impulse to continue doing what we did in the past.

When we have a negative thought, rather than watching it arise and dissolve, we dwell on it, create a story around it, and throw ourselves into a round of punishing criticism: ‘I always feel so useless compared to Sally, she’s so on top of things ... mind you, she’s boring, she’s got no life outside work ... oh great, there I go again, why am I so negative?’ Or, when someone shouts at us, rather than observing the anger or fear it produces in our bodies, we shout back or run away. We rush around constantly, brooding about the past and worrying about the future. We keep on doing the same old things, and getting the same old results. This is mind/lessness.

In mindfulness meditation we learn to tolerate our impulse to follow old patterns which don’t serve us. We cultivate a gap between thought and action, in which we can simply be present to our experience. Gradually, as we become more and more skilled, our ability to dwell in this gap grows, and we are impelled less and less into impulsive, knee-jerk reactions. We can stay with our experience long enough to consider our options, connect with our deepest values and start to make wiser choices. We step out of automatic pilot. As we begin to make better decisions, our lives start to work better – we begin to exist in the flow of life, rather than always trying to resist it or escape it. By practising
mindfulness, we are laying the ground for deep, lasting change, creating space in which we can develop new habits of thinking and behaving that will serve us better, and help us serve others better.

Mindfulness meditation is no quick fix – it means giving up the search for instant answers that come from outside us. It means taking a profound, radical step, starting to cut out suffering at its root – in our minds. This is supremely empowering – for while we may not appear to have full control over our external lives, we can always work with our mind, turning our attention to gently, firmly and repeatedly training it to thrive in the midst of life’s challenges. We aren’t just tinkering with what work we do, where we live, how much money we make or whom we decide to be friends with – we are changing how we relate with our consciousness, the tool that actually experiences all these details. By changing how we relate with our minds, we start to put wellbeing in our own hands.

It’s a bit like having a TV with a fuzzy picture – it blurs, cuts out, and there’s snow on the screen. You try changing channels, fiddling with the remote, switching it on and off again, or banging the set. Finally you call the engineer, who goes up on the roof and gently shifts the aerial – it had been forced out of place by the wind. Your reception becomes clearer.

Many of us deal with our problems in the same way: we try to change channels, hit the remote or bang the set – to alter the contents of our experience. With mindfulness meditation, we’re learning how to change the position of
our aerial, to see things from a different perspective. We’re training our mind to receive the experience of our lives clearly and accurately.

**PRACTISING GENTLY**

If we practise mindfulness regularly, in a spirit of curiosity and gentleness, and without striving for results, the benefits will appear. We can start to see how our craving for pleasure causes us pain, and how our attempts to resist or escape suffering only make it greater. We may no longer be so in thrall to the conditioning we received when we were growing up, or so easily give in to the social and cultural pressures to speed up and follow the herd, doing things that aren’t good for us, for others or for the world. Perhaps we’ll start to see that we can’t solve the problems of a busy mind with a busy mind.

Maybe we won’t be so upset when things don’t go right, and start to accept and be realistic about the natural ups and downs of human existence – life can become less of an insult and more of a joy. Mindfulness allows us to enjoy the delights of the world, without getting so attached to them or using them in a way that depletes the earth’s resources. It can mean we unconsciously harm others less often. With mindfulness we can make better decisions, and no longer be so tempted to chase dreams that won’t bring us happiness. We can start to choose consciously and cultivate behaviours that bring about genuine contentment. When we are mindful we spend less time living in our heads, and aren’t so dominated by our thoughts and feelings – we become less wrapped up
in ourselves. We can start to see and flow with the way things are. We can start to be!

Now, imagine if you weren’t the only one who’s decided to learn how to be more mindful. Imagine if all your friends and family decided to start practising meditation as well. Then it wouldn’t only be you who noticed how habitual tendencies get in the way of wellbeing, and how constant craving and doing create more suffering. Everyone around you would slow down, start paying attention to their minds and begin to reap the benefits of greater awareness. They too might start to become more relaxed, and more discerning. Their discoveries about their minds could chime with your own insights, and you could start to feel supported by your environment rather than challenged by it. Your friends and family might feel the same, bringing you closer and allowing your lives to work in flow together. The energy of mindfulness would grow in power and, with increased confidence, you might feel more able, as a group, to resist the cultural and social pressures to be speedy and materialistic. You would all feel less stressed. You might each get ill less often, and start to feel happy more of the time, more able to share the joys of the world with one another. You would start living mindfully. You would start being, together.

And now, imagine that the news about the benefits of mindfulness meditation spread much, much further and wider. Imagine if instruction in mindfulness were available to every patient, with any health condition. Imagine that instead of telling us about the latest celebrity gossip, the latest car or the latest diet, newspapers and magazines used
some space to inform their readers that developing and maintaining mindfulness practice could lead us towards a happier, healthier life. Imagine that instead of pressuring us to work harder and faster, employers encouraged their workers to take time out each day to meditate, in the knowledge that real productivity comes from a relaxed, clear-minded and energetic staff. Imagine if mindfulness were taught in every primary and secondary school, so that instead of just learning how to pass exams and reach targets, children discovered from an early age how to ‘be’, embedding their learning in a framework of greater compassion and creativity. And imagine, just imagine, if instead of shouting about how useless their opponents are, politicians sat mindfully in meditation for 10 minutes before each session of Parliament, pausing to disengage their egos and notice how their unhelpful old patterns of thought and feelings might be driving their decisions – shifting our current process of government away from defensiveness and confrontation and further towards constructive collaboration and cooperation. Imagine, finally, what it would be like if mindfulness formed the groundwork of our whole lives, the basis from which we could work towards creating the happy world that we all want, but which we seem to find so hard to manifest.

Unrealistic, you might say. Pie in the sky. A pipe dream. People would never do it – they already think they don’t have enough time, so why would they sit down to practise meditation? Anyway, most people think meditating is a weird, ‘new-age’ thing, something to do with Eastern religion or escaping from reality. What’s going to make them change their minds? I might give it a go – after all,
that’s why I picked up this book – but the idea that the majority of ordinary people are going to do it is a flight of fancy; it just isn’t going to happen. And as for doctors, teachers, employers and politicians encouraging people to meditate – give me a break!

MINDFULNESS IN THE MAINSTREAM

If that’s what you think, we have news for you. It’s already starting to happen. Mindfulness meditation is no longer found only on the spiritual fringes, in self-help sections of bookshops and alternative health centres. It is going mainstream. Powerful people are starting to sit up and take notice, realising that mindfulness might be, as suggested, a way to work more skilfully with some of the enormous problems we face as a world.

Why are they taking notice now, you might ask, when meditation practitioners have long been saying that working with our minds in this way is beneficial? After all, mindfulness is not a new technology – the basic practices have been around for thousands of years.

The answer is science. Over recent years, a large and ever-growing volume of research has been backing up some of the claims that have been made about the benefits of mindfulness. Pioneering psychologists have developed new therapies based around mindfulness practices, and carefully examined their effects to see if and how they work. Study after study has been published in reputable academic journals showing that practising mindfulness can indeed reduce stress, anxiety and depression, as well as
strengthening the immune system, speeding healing and helping people to manage a wide range of physical illnesses.

Research has confirmed that mindfulness can sharpen our attention, concentration and memory, improve our emotional balance, help us to sleep better, boost our self-esteem, make us less angry and unleash our creativity. It has shown that mindfulness can reduce negative thinking and help us to enjoy more satisfying relationships with others. Neuroscientists have also shown that practising mindfulness can lead to positive changes in the brain, increasing activity and even promoting growth in areas of our neural networks associated with wellbeing.

Studies have also found that people who are more naturally mindful are less neurotic, less defensive and more extrovert, as well as having more energy and awareness, and being generally happier with their lives. When they do experience bad moods, they recover from them more quickly. They are more compassionate and empathic – mindful people care about others, and feel closer to and more connected with them.

We live in a scientific age, and when this kind of research demonstrates that something works, people in power take notice. That is understandable – the scientific method has led to many of the great achievements of the ‘doing’ world over the past few centuries, especially in areas such as medicine and health. When a few spiritual devotees or new-age dropouts were the only ones saying meditation is helpful, they were never going to convince the mainstream. But when reputable academics from universities like
Harvard and Oxford start saying the same thing, and providing the data to prove it, that’s something entirely different. Some of their data has even shown that teaching people mindfulness could save us money – that kind of information really makes people in power prick up their ears!

Mindfulness is simple, and yet it can be used to help with so many different problems. The basic instruction on how to practise it can be given in just a few minutes, and can be learned by almost anyone. It can be done on the bus, in the supermarket, at your desk, in bed. You don’t need any special equipment – just your mind! There probably isn’t any situation in which more mindfulness wouldn’t be helpful, from the smallest daily niggles to the largest global problems.

The idea that mindfulness could be the foundation for a happier life and a happier world isn’t new, but because of all this scientific endeavour, it is now starting to reach some of the people who need it most. In the United States, mindfulness is already being taught in hundreds of hospitals, to people with conditions ranging from anxiety, fatigue and back pain to heart disease, HIV and cancer. Meanwhile in the UK, the Government has recently recommended mindfulness as a treatment for people who have repeated episodes of depression. GPs are becoming much more convinced about its benefits – the Mental Health Foundation survey mentioned earlier found that 68 per cent of British family doctors think it would be helpful for their patients to learn how to practise mindfulness. Programmes are also being developed to teach it to people
with addictions, to pregnant women and their partners, to schoolchildren, and to couples who want to enjoy more harmonious relationships.

The seeds of a more mindful society are being planted, but there is still a way to go. While mindfulness is now quite well known and respected among health professionals, the chances of someone being referred for meditation training on the NHS are small. When we consider the number of people suffering from stress, depression and chronic physical ill-health, the services available are little more than a drop in the ocean.

The same is true in schools, workplaces, prisons and in government – there are exciting pilot schemes, but most people probably haven’t heard about mindfulness, let alone tried to practise it.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is bringing attention to your present experience, on a moment-to-moment basis, in an inquisitive, non-critical way.

Most of us will have some idea of what it is to be mindful – of someone else’s feelings, pedestrians crossing a busy road, or the step as you get off the train. We generally use ‘mindful’ to mean that we should pay particular attention to something or someone, to take care, or to notice what is going on around us. What may come as more of
a surprise is that being mindful is a quality we can develop and train ourselves in, a tool we can use to cultivate greater balance and happiness.

In this book we are going to explore what is meant by mindfulness from both a Buddhist and a more scientific perspective. We will look at how it can be used to help train the mind, to change destructive ways of thinking and behaving, improve our physical and mental health, and allow us to thrive in our daily lives.

‘Mindfulness’ is one of those words that, the more you start to think about it, to unpick it, the more difficult it can be to define. It is a word that has many facets to it. Over recent times it has come to be used predominantly to describe a psychological approach to treating a range of health problems, and it is now understood by many merely as a therapeutic method. However, it would be a mistake to think of mindfulness simply as a psychological concept, or a process that is only beneficial in the treatment of stress or depression. It is much, much more than this. It is a way of experiencing ourselves, and the world we live in – a way of being – and one that has been recognised for thousands of years to promote physical, psychological and spiritual health. Mindfulness is an approach to life – it’s about how we relate to ourselves and the world around us.
At one level, it is simply about staying with the present moment, paying attention to our mind, our body and our surroundings, in an inquisitive, non-judgemental way, and not getting distracted by our thoughts and feelings – our constant mental chatter – so that we can truly experience every situation for what it is, in a genuine, open and curious way. Over time we start to notice what’s happening in our mind, to become familiar with it and the effect it has on us. Gradually, we then begin to recognise our thoughts for what they are – just thoughts. They are not ‘us’, they do not define us, they are not ‘real’ and they are not ‘true’ (or ‘false’, for that matter) – they are simply thoughts. This doesn’t mean that they are not of value, but by not identifying with them or embroidering them with layer upon layer of emotion or meaning it is easier to let them go and pay attention to what’s happening right now. Gradually, we can free ourselves from the limitations created by our habitual patterns of thinking and reacting to situations. Our thoughts lose their power to send us tumbling into despair, distract us with daydreams or blind us with longing, and we are able to make different choices about what we’d like to do.

We spend most of our lives on autopilot. Much of the time, we don’t even notice what we are thinking, saying or doing – whether we are driving the car, listening to friends, taking a shower, eating our breakfast or making love. Practices involving
mindfulness allow us to wake up to our experience, reconnect with a clearer, more spacious mind, and take a fresh approach to whatever comes up rather than falling back on our usual, habitual, mindless responses to situations.

So, mindfulness is not simply about ‘not doing’; it’s an active, purposeful process – there is effort involved. We have to constantly remember to pay attention. In fact, some definitions of mindfulness use the word ‘remembering’ – not what happened yesterday or last week, but rather on a moment-to-moment basis, ‘re-minding’ ourselves to pay attention to where we are, what we are doing and whom we are with. This is what cognitive psychologists call our ‘working memory’ – our moment-to-moment memory lasting just a few seconds, which allows us to hold our attention on what we are doing. So when our mind wanders off and we forget where we are, what we are doing and why we are doing it – mindfulness ‘brings us back’. As we get distracted by the future or the past, mindfulness helps us stay with the here and now. Meditation, and the other practices we are going to describe in this book, are ways of nurturing this quality.

We would sound a note of caution, however. This is not about never reflecting on the past or making plans for the future. It is also not about living ‘for’ the moment in a hedonistic sort of way. It is about
living ‘in’ the moment, which will still involve making decisions and choices. This practice should not disempower us, or make us completely aimless. As we will see, it should allow us to make better, healthier, more intelligent choices for ourselves and our world. So it is not that in seeing thoughts as thoughts we treat their content non-judgementally – if we notice we are being hateful or causing harm, towards ourselves or others, there is little value in noticing it if we are not then able to bring our intelligence to bear and aim to do things differently in the future. The difference is that, simply by recognising our thoughts as thoughts and not over-identifying with them, we open up the possibility for just that – change.

If we are to have a hope of stemming the tide of chronic ill-health and unhappiness in our society; if we really want to live in a world that brings people happiness; if we really want to have a chance of tackling the mindlessness that causes so much stress and suffering, then more and more people will need to hear about the benefits of mindfulness. We will need to learn how to be mindful together.

That is why we have decided to write this book. We want to invite you to learn about mindfulness, and begin practising it for yourself. We want to invite you to step off the treadmill of manic doing and to investigate being. We don’t promise instant results – indeed, if the practice is to work, you have to let go of goal-oriented craving and the need for
quick solutions. But if you can do that, you can start to relax and enjoy the journey.

Practising mindfulness isn't always a comfortable experience. We have been rehearsing our habitual patterns for a long time, and they won't disappear overnight. We will still get caught up in our hopes, our fears and our speed, and we will still be impelled towards old habits. It may even be painful to see and experience these habits so clearly. But if you are motivated, the fresh perspective you develop can begin to bear fruit – your mind will start to loosen up and your habits will weaken their grip on your life. You will be able to be present more often, and to be more confident, open and relaxed.

Then you can take your practice out into your life, and start being more mindful in your family, community and workplace. Others may see how you are growing, and be intrigued by what you have been doing. And, when you tell them, some of them may be inspired to start practising themselves.

Gradually, as people join in, mindfulness could start to reach more people in every sphere of life – including employers, newspaper editors, teachers, healthcare commissioners and politicians. As more people manifest mindfulness in their lives, our collective stress levels could begin to fall, our communities could grow stronger and our world could become a more peaceful place.

The Mindful Manifesto, then, is not just a self-help book. Helping ourselves isn't quite enough – unless, of course, we
plan to go off and meditate by ourselves in a cave forever, shielding ourselves from outside pressures. For most of us, that is neither possible nor desirable – we want to live with other people, and we want to try and make the world a better place.

By working with others to help create a more mindful environment, we make it easier to be mindful ourselves. If the world continues to push us in the direction of mindlessness, it will be much harder to keep from falling into old habits. But if we can be more mindful in our own lives, and by our example encourage others to do the same, we will start to create a virtuous circle to counter the vicious circle of speed.

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

Things won’t change radically overnight, but if we are patient, we *can* begin to make a difference. We can be part of a shift in balance from doing to being, a new ‘non-movement’ of people willing to stop, even just for a short period each day.

But let’s not go too fast. We don’t need to try to improve things through force of will, or through more overactivity – that is not how mindfulness works. Change can come, but not through the exposition of grand theories, or carrying out great programmes of action. In time, we will know what action to take. First of all, don’t just do something, sit there!

What can you expect from *The Mindful Manifesto*? We would like to share with you where mindfulness has come
from – its roots in spiritual practices dating back thousands of years. We will look at how mindfulness is a lynchpin of ancient Buddhist teachings on how to relieve suffering. We will then explain how it came to the West in the late 20th century and was adapted to help patients suffering from chronic illness. We will show you how mindfulness affects the body, and how practising it can reduce your stress levels and help you cope with physical health problems.

Then we will tell the story of how psychologists working in mental health discovered mindfulness in the mid-1990s, and about the remarkable success of this ‘new’ treatment that has helped people who are prone to depression. We will also look at neuroscientific research that suggests that mindfulness actually alters, for the good, the way our brain works.

Next we will show how mindfulness can be used to help treat addictions, and how you can develop a greater ability to let go of destructive behaviours. And we will see how mindfulness can help you to be more effective and happy in other aspects of your life, such as at work, or in your relationships.

Finally, we will look at the big picture – how mindfulness can be a tool for manifesting our greater potential as human beings, how it can facilitate a saner approach to social problems and help us meet the myriad challenges of the 21st century.

All the way through we will be sharing our own experiences, the stories of people whose lives have been
helped by mindfulness, and giving you tips and suggestions on how you can begin to develop your own practice.

We won’t pretend that following the path of mindfulness is easy. It requires patience, discipline, energy and compassion. Sometimes it may seem frustrating, boring or confusing – and sometimes it may seem like nothing much is happening at all. But gradually, gently and unmistakably, if we practise together, we can become less busy and stressed, and create a healthier, saner world.

Before we go any further, we thought it might be helpful to share how we have become confident about the benefits of mindfulness. First, there is our professional experience. As a GP, Jonty sees people in his surgery every day, suffering from illnesses that are either caused or made worse by stress. And through his research and writing, Ed has studied and become more and more conscious of how the pressure to be overactive is at the root of so many of our problems. Through our jobs, we have each come to see again and again how relentless pressure creates enormous pain and suffering in people's lives. We have studied the scientific research, and we have seen people who are enormously helped by learning how to practise mindfulness – their anxiety levels fall, their conditions become more manageable and they can thrive, despite often very serious health problems.

Above all, we have become convinced because we have both benefited from mindfulness ourselves.

We both experience the pressure to do, achieve and consume that is endemic in our society, and we are both
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vulnerable to that pressure, and the stress it creates. We both find that meditation is an immensely powerful antidote. It’s not a miracle cure, but a way of working with our experience that is both simple and effective. Below is a short summary of how each of us came to this conclusion, and how it continues to work in and on our lives.

**Jonty’s Experience**

I first came across mindfulness and meditation about eight years ago. I had just turned 30 and there was a lot to celebrate. I was progressing well in a fulfilling career as a GP, I had good friends and no particular financial concerns. I should have felt a sense of achievement, but instead, in my mind I felt stuck. I was unhappy and didn’t know why.

I didn’t feel like I was depressed and I knew I didn’t need to take any medication, but I also realised that I needed help to untangle the knot in my mind. I started seeing a psychotherapist who was incredibly helpful but, as therapy came to an end, I felt I wanted to find some way of working with my mind by myself. So I began to investigate meditation.

Like most people, when I first heard about meditation I made a whole range of assumptions – and my friends all joked about the idea of me sitting cross-legged and eating lentils (neither of which are necessary to practise being mindful!). For me the biggest resistance I had was to its origins in Buddhism. I had no real understanding of Buddhist beliefs, but I was worried about getting involved in anything ‘religious’. As a GP I try to take a scientific approach to life and, whilst I respect people from all
faiths and traditions, I wanted something that I could question and that could offer me some evidence of its benefits – both personally and professionally.

I was lucky enough to find the Shambhala Meditation Centre in London. It offered a more secular approach to meditation, and the teachers there were completely open to my process of exploration.

Whilst psychotherapy was the first step in changing my relationship with myself, meditation has offered me a very practical technique for continued observation and reflection in my life and, whilst I would still not say that I am ‘a Buddhist’, the knowledge and wisdom I have encountered throughout this process has provided a structure that has not only helped me to calm my mind, but also understand more about its nature … something that offers me great reassurance as I continue to notice more and more of my own neurotic tendencies!

I haven’t become a new person. I am, however, more able to notice how I think and what I do, and the impact this has on me and the people around me. And the biggest difference is that I do this with more compassion and humour and less judgement and self-criticism than I used to. I am able to be inquisitive about my life without feeling driven to try and solve every problem I encounter, and without feeding the constant cycle of self-improvement that I so easily get trapped in.

Initially I found meditation uncomfortable, both mentally and physically. Just sitting still, noticing and letting go was so different to my usual energetic, solution-focused approach to life. I found the practice incredibly frustrating
(and still do a lot of the time!). However, as time passed I began to notice differences in the way I handled situations at work, in my confidence in relationships and, most wonderfully of all, in my ability to connect with my patients. I was able to be more attentive and more available to them in consultations as I became less distracted by all the other thoughts jockeying for my attention. As I started to meditate regularly I found myself more able to be present in every situation that I encountered, both in and out of work. This is not always comfortable – mindfulness allows us to start seeing things as they are rather than as we would like them to be – but it enables us to bring our intelligence and our heart to bear in whatever situation comes our way. This offers me the opportunity to remove my metaphorical blinkers, and to be creative, equitable and compassionate in my responses, rather than simply reacting with my usual habitual defensiveness to new challenges.

I have seen how helpful these practices have been in my life – in my relationship with myself and other people, in my ability to take care of myself, my patients, my family and my friends, in the courage it has given me to say ‘yes’ to things I would previously have been too frightened to agree to (whether it has involved appearing on TV in front of millions of people or even writing a book!), and to say ‘no’ to things I would usually feel too insecure to refuse.

**Ed’s Experience**

Learning how to practise meditation was the turning point that led me to recovery from a period of chronic depression and anxiety that had lasted nearly three
years. After working speedily, busily and mindlessly in a media career that brought plenty of material benefits, I had suddenly collapsed under the weight of stress. Signed off work, I was miserable and frightened.

I thought the way to deal with my problems was to do something. And at that point I was so anxious I was willing to try anything. Within a few months, I had enough psychology and self-help books to start a small library. I was seeing a therapist, taking anti-depressants, attending support groups and seminars, and having all sorts of alternative treatments. I tried changing friends, changing jobs, changing where I lived – but none of it seemed to make much difference. In fact, it just made me feel more powerless.

By seeking answers with the desperate speed that had led to my crisis, I was perpetuating the same old patterns – if only I could just keep trying harder, I thought, I would be able to shake myself out of misery. In amongst all my books were some about meditation. People suggested it might be helpful for me, so I went to a local centre that offered instruction.

Initially, I approached the practice in the same way as all my other ‘fixes’ – throwing myself at it in the hope that I had finally found the answer. But there is something very clever about meditation – it’s impossible to follow the instructions properly and chase after results at the same time. Soon, the penny started to drop – it was not so much what I was doing that was the problem, as how my mind worked – it was going way too hard, way too fast. In meditation, I saw my habitual patterns of speed
and impulsive doing for the first time. I let go – at least a little bit. After a few months of meditating every day, my depression and anxiety began to lift.

I’m still prone to getting ‘speedy’ and so I’ve continued to practise – habitual patterns are hard to let go of. But gradually, the bouts of mental ill-health that used to be so regular and debilitating have begun to diminish, both in frequency and duration.