

MUNICH MODEL

Mindfulness
and Meditation
at University

Interviews,
Articles,
Exercises



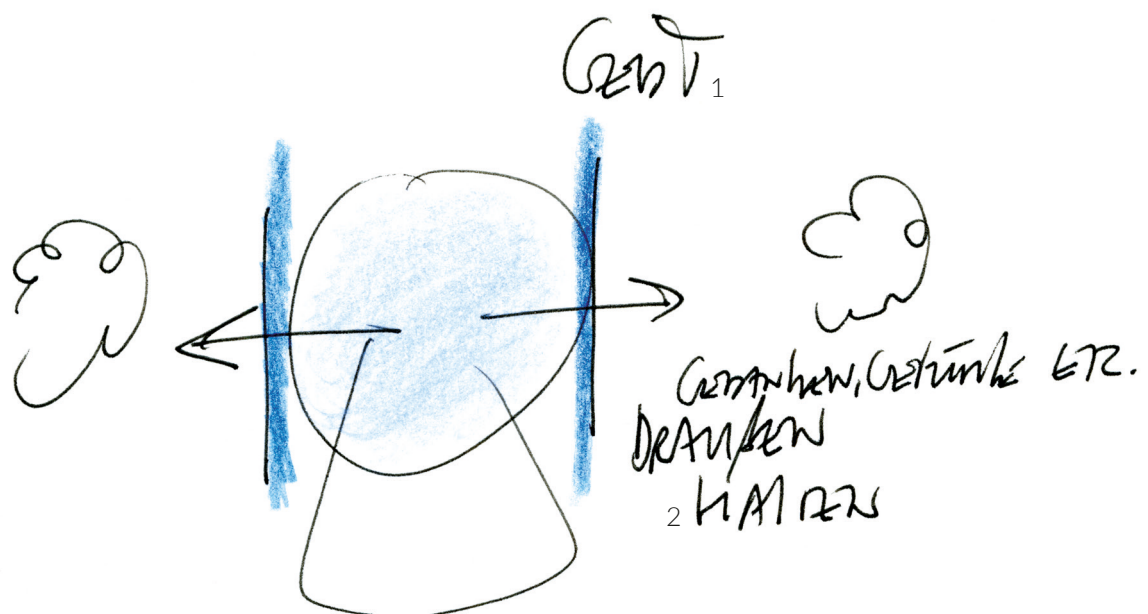
Andreas de Bruin

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MUNICH MODELL

MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION AT UNIVERSITY

INTERVIEWS, ARTICLES, EXERCISES



¹ Mind | ² Keeping thoughts, feelings etc. outside

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EDUCATION SHOULD SERVE THE UNDER- STANDING OF LIFE

Prof. Andreas de Bruin is the founder of the Munich Model, “Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context,” which was started in 2010. In this interview, he talks about mindfulness and self-awareness, and why spirituality deserves a place in higher education.

Interview conducted by Mike Kauschke for *Ethik heute*

How did you come up with the idea of teaching mindfulness and meditation at university and initiating the Munich Model?

de Bruin: I have been meditating myself since 1991 and for me, meditation has always served as an inner compass. Meditation has taught me a lot about self-awareness, conditioning, and the concept of duality. What I mean by that is this:

I am the person I see in the mirror who is full of conditioning. At the same time, I am also the one who is able to observe this person [myself] and his/her conditioning. The person in the mirror changes, gets older and so on, but this inner being does not change in form. Who am I now, this outer person or the inner observer? Meditation has helped me to become more aware of this inner being. If I have a stronger connection with this inner being, then I also better know what I have to do here in my life.

From this experience, it was important to me that students have the opportunity to get to know themselves better and as a result find out what contribution they would like to make to society. Besides that, I was of course also interested in the neuroscientific justification of meditation's effectiveness.

In 2010, I started implementing meditation at the university and making it a permanent part of the curriculum. That was something completely new at that time.

*AS I SEE IT, SPIRITUALITY IS
EVERYTHING THAT CONNECTS PEOPLE
TO THEIR INNER ESSENCE AND
EMPOWERS THEM TO CONTRIBUTE
THEIR OWN POTENTIAL TO SOCIETY.*

How did the program evolve?

de Bruin: We started in an old gym, which was quite cold, sitting on simple chairs. There was no ready-made curriculum; rather, it started very simply: meditation in silence, followed by an exchange about our experiences.

Word of the offer spread, so that students from the main study program also asked to sign up, and even university employees were interested. I then developed in-depth courses for the higher study sections.

Over time, more and more exercises were added. In the context of the courses, however, the classical sitting meditation remains the central practice for me, though it's not necessary that the object of meditation always be the breath. Many students prefer to practice with a

mantra such as So'ham or Maranatha, or for example they focus on the point between the eyebrows. Starting with these sitting meditations, I then expanded the program to include informal (e.g. mindful eating) as well as formal, or well structured mindfulness exercises (e.g. body scan). These are all exercises that can be practiced very superficially or very deeply; it's a matter of attitude.

My own work has also deepened with the meditation and mindfulness exercises and the complementary neuroscientific input. Today, I am not so much interested in teaching certain methods, but above all in creating space for ourselves and for each other, as well as a shared awareness. This leads to further topics and questions. Thus, the Munich model "Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context" has developed from an inner impulse and through dialogue with the students has become something like a living organism for me today.

You mentioned the difference between mindfulness and true mindfulness. What do you mean by that?

de Bruin: I've already mentioned these two identities: the one I see in the mirror, and the inner being or inner self. It is important that we deal more with this inner level, because it concerns our deepest being. If we find more connection here, it automatically brings us to a deeper awareness.

Education is still oriented to the industrial age; one is educated to do a job. But questions like these about the meaning of life are given little space. We need a paradigm shift in education. Do we study only to find a job later? Or is it not the task of education to prepare young people to understand the whole process of life?

We also don't learn how to manage our minds so that, for example, we are less likely to digress or be distracted by our thoughts. That is why the renowned mindfulness and meditation researcher Richard Davidson suggests that in the future there should be a subject called "mental hygiene," similar to the way physical education is taught today.

Do you think education needs to be more about the inner self?

de Bruin: We are so externally oriented and define ourselves on the basis of countless forms of conditioning, imposed on us from outside – for example, how one should look their best, what one should later pursue as a profession, how one should behave, etc. Linked to this are then also the many products of our achievement-oriented society, which we need for validation.

But if we can learn to focus more on our inner life, this can result in a spiritual change, which in my opinion is also about to take place on a societal level.

Australian nurse and author Bronnie Ware asked terminally ill people what they would have liked to have done differently in their lives. The answer was that people wished they had expressed their feelings more often. They would have liked to have maintained more contact with their family and friends and also to have had more courage to live life the way they would have liked to.

That's why it's so important to be aware of the present moment, to really be here and to appreciate it. For most people, the biggest fear, is the fear of death. And because we don't know what to expect, we feel insecure. But from a larger, more encompassing perspective, this "dying" is happening every moment that passes. When we learn to have more trust in ourselves and in life itself, we appreciate each moment more and are mindful from within. This is real mindfulness.



Journal entries after mindfulness and meditation exercises



Bodyscan: Mindfully exploring the body

**WHEN WE LEARN TO HAVE MORE TRUST
IN OURSELVES AND IN LIFE ITSELF, WE
APPRECIATE EACH MOMENT MORE AND
ARE MINDFUL FROM WITHIN. THIS IS
REAL MINDFULNESS.**

You said that in your courses today mindfulness and awareness is about meeting with students and opening an intentional space. Can you elaborate on that a bit more?

de Bruin: The space enables the mindfulness. There's research that says 47 percent of the time we're not on task, which is called "mind-wandering". Often the mind is distracted and we are thinking about random things, past or future.

This is especially the case when we are resting or performing routine tasks. The areas of the brain that are active during this are collectively called the default mode network, which can be translated as "resting-state network".

Researchers conclude that people who practice mindfulness and meditation are generally less distracted by thoughts and also less preoccupied with themselves. When the mind becomes quiet, a space for consciousness can emerge. You could call this inner space; that's why I try to create settings in university classes, for example, in which this is enabled.

Unlike other approaches that aim to bring mindfulness and meditation into a secular context, the Munich Model also works with ideas from wisdom traditions, such as the higher Self. How do you see the role of spirituality in the secular context of a university?

de Bruin: Here, of course, we have to ask the question, what is spirituality. Is it a matter of religion and its institutional structures, or can we define it more broadly? As I see it, spirituality is everything that connects people to their inner essence and empowers them to contribute their own potential to society. So, on a spiritual level, universities also have a contribution to make.

A space should be created here where students are able to develop so that they can contribute to the further development of society, which in turn finances the universities. That's why I think it's important that spirituality finds a place at the university and is thus anchored in life in a very concrete way.

Of course, one may wonder that I am talking about soul or higher Self, but many of our esteemed personalities, such as famous inventors and artists, have also used these terms. If we want to understand mindfulness and meditation more deeply, we cannot avoid terms like spirituality in a broader context and soul or Self. Because in a deeper sense, meditation is building the bridge to the inner core. And this inner core is the higher Self or soul.

The Interview “Education Should Serve the Understanding of Life” was originally published in German, on August 19th, 2021 for the online magazine for ethics, mindfulness and awareness *Netzwerk Ethik heute*, www.ethik-heute.org. Some details have been updated for this publication.

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IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD TIME FOR MINDFULNESS

In a time when pressure to perform and stress are simply a part of life for many, we often miss out on moments of silence. But evidence shows that individuals who actively integrate mindfulness into their daily lives live healthier and happier lives.

Interview: Maximilian Immer

Are you among those individuals whose days are packed with to-dos, but who ultimately feel that they're never really able to enjoy life? There's a solution: be more often in the here and now. Don't allow all those moments to just rush by. This is mindfulness. When you live more consciously, you can better observe what's happening – around you and within you – in this very moment. Sounds simple, and yet it's precisely this that's so difficult to do in everyday life. In this interview, Andreas de Bruin, a professor and researcher in mindfulness and meditation, explains how mindfulness can be learned and why active mindfulness is so important.

Lying on the couch, eating chips and watching Netflix is relaxing. Isn't that mindfulness?

de Bruin: Although it's certainly very relaxing, the answer is unfortunately no. Because in this case, one's attention is divided between eating and at the same time watching TV.

But it's unrealistic to expect anyone to manage without a TV and a smartphone. Does that mean goodbye, mindfulness?

de Bruin: Every action can ultimately be performed mindfully. But constant and uncontrolled use leads to automatism and even to a dulling of reality. Active mindfulness in dealing with digital devices may help with using them more consciously and competently. The solution is selective digital consumption.

How does one live even more mindfully?

de Bruin: Mindfulness is the ability to consciously perceive the momentary action in its entirety, to observe and not to evaluate. This can be in conversation, while cooking or eating, while walking, and yes, even while doing unfavorable tasks like washing dishes or cleaning.

MINDFULNESS IS AN INNER ATTITUDE THAT AUTOMATICALLY LEADS TO CHANGE AND TEACHES US TO DEAL WITH LIFE MORE RESPONSIBLY.

Mindfulness is often perceived as passive. But isn't it more practical to actively integrate it into everyday life?

de Bruin: Fundamentally, mindfulness is an inner attitude that has both an active and a passive component. A certain active focus is required in order to always be in the present. Staying in the now as uninterrupted as possible is an active, intentional activity. If one manages to keep mindfulness as an inner attitude, one can bring it into all possible facets of life. Active mindfulness, in this way, is *living* mindfulness.

Can you give a specific example of what you mean by active mindfulness?

de Bruin: For example, I'm a swimmer, and when I'm doing my laps in the crawl, I notice how my hands dip into the water, I feel the temperature, I hear the sound, I feel my legs. Although these actions are very active and quite fast, I can still be very present in the moment and be very aware of the processes. Or another example: a mountain climber recently told me that after he had made the effort to reach the summit, his sandwich tasted so different. A more conscious perception – that is also active mindfulness.

So, does this apply to any sport?

de Bruin: Basically, yes. But we have to draw a slight line between mindfulness and the so-called flow experience. That would be another level beyond mindfulness, where we are completely absorbed in the activity. This can even lead to a strong sense of well being and enhanced performance. Of course, this isn't bad, we are just no longer consciously mindful during the activity.

Does this lived mindfulness also do something to our brain?

de Bruin: It does. We see that so-called mind-wandering decreases and with it worrying. This also reduces the feeling of stress, which can be detected in the density of nerve cells in the hippocampus and in the right amygdala nucleus using MRI brain scans. During mindfulness exercises that deepen body awareness, such as the body scan, we see that nerve cell density increases in the insular cortex. This area of the brain is responsible for linking mind and body. Stress is thus more quickly perceived through body signals. People who experience burnout are unable to interpret these signals correctly or even perceive them at all.

IF YOU SUCCEEDED IN LIVING THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS MORE AND MORE AS AN INNER ATTITUDE, IT WILL BECOME MUCH EASIER OVER TIME. AND THAT WILL PROFOUNDLY ENRICH YOUR LIFE.



Many people are just running on autopilot. Have we lost our sense of self?

de Bruin: We have pretty much lost the connection to the inner self. We don't have time to look inward these days. We seek satisfaction in consumption and in recognition by others, which in both cases comes from the outside. But many realize that this supposed happiness doesn't last long and that maintaining it is exhausting. That's why more and more people are looking for new ways to achieve more contentment and serenity, and are discovering mindfulness for themselves.

How intensively should I confront my problems in order to do this?

de Bruin: We really shouldn't think too much about our problems. What we can solve concretely, we should try to solve. What we can't, we shouldn't worry about too much.

Can mindfulness help one to solve problems?

de Bruin: Gaining the insight that many thoughts are of little importance is often already a remedy. In addition, mindfulness helps to organize thoughts better and to gain clarity about some things. Active mindfulness basically trains the attention to the events that are ta-



Mindful cooking and eating

king place in the present moment. The emphasis is on conscious awareness. The goal is to cultivate an alert, sensitive and loving attitude towards our perceptions and ultimately towards ourselves. The insight into our own thoughts, feelings and actions and their interactive effects leads to the result that we are no longer at the mercy of these tools. We have ourselves under control and can better direct ourselves.

And what does that look like in concrete terms in everyday life?

de Bruin: First and foremost, enjoy being in the now. Being curious and cultivating the so-called beginner's mind. There are always so many new things to discover everywhere. For example, on the way to work, you can always try to look for something you've never seen before. Or in conversations with others, look properly, listen properly – but do everything with joy and serenity. Under no circumstances allow your attentiveness to become mechanical. Also important: a good dose of humor and some distance to be able to observe your own thoughts. This brings you more into the now and automatically reduces the time spent in autopilot mode.

So, is mindfulness also a good way to learn to love the daily grind?

de Bruin: If we merely seek to escape from the loud and hectic reality, we cannot reshape it. By living through mindful approaches, we can better find ways to reduce, and even end, the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Mindfulness is an inner attitude that automatically leads to change and teaches us to deal with life more responsibly.

Does it depend on the day or does it always work?

de Bruin: Sometimes you have more energy, sometimes less. This also affects the situation and the activity in which one wants to or can be mindful.

One last piece of advice: how much time should one actually devote to mindfulness?

de Bruin: My suggestion would be to incorporate modest attempts at mindfulness into one's daily life, to have some fun with it, and to gradually expand it. If you succeed in living the practice of mindfulness more and more as an inner attitude, it will become much easier over time. And that will profoundly enrich your life.

The interview "It's Always a Good Time for Mindfulness" was originally published in German, on October 1st, 2018 in the magazine *Soul Sister*, Volume 01/2018. Stuttgart, p. 12-16. Some details have been updated for this publication.

A CIRCLE COMPLETES ITSELF

When Andreas de Bruin began introducing mindfulness and meditation at the university, he had no idea what an inspiring cycle he would set in motion, one that today involves many people with creative ideas: faculty, students, professional staff, children and their parents. They are all pioneers in a theory-practice transfer that is constantly being updated through new experiences and continues to grow organically.

Text: Martina Darga, Norbert Classen

“When I promoted the first courses on ‘Mindfulness and Meditation’ at Munich University of Applied Sciences in 2010, it was something completely new,” says Andreas de Bruin. “What started then on hard chairs in a cold gymnasium has evolved significantly up to now, and has reached not only students but also countless people beyond the university.”

As the meditation circle grew, de Bruin expanded the range of practices and worked out an overall program that is now known as the “Munich Model – Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context” and continues to grow like a living organism. Today, the program also includes “Meditation and Art,” a series of exercises for students that combines meditation and the experience of art in museums.



Shared dialogue – an important part of teaching

Teaching and learning

At Munich University of Applied Sciences, de Bruin teaches in the Social Work, Nursing, Education and Early Childhood Education (BEKI) degree programs as well as in the General Studies program, open to students from all fields of study. As part of an education and research partnership, he also teaches at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich. There, students of elementary education, school education, special education, and psychology in particular take part in his courses.

“Students have the opportunity to explore the subject matter of mindfulness and meditation and the question of how these can be meaningfully offered or realized in the students’ later professional field of activity, primarily in the context of their final thesis.

In the meantime, more than 100 bachelor’s and master’s theses as well as theses for professional teaching certification have already been submitted,” says de Bruin, “and the supervision inquiries continue to grow.”

Today, as he looks back on his teaching journey thus far, his focus has always been on helping people to bring their innate potential to the outer world. One example is the mindfulness box for children that two students developed as part of their bachelor’s thesis and which is now used in kindergartens.

A mindfulness treasure box

In 2019, as part of her oral exam, student Julia Kohler from the BEKI program introduced a small box with three simple mindfulness exercises for children, which she further developed with fellow student Isabella Werr in 2020 and on which they both wrote a joint bachelor’s thesis. Among other things, the box contains a series of cards, vividly designed with and by children. The children are able to open this “treasure chest” at any time in order to become more familiar with the material, to practice the exercises with other children, or to develop the exercises further through play.

A crocheted frog serves as an icon for the box. As Kohler and Werr explain, they wanted an animal that could embody the box and also serve to establish contact with the children. The frog, which they already knew from exercises presented in Munich Model lectures, came to mind and they thought it fitting. “A frog can croak loudly and hop far, but also sit still and focus entirely on itself. It’s a multi-faceted animal,” Kohler says. After graduation, Kohler and Werr decided to further develop and disseminate their mindfulness box. They were invited by fellow former student Franziska Sperber to present the mindfulness box at her workpla-

ce, the Hans-Georg Karg Kindertagesstätte, an inclusive facility for gifted children.

Once the specialist staff at the daycare center had familiarized themselves with the topic in detail, several copies of the box were ordered for the groups at the facility and a presentation evening for parents was organized. The first objective was to ensure that the pedagogical work was made transparent. At the same time, it was important to introduce the topic of mindfulness to the parents and to show them ways in which they can integrate mindfulness into their own everyday family lives at home.

Since then, the box, affectionately called the “treasure chest” by the children, as well as its mindfulness content have been firmly integrated into the pedagogical work of this daycare center. The children are free to contribute their own mindfulness ideas at any time and to help create exercises themselves or invent new ones – which they do on a regular basis.



Mindfulness box with frog

Everyone is involved

The mindfulness box for children is just one of numerous initiatives launched as part of the Munich Model, all of which have created ripple effects across students’ various professions and thus across different target groups. It has enabled a cascade of mindfulness to develop.

This succeeds because those involved have the opportunity to creatively contribute to the process in their own way. In a trusting atmosphere, everyone is supported in trying things out and implementing their ideas.

And everyone involved is included. “This is particularly significant,” says de Bruin, “because the younger generations especially have the potential to meet future societal challenges with the appropriate solutions.”

An organic development

For de Bruin, this represents an organic development that begins with science and becomes real through experience. “Scientific findings explain and prove why mindfulness and meditation practices are useful, for example to improve mental hygiene, body awareness, concentration and selective perception, self-efficacy, well-being and emotion regulation,” says de Bruin. “But for students it is essential to experience the effects of mindfulness and meditation for themselves, in their own minds and bodies, and also to be able to pass on the practices later, for example in kindergartens or schools where they become a real help.”

**FOR STUDENTS IT IS ESSENTIAL
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As one 5th grade student reported, “During the relaxation exercise, I was able to focus on a few thoughts. I listened to myself and to a voice inside me. It said: Everything is fine. You have prepared yourself. I thought: I’m doing my best now, and it doesn’t have to be perfect. If I make mistakes, it doesn’t matter. I can learn from them.” In addition to the students, the teachers also benefit: “When I lead an exercise, it also helps me myself to better arrive in the classroom and to shake off the hustle and bustle of the school environment,” says one teacher.

A central component of the Munich model is therefore regular networking meetings for students and alumni. “The focus here is on the exchange of experiences about self-conducted mindfulness and meditation projects and about newly gained insights from research. Through the discourse, this content in turn finds its way back into university teaching and with it to the students. It’s a two-way theory-practice transfer that keeps updating and organically evolving through new experiences from theory and practice,” de Bruin says.

The success of the model is based above all on mutual respect, which is an absolute prerequisite for a successful transfer. Thich Nhat Hanh said something very valuable about this: “At the beginning of a communication with another person, it is helpful to remember that there is a Buddha in each of us.” And in order for it to awaken, we should trust in the inner wisdom of young people in particular, and attentively encourage their organic development.

The article “A Circle Completes Itself” was originally published in German, on March 1st, 2022 in the magazine for mindfulness and awareness *Moment by Moment*, Volume 01/2022. Freiburg: Hammer Solutions Media, pp. 76-79. Some details have been updated for this publication.

A BRIDGE TO THE INSIDE

Interview with Prof. Andreas de Bruin, who developed the Munich Model “Mindfulness and meditation in a University context” in 2010. He was one of the first to offer meditation as a university subject.

Interview conducted by Hannah Lisa Linsmaier for AVE



At the beginning of class: the meditation of inner immersion

Over the past eleven years, the Munich Model “Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context” has successfully evolved with over 2000 students participating. What is still particularly important to you?

de Bruin: Collaboration and sustainability. Five students from the first few years of the program are already themselves teaching within the framework of the Munich Model. Courses based on the model have now also been incorporated into training institutions for university teachers who want to establish something similar. I describe the details in my newly published book.*

I am still amazed that, as is the case in the Munich model, it is possible to evaluate a practice such as meditation in accordance with binding standards.

de Bruin: If one wants to anchor mindfulness and meditation as a regular subject in university curricula, naturally there must be assessment criteria. So far, the performance is assessed on the basis of presence, regular participation, keeping a personal meditation journal and a written reflection on how mindfulness and meditation can be meaningfully offered or realized in ones later professional field. I am quite satisfied with these

existing assessment criteria and the students also seem to handle them well.

IT IS ABOUT TAKING OUR INNER CORE, THE SOUL, SERIOUSLY AND AT SOME POINT ALSO ACKNOWLEDGING ITS EXISTENCE SCIENTIFICALLY TO THE GREATEST POSSIBLE EXTENT.

As you see it, what is the future of meditation as an integral part of the mission of education?

de Bruin: The university offers a serious setting for the subject of meditation, for interested people who would otherwise have no idea how to distinguish the offerings available on the free market. One of the paradigm shifts we are facing is the change of perspective from the outside to the inside. It is about taking our inner core, the soul, seriously and at some point also acknowledging its existence scientifically to the greatest possible extent.

The focus is then no longer only on one's future job, but most importantly on the inner potential of the human being. Through this shift, teaching will also be completely different, because everyone will then be able to develop themselves more freely.

Then one's own inspiration and inner mission become more visible and thus the individual contribution to society. The practice of meditation can make an important contribution here, because it promotes this inner orientation, as well as intuition as the language of the soul.

What might learning look like in the future?

de Bruin: It's almost impossible to predict what professions will exist in 20 years. So, it makes little sense to have students learn all kinds of things they will need to know in the future. In addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, it would make more sense first and foremost to promote the strengthening of creativity, fle-

xibility and a certain confidence in oneself, as well as one's bond with fellow human beings and the environment. This can be done, among other things, through meditation, which can lead to an authentic and mindful attitude towards oneself and one's surroundings. Then, for example, mindful communication becomes something quite natural.

What future plans do you have for the Munich model?

de Bruin: Research will certainly continue to differentiate: what works well in schools, what is appropriate for a university context, what is successful in social institutions, and how can we implement it? That's where the Munich model, with over two thousand participating students and through more than ten years of teaching mindfulness and meditation offers an example of how this can succeed in higher education.

In order to expand on this, further qualitative and quantitative surveys of the students regarding their expectations and development are planned. This is currently already being done in part through the students' meditation journals. In addition, it would be interesting to measure cortisol levels, attention span, emotion regulation and possibly even brain measurements..

* de Bruin, A. (2021). *Mindfulness and Meditation at University. 10 Years of the Munich Model*. Bielefeld: transcript.

ONE OF THE PARADIGM SHIFTS WE ARE FACING IS THE CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE FROM THE OUTSIDE TO THE INSIDE.

The Interview "A Bridge to the Inside" was originally published in German, on February 25th, 2021 for the online magazine for mindfulness and awareness in education by the institute *Achtsamkeit Verbundenheit Engagement (AVE)*, www.ave-institut.de. Some details have been updated for this publication.

INTUITION AS A SUBJECT OF STUDY

What do the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA, the periodic table of the elements and the fundamentals of organic chemistry all have in common? The brilliant minds that discovered them were supported by dreams or flashes of inspiration: perceptions that they then translated into grand theories. Andreas de Bruin, founder and director of the Munich model “Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context”, is convinced that the key to creativity lies in intuition.

Interview: Norbert Classen

Intuition plays a big role in your project “Mindfulness and Meditation”. How do you define intuition and what distinguishes it from mere instinct?

de Bruin: Intuition gives us access to knowledge that cannot be achieved through a discursive approach. Intuitive perception proceeds without methodical or even conscious reasoning and arises immediately; it is infallible and capable of holistically grasping the “truth”. Instinct and intuition have – spatially considered – both their origin outside of the daily consciousness, and both appear unexpectedly. However, intuition is on the opposite side of the intellect to instinct, i.e. instinct is below the threshold of consciousness, while intuition is above these two levels and originates from a higher level of cognition. With instinct one speaks rather of impulse, with intuition of inspiration.

So, intuition is a different way of gaining knowledge? Already in the last century, C. G. Jung contrasted intuition with thinking, feeling and sensing as a basic function of comprehension...

de Bruin: Yes, exactly! Intuition, as Jung would say, comes from the Self. History is full of people who had this kind of perception. Their inspirations and ideas have shaped the history of the world on all levels of society. They are the great inventors, artists and so on. For example, it is known of the composer Johannes Brahms that once, when he was asked from where his inspiration comes, he answered that he goes to another level of consciousness, where the conscious thinking is temporarily “surrendered” and he has to focus intensely so as not to miss a single part of the inspiration. He also explained that the musical ideas that flowed to him were already completely orchestrated in harmony and form.



Meditation of inner immersion: a path to the intuition

Just like Paul McCartney of the Beatles, who woke up one morning with the melody of “Yesterday”, one of the most successful songs of all time, echoing in his ears. There too, everything was already in place. But why do you think intuition is so important in solving our social and global problems, especially in our day and age?

de Bruin: Because intuition involves this connection to another source of inspiration, another level of consciousness. First of all, it is often the basis for creative discoveries of a cognitive or material kind. And we urgently need them now! As Albert Einstein once said, “Problems can never be solved with the same way of

thinking through which they were created". And Sir Ken Robinson, one of the most important researchers of our time* in the field of creativity, points out that we should above all promote creativity in education in order to cope with the challenges of the future. Secondly, this deeper level of consciousness leads to a different way of dealing with ourselves, our fellow human beings and our environment. A new view of life changes our priorities, our perception of what is important. From that point on, problems such as famine, war or environmental destruction are addressed and solved in a more concrete way.

**INTUITION GIVES US ACCESS
TO KNOWLEDGE THAT CANNOT
BE ACHIEVED THROUGH A
DISCURSIVE APPROACH.**

You speak of intuition as a gateway to the creative level. How do we approach this level practically?

de Bruin: In order to develop and grow, we must learn how to use and train our inner faculties. If we compare the intellectual versus intuitive acquisition of knowledge, there is a decisive difference in the orientation of the thinking faculty. In the intellectual way, the thinking faculty is directed outward and registers the external information and stimuli that are passed on to the brain via the senses. It also recognizes the associated sensations and mental images and puts all these in relation to each other. In the intuitive way, the thinking faculty turns in a different direction, namely to the inner world. In the intuitive perception, the soul's impulses are directed into the thinker's respective field of experience. The development of this ability requires a mental training that leads to a connection with the soul.

If we want to achieve a conscious alignment of the mind, this first requires concentration. Mindfulness and meditation techniques can be very helpful here and lead us to gain more insight into the mechanisms of our thinking, our feelings and physical sensations. This leads to the ability to maintain our concentration for a longer period of time. The concentration needed for the meditation techniques of inner immersion has the effect of calming the mind and transforming it.



Students choose the meditation object that suits them, such as the breath, a mantra, or the point between the eyebrows

Is this why you're focusing on meditation and mindfulness in higher education? In a seemingly intellectual age, primarily dominated by the mind, where does the interest come from?

de Bruin: The main reason for implementing mindfulness and meditation programs at the moment is to strengthen mental hygiene, attention and the regulation of emotions. But ultimately, I think it's about learning to connect more with our inner core with the help of these techniques. Many of my students would like to find out how to better quiet their own minds and how to be more introspective.

The fact that meditation, in particular, can be very helpful for the development of the intuition is hardly taken into account at the moment. And not least because intuition is also given far too little attention in the scientific community. However, it's not possible to reach the depth of the intuition through the intellect, because it is directed outward and accordingly acts on the surface. From this point of view the intellect is subordinated to the intuition. Nevertheless, the intellect also has an important function and a legitimate place in science. In order to manifest the inner potential in the world, depending on the subject area, the respective "craft", the handling of the corresponding knowledge and thus also the intellect, is needed. Let's take as an example again the composer Johannes Brahms: With him this was his ability to compose. If he had not had this gift, he would have heard the music inwardly, but it would have been inaccessible to mankind.

What role do space and silence play in all this?

de Bruin: A very important one! The human mind is often too full and too restless. If we are able to let our psyche, i.e. our thinking and feeling, come to rest,

IF WE ARE ABLE TO LET OUR PSYCHE, I.E. OUR THINKING AND FEELING, COME TO REST, A CONNECTION TO THE INNER WORLD AND THUS TO ANOTHER LEVEL OF COGNITION AND PERCEPTION CAN BE REALIZED. THIS INWARD ORIENTATION IS NECESSARY, BECAUSE OUR FOCUS ON THE OUTER WORLD HAS REACHED ITS LIMITS.

a connection to the inner world and thus to another level of cognition and perception can be realized. This inward orientation is necessary, because our focus on the outer world has reached its limits. And the promotion of intuition also fits in with this. We are facing a societal change of consciousness!

Should intuition be part of the future curriculum at schools and universities? Can intuition be taught?

de Bruin: Yes, of course. As I've already mentioned, for intuition we need the contact with our inner core, the soul, the Self. Over the millennia, important spiritual teachers have recorded in their teachings ways in which this can be achieved. For example, teachers such as Krishnamurti and Nisargadatta Maharaj emphasized that it is first necessary to free oneself from one's own

conditioning. Ramana Maharshi recommends to pursue the question "Who am I?". The well-known mindfulness and meditation researcher Richard Davidson assumes that in the near future mental hygiene will be a subject in schools, just like sports lessons. In the university context, I see meditation in particular as a promising approach.

Andreas, thank you very much for the interview!

* Sir Ken Robinson died in London on August 21, 2020.

The interview "Intuition as a Subject of Study" was originally been published in German, on July 1st, 2020 in the magazine for mindfulness and awareness *Moment by Moment*, Volume 03/2020. Freiburg: Hammer Solutions Media, pp. 68-71. Some details have been updated for this publication.

*THE WORKS OF THE GREAT MASTERS
OF PAINTING ATTEST TO AN ENORMOUS
DEPTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS.
BUT WHEN WE GO TO A MUSEUM,
WE USUALLY DON'T TAKE THE TIME
TO REALLY LET THESE PAINTINGS
HAVE THEIR EFFECT ON US.*



MEDITATION AND ART

“Meditation and Art” is a project by Prof. Andreas de Bruin. He accompanies students to art museums to facilitate deeper access to the works and the artists through the the practice of mindfulness and meditation. De Bruin explains the four steps of his method and how art and meditation can bring about a deeper perception.

Interview conducted by Mike Kauschke for *Ethik heute*

What prompted you to bring “Meditation and Art” to life?

de Bruin: The works of the great masters of painting attest to an enormous depth of consciousness. But when we go to a museum, we usually don't take the time to really let these paintings have their effect on us.

Guided museum tours are of great value, but the imparting of too much information about the respective works of art can get in the way of one's own personal access, as it interferes too much with the process of perception.

Also, most people's attention span runs out too soon and while they may still be listening, they can't absorb what is being said or associate it with the artwork.

So, I thought it would be important to spend more time in front of each painting and not be distracted by all the other paintings and other visitors. And also not to be distracted by one's everyday thoughts: what I still have to buy, want to cook, or that I still have a meeting with someone, etc.

I wanted to find a way to really connect with the painting and therefore with the respective artist. This all requires concentration and focus, and that brings us to mindfulness and meditation.

The fostering of a deeper perception is the most important feature of “Meditation and Art.” This comes about through meditation, as a profound form of inner immersion. Meditation builds the bridge to the inner world, where our deepest source of inspiration lies. And it is precisely from this source that the work of a great master originates.



Only in the third step does art history come into play



Walking meditation

Can you say something about the method you use to bring paintings closer to people?

de Bruin: In 1998, in the German Black Forest, I came to know “Musicosophia,” an international school for the conscious listening of classical music. The primary aim of the school is to reveal the essence concealed in classical music. With the method of conscious listening, they seek to provide a means of approaching this very essence.

According to Musicosophia, one does not need to be a good musician to access the masterpieces of music in a deeper way. Even as an amateur, one can learn to hear, understand and open up the music in all its depth.

This approach has also inspired me in my method for viewing artwork, “Meditation and Art”. And again, you don’t necessarily have to know about art theory or be able to paint to truly perceive the essence of a painting. In 2017, I first presented “Meditation and Art” as a method consisting of four steps at a symposium at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Please describe how we can approach a work of art meditatively.

de Bruin: The first step is at the entrance of the museum, where I explain that we’ll go deeper into some paintings, but don’t say which ones.

Then we continue with an introduction to walking meditation, so we can move from painting to painting in this manner. For some, this is already a highlight, to walk through the museum so consciously and with awareness of the feet and each step.

We then come to the selected painting and stand in front of it. We look at it briefly, then close our eyes and engage in a short focusing exercise, paying attention to our own breath.

In the second step, we look at the painting, reviewing its objective aspects such as composition, color, light and shadow, expression, technique and painting style, as well as objects and symbols. Then we form small groups to work on one aspect. The participants decide for themselves in which group they would like to work.

The groups then report to the other groups on what they have discovered. At the beginning, it’s important not to place too much emphasis on subjective impressions. We first try to describe the picture as objectively as possible. Usually by this time, we’ve been standing in front of the painting for 30 minutes.

In the third step, we read the information on the text panel next to the picture; its title and who painted it.

I then follow-up with some art history information related to what the participants have discovered themselves. – Why did Dürer paint his self-portrait in this way? In which phase of life did Rembrandt paint the respective picture? How do you recognize a painting by Raphael? – Against the background of all the information and perceptions gathered beforehand, a dialog develops in which subjective elements now also find their place.

At the end, the fourth and last step, we conclude our observation with a short silent meditation, in which we once again inwardly visualize the artwork. We then move on to the next painting while engaged in a walking meditation.

**MY SACH DIE GAT
ALS ES OBEN SCHAT –
MY AFFAIRS FOLLOW THE COURSE
ALLOTTED TO THEM ON HIGH.
ALBRECHT DÜRER**

Can this shared viewing of art strengthen people’s inspiration?

de Bruin: When we see these paintings, we are always standing in front of the originals. It’s incredible! Take a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, for example, as it hangs in Munich. It’s just like listening to a piece by Beethoven when it was first performed. Most museum visitors are not at all aware of that.

These paintings are condensed energy. The master's inspiration shows itself in the painting in form, color, and also in a vibration, the frequency in which we then spend some time. And that changes us.

The sculptor Rodin once said that a good work of art brings viewers into contact with their own soul. This really happens; these paintings can connect us with our inner being. In moments of deep perception, the duality between the viewer and the painting as object is virtually suspended. Participants report that they can also remember the works much better, that they have "internalized" them more, so to speak.

What do the students take away from this experience?

de Bruin: With the students, I've noticed that they change personally as a result of the long periods of time we spend at the museum during this course. They engage intensively with a painting of their choice and then guide the whole group through it on their own using the "Meditation and Art" approach.

In addition to learning about the different levels of meaning in a painting, the iconography, they also learn about the context of the painting during that period and about human thought and action during the respective eras, the iconology.

One could say that the great works of painting allow for a resonant space in which we can connect more deeply with ourselves. Through meditation and art appreciation, students also learn to create space within themselves.

Many of them acquire a more profound capacity for mindfulness and perception in the process. And they come to know themselves better. This is because the topics we discuss in connection with painting also have to do with them. They experience the power of stillness and mindfulness, which they can apply to other day-to-day activities, such as communicating or cooking and eating.

Students feel more at home in the museum and learn how to approach painting differently. This boosts their confidence; interest, enthusiasm, and curiosity are awakened. They also learn an approach that can be done with different audiences, children, teens, seniors, etc. That's what my students then do. It's a very open method that everyone can participate in.

It's the feedback from the students that always impresses me. "I have goose bumps!" one student said after observing Dürer's "Self-Portrait with Fur-Trimmed Robe." "He looks at me with such calm and power and somehow right through me!"

Others said, "To me, he's looking sideways past me!" "No, I think he's looking at me!" And another student added, "For me, it's about serenity and eternity!"



Small groups discuss aspects of the painting

* Two articles (de Bruin 2019 / 2020) describe the "Meditation and Art" approach through a detailed case study, focusing on the work "Self-Portrait with Fur-Trimmed Robe" (1500) by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).

The articles are also available as free PDFs at: www.hm.edu/meditationsmodell (section "Meditation and Art").

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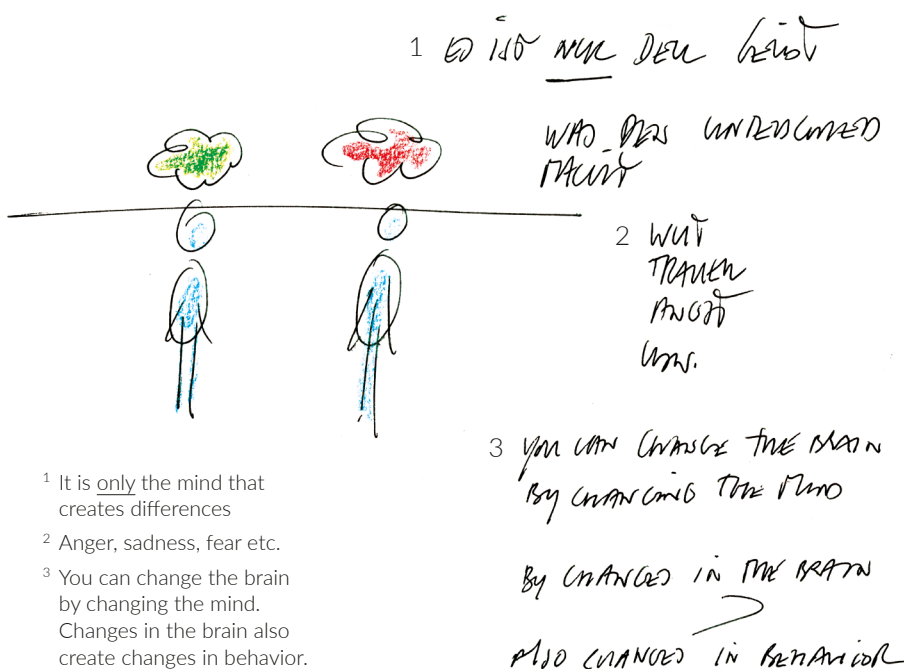
EXERCISES

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The book *Mindfulness and Meditation at University. 10 Years of the Munich Model* describes a series of mindfulness and meditation exercises taken from the programs offered by the Munich Model.¹ To complement these, the following exercises – which also feature in the Munich Model’s courses – are presented below.

The human mind changes quickly

It’s possible to visualise just how quickly our thoughts and feelings change with the help of the “column exercise” found in the book *Mind Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* by Deborah Schoeberlein David², a teacher and curriculum developer. A sheet of paper is folded into three equal-sized columns. In the left column, one writes or draws what one is thinking and feeling. When one is done, this column is folded back so that only two columns remain visible. A singing bowl is then struck. The task is to focus on the sound that ensues and follow it attentively until it fades out completely. This is repeated two more times. After the last tone of the singing bowl has faded away, the thoughts and feelings that arise are again recorded in writing or drawn in the left column. After that, this column is also folded back, leaving one last column. Now follows a breathing exercise in which one concentrates on the breath for a few minutes. When we do this exercise as part of the Munich Model, we also use other meditation objects instead of the breath, such as a mantra or the point between the eyebrows. After that, the thoughts and feelings that are now present are recorded in the last column. At the end of the exercise, the sheet is unfolded and the three columns are compared. Finally, the participants talk about it in small groups and then in a plenary session. The following example illustrates a potential discussion:



¹ It is only the mind that creates differences

² Anger, sadness, fear etc.

³ You can change the brain by changing the mind. Changes in the brain also create changes in behavior.

Moderator: “What do your columns look like? Do they contain similar content?”

Response 1: “In my case, the content of each column is steadily decreasing.”

Response 2: “I ended up with nothing left to write down. The column is empty.”

Response 3: “After listening to the bell, the column in the middle is as good as empty. In the third column, thoughts have crept in again.”

Moderator: “Interesting, isn’t it? How quickly one’s state of mind can change. After all, the exercise didn’t take long.”

Response 1: “Just a moment ago, I was fully occupied with my daily to-do list and thinking about what I still have to do today. Now I’m much calmer.”

Response 2: “My mind has become calmer but the thoughts haven’t really gone away. They’re not as close, as present.”

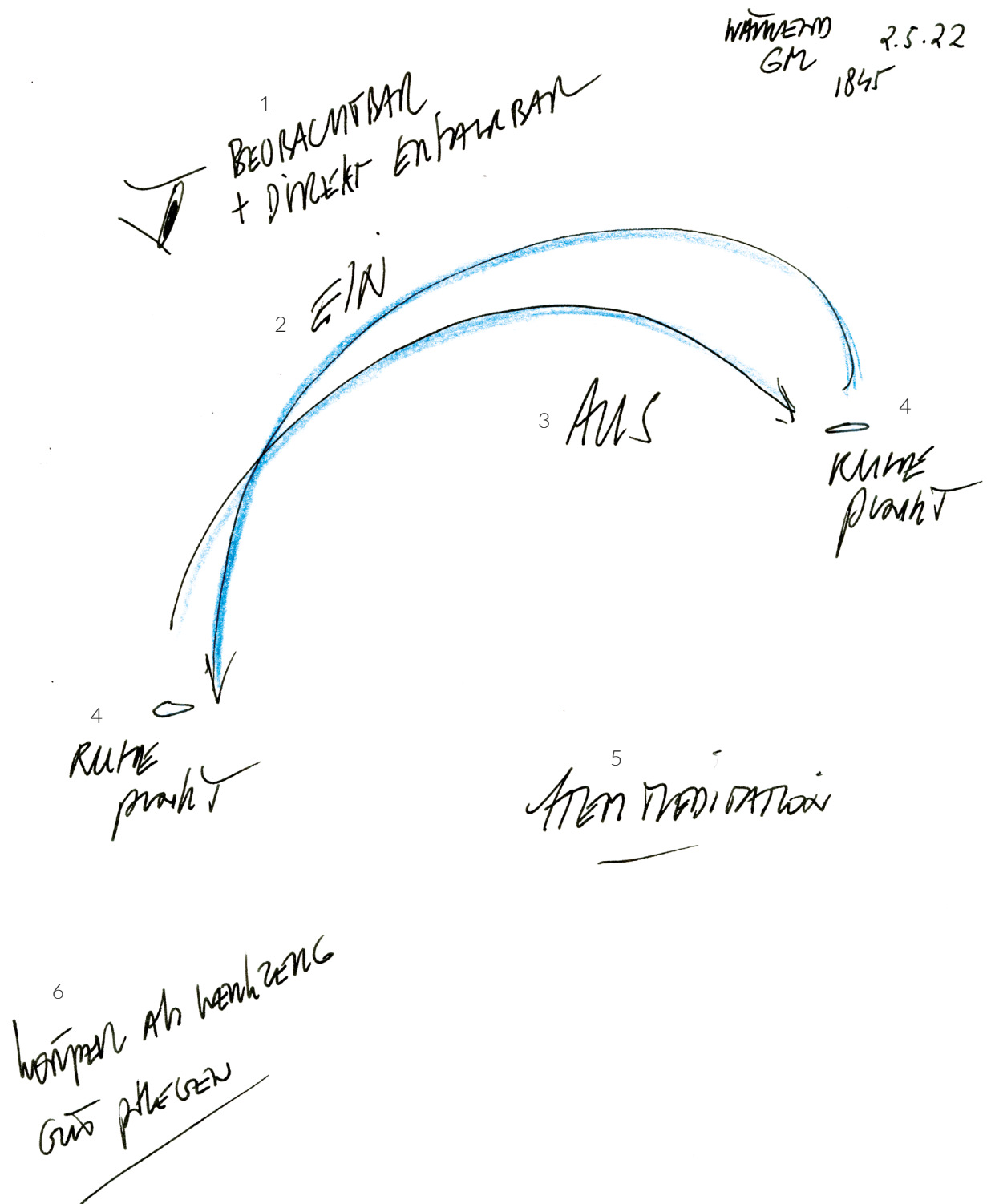
The breath as an anchor

In *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Buddhist monk and Bhavana Society co-founder Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, there is a helpful description of the properties of a meditation object and why the breath is well suited as such: “A useful object of meditation should be one that promotes mindfulness. It should be portable, easily available, and cheap. It should also be something that will not embroil us in those states of mind from which we are trying to free ourselves [...]. Breathing satisfies all these criteria and more.”³

The observation of the breath lends itself well to metaphors. For example, one can imagine oneself by the sea. Similar to the rhythm of breathing, the waves that roll onto the beach and then recede have a rhythm all their own. We can therefore imagine that when we exhale, the waves roll onto the beach and when we inhale, they flow back into the sea.⁴

Breathing exercises can be done in a very simple way. The main thing is to breathe naturally. Those who wish to engage in more complex breathing techniques should definitely do so in the company of an experienced breath meditation teacher.

In his book *Breath, you are alive! The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022), who exemplified and taught the attitude of conscious awareness throughout his life, goes into detail about the importance of breathing. To help us experience it, he recommends a series of practice sets, where the emphasis is on *conscious* breathing. When we *consciously* focus on breathing in and out, the breath connects us to a deeper level within us.⁵



¹Observable + directly experienceable | ²IN | ³OUT |

⁴Resting point | ⁵Breathing meditation | ⁶Taking good care of the body, which is a tool

The Indian spiritual teacher Sri Chinmoy (1931-2007), a writer, poet, composer, musician, artist and athlete recommends taking enough time when breathing: “When you breathe in, try to breathe in as slowly and quietly as possible, so that if somebody placed a tiny thread in front of your nose, it would not move at all. And when you breathe out, try to breathe out even more slowly than when you breathed in. If possible, leave a short pause between the end of your exhalation and the beginning of your inhalation. If you can, hold your breath for a few seconds. But if it is difficult, do not do it. Never do anything that will harm your organs or respiratory system.”⁶

Elaborating on slow breathing, Sri Chinmoy shares an exercise with the idea that one breathes in a positive quality, such as peace, and breathes out the opposite of that quality – in this example, restlessness: “This is not the traditional yogic pranayama, which is more complicated and systematised. But what I have just told you is the most effective spiritual method of breathing. If you practise this method of breathing, you will soon see that what you are doing is not imagination; it is reality. In the beginning you have to use your imagination, but after a while you will see and feel that it is not imagination at all, but reality. You are consciously breathing in the energy which is flowing all around you in the cosmos, purifying yourself, and emptying yourself of everything undivine. But this breathing has to be done in a very conscious way, not in a mechanical way. If you can breathe this way for five minutes every day, you will be able to make very fast progress.”⁷ Moreover, he explains elsewhere that slow breathing while meditating is essential, “[so that] your meditation is going to be deep and your mind will be very calm and quiet”.⁸

Besides the breath, there are many other meditation objects that can be effectively used in mindfulness and meditation practice: for example, reciting a mantra or focusing on an image or an area of the body such as the point between the eyebrows.⁹ It’s key that the techniques chosen are authentically suited to the individual.

The mechanisms of the mind

Besides relaxation, mindfulness and meditation exercises also promote insight. It’s valuable to learn more about one’s own thoughts, feelings and body. This helps us to better understand these “tools” and how they influence each other. We are less the pawn of our thoughts and feelings and are able to more consciously decide when and how we react to situations. It renders us more self-confident and self-efficacious. This is the difference when compared to pure relaxation exercises.

To better understand the mechanisms of the mind, Indian spiritual teacher and peace activist Vishnu Devananda (1927-1993) compares the mind to a record: “In a sense, the mind is like a record. It contains grooves, or impressions, called *samskaras* in Sanskrit. These *samskaras* are formed when certain thought waves, or *vrittis*, become habitual. For example, a man passes a bakery and sees a chocolate éclair in the window. The *vritti* arises in his mind: ‘How delicious; I will buy that éclair’. If he ignores that *vritti*, and turns his mind to something else, then no pattern is formed. But, if he identifies with the thought, he gives life to it. He buys the éclair, looking forward to enjoying it as dessert that evening. [...] Each time he goes by, he

recalls that wonderful eclair, and purchases another. Now what was originally just a flash in the mind has become a force in his life, and a *samskara* has been formed.”¹⁰

Becoming aware of how and which impressions eventually become “grooves” and thus habits can help us counter destructive thoughts so they don’t “take root” in the first place.

Don't get on the train

Thoughts come and go. Like trains. Let's imagine we enter a train station and sit down on a bench there. We watch the trains coming in and going out. But we don't get on. It is the same with our thoughts. We watch them coming and going, but we don't allow them to engage us – we don't get on the train.

After a certain time, at the end of the exercise, we reflect on it: How did the participants experience this exercise? Was it easy to monitor the trains, the thoughts, as they come and go? Who had difficulties with it and why?

Thoughts and clouds

Instead of trains at the train station, there are many other metaphors that can be used for this exercise. For example, clouds that the observer simply lets pass by – like thoughts – without evaluating them. We can also imagine that the clouds carry away our thoughts. In our imagination, we place our thoughts on the passing clouds and let both float away. At the same time we can imagine that we are lying relaxed on the beach or in a beautiful green meadow. We can expand the exercise even further, for example, we can imagine the clouds in different sizes, colors and consistencies and choose the appropriate cloud for each thought.

The inner weather

A helpful metaphor for our feelings can be the weather. The weather is changeable and has many different qualities. Sometimes the sun is shining, sometimes it's rather overcast or it is raining or stormy. It is especially important for children to learn that feelings can also assume different forms and are not always the same. Just like the weather, feelings change and can also be observed, “I have feelings, but I'm not my feelings!” Gaining more insight into how one is feeling right now and why that is so promotes balance as well as offering a constructive approach to conflict situations, which are rich with feelings.¹¹

Discovering new things

“What new thing did you discover today?” I sometimes ask my students at the beginning of a mindfulness and meditation teaching session.

Moderator: “While you were on your way to college, to the university today, was everything the same as always? Who took the subway today?”

Some raise their hands.

Moderator: “Were the exact same people on the subway today as on other days? Did they look exactly the same as they usually do? The same clothes, the same facial expressions?”

Response 1: “I came by bicycle today. I don’t do that very often.”

Moderator: “What did you notice?”

Response 1: “I didn’t quite remember the way, so I got a little lost.”

Response 2: “There were a lot of children in the subway today. It was a bit chaotic, but also amusing.”

Response 3: “I sometimes look more closely at people’s facial expressions.”

Moderator: “Intriguing. And do they always look the same?”

Response 1: No ;-)

By expanding our ability to perceive, life reveals itself in its fullness. We see more details, discover new things, perhaps also beautiful and good things, which in turn enables us to have new experiences and to experience joy.¹² We are more in the now and are able to recognize the “little things of everyday life” – a child saying something funny on the subway; a red ladybug crawling on a bright green leaf; thick raindrops on our skin...

Mindfulness helps us to be more aware of our activities. Everyone is familiar with situations in life in which one is more mindful than usual or where mindfulness is especially called for. Such situations and moments can also simply arise. The following are two examples.

My hairstylist knows

I've known my hairstylist for years. He has an extraordinary knack for seeing how head and hair work together – this may be due to the fact that his ancestral roots are both Brazilian and Japanese. The last time I sat in the barber's chair and he ran the scissors through my hair, I immediately felt a sense of serenity. I realized that I could really let go; he knows what he's doing. And after he's done, he shows me the result in the mirror and, as always, I'm totally satisfied. I really don't have to do anything myself – as long as my head is there, and my hair too, I can completely relax while he cuts. This attitude can actually be transferred to many everyday situations: just being there.



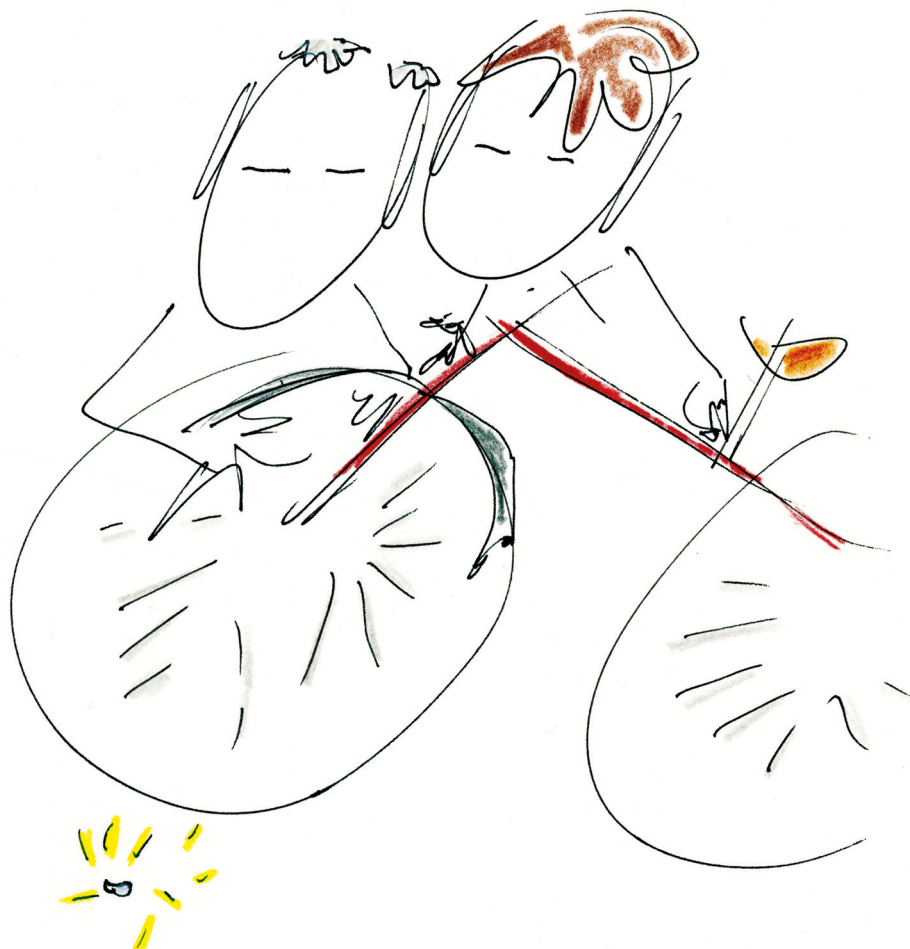
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Listening mindfully

On the left side of our former family home in Delft, my hometown in the Netherlands, there lived a neighbor who assembled bicycles in his spare time. As a child, I was occasionally allowed to assist him and thus learned a lot about bicycles. But what I remember most vividly are his “words of wisdom”. For example, a situation when a screw fell out of his hand while mounting a mudguard. He was already quite old and could no longer see so well. He immediately said, “Andreas, first hear exactly where it falls, then we’ll look!” So we closed our eyes and focused completely on our sense of hearing. The screw landed on the ground, bounced up a few times, and rolled toward the front wheel. When we couldn’t hear anything, we opened our eyes, which instantly focused on the ground by the front wheel. He found the screw right away.

“Hear where it falls”

“Hör wo es hin fällt”



A.B. 140522

The human being is altruistic

Among the mindfulness and meditation practices, an important category are the metta meditations, or meditations of loving kindness. These focus on the qualities of empathy and compassion, as well as altruistic behavior. Researchers at Yale University (USA) have found that babies as young as three months of age show a preference for positive over negative behavior.¹³ Contemplative neuroscience generally assumes that almost all people are fundamentally altruistic and that the goal is to retain and develop this trait. For this reason, for example, a research team led by Richard Davidson, one of the pioneers of contemplative neuroscience and an expert in the field of emotion research, has developed a special *Kindness Curriculum* for children ages 4 to 7 at its Center for Healthy Minds.¹⁴ The reason for starting so early is the neuroplasticity of the brain, which is particularly pronounced in this time window. This makes it easier to restructure and expand neuronal networks in the brain, and it is precisely at this stage that interventions are meaningful.¹⁵

To better understand who and what we currently feel connected to, we do an exercise in class where we create an individual connectedness chart. It goes like this:

Participants are given a sheet of paper and draw on it, in the form of a mind map or overview, the people or even objects, animals, and places with which they currently have a relationship. In the middle of the paper one draws in oneself – starting from there all others are placed and connected with lines that lead back to ourselves. Distance and size express the significance of the connection. After some time, e.g. 10 minutes, a discussion follows in small groups, and then in a plenary.

Many participants find it interesting to see with whom and with what they feel connected or related. This exercise can break down the experience of space as a distance construct. For example, people can be very close and connected to us, even if they are in a completely different place or are even no longer alive.

As for the metta meditation or meditation of loving kindness¹⁶, occasionally students come up with phrases on their own that are appropriate for them to use as affirmations. A nice example goes like this:

I say the following phrase to myself, “May I be healthy and free from suffering,” and for a person very close to me, “May you be full of peace, tranquility, and serenity,” and for a someone I don’t know well, “May you be happy,” and for a person I don’t like very much, “May you be healthy and free from suffering.” (Meditation Journal C. D.)

For Devananda, focusing on that which is positive in life is essential: “*Samskaras* are not necessarily negative. There can be grooves in the mind which are uplifting and those which bring one down. It is the express purpose of meditation to create new, positive channels in the mind, and to eradicate those which are destructive. [...] There must be a striving to develop love, compassion, a sense of service, cheerfulness, kindness, and the many other qualities which not only make one’s own life happy, but which radiate to others.”¹⁷

Pausing in silence and gratitude

Television host Fred McFeely Rogers (1928-2003), who rose to fame with his preschool television series “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” reaching millions of children with his constructive and authentic messages between 1968 and 2001, set a beautiful example of pausing in silence to give thanks. When he accepted the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 24th Annual Daytime Emmy Awards in 1997, he asked the audience in the room to join him in silence for ten seconds, and in that window of time to think of all those who have helped us in life to become the person we are; who had cared for us and wanted only the best for us in life. This brief moment of silence and gratitude deeply moved many present in the room to tears.¹⁸

Even in our often-hectic everyday lives, it is important to be grateful and to pause. In the silence of that moment, an inner space is created in which we find peace, protection and tranquility.

The monastery cells in the San Marco Museum

In the case of meditation forms in which the focus is exclusively on a meditation object in order to bring us more into mental peace and in reach of an inner dimension, I recommend that students first mentally tune into the meditation and then inwardly tune in to the chosen meditation object, such as the breath, a mantra or the point between the eyebrows. Ultimately, as a result of the directed focus, these so-called internal forms of immersion do not observe emerging thoughts, feelings or physical sensations.¹⁹ In this case, the breath is also used purely as an object of meditation, and not for example as an anchor point to observe thoughts without being drawn into them.

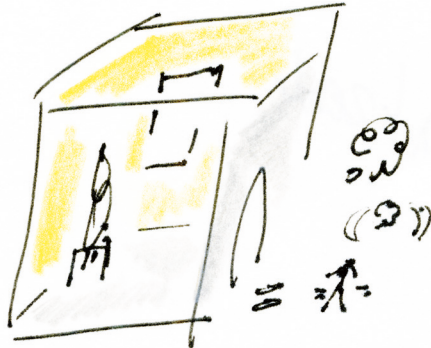
To make the above more tangible, I use vivid images in class, such as for example that of stepping into the rooms of a monastery.

Those who know the former Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence know that there are a large number of small monastery cells, which the monks used at that time for devotion and inner contemplation. In each of these rooms there is nothing but a painting. Most of these paintings are by the great early Renaissance painter Fra Angelico (c. 1395-1455). The paintings together form a fresco cycle and depict passages from the life of Christ.²⁰

When I prepare with participants for a meditation session of inner immersion, I sometimes tell them about San Marco. To set the mood for meditation, we can imagine such a small room into which we enter. There in the room, we can replace the image with the meditation object that we ourselves use for our meditation. Before we imagine entering the monastery cell, we attempt to set aside our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations, so as not to take them into the room with us. We are, like the monks in the monastery cells of San Marcos, alone in the room with only our object of meditation.

The thoughts remain outside

Sometimes I'm asked if one is allowed to think while meditating. I usually ask back, "What if you think you're not allowed to think?" The answer back promptly follows, "Then you're already thinking again!"



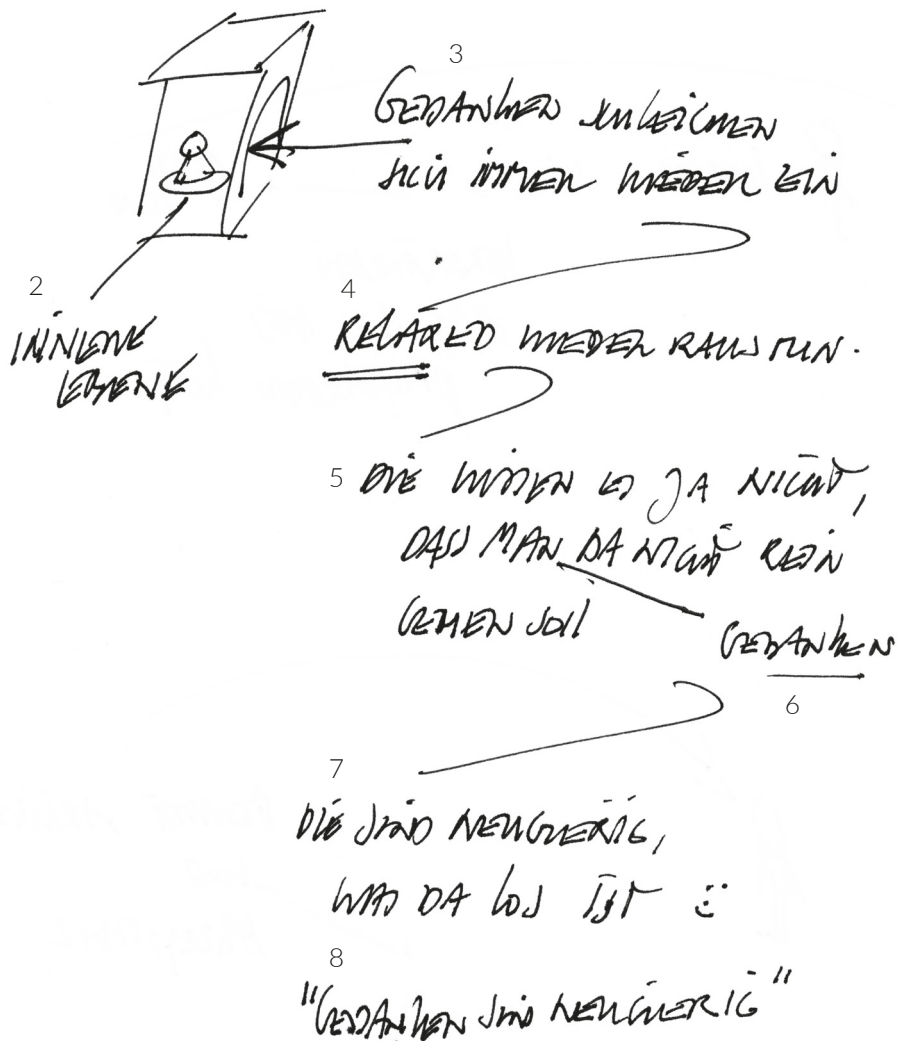
Moderator: "True, you can think, but the crucial thing is not to pay attention to these thoughts while practicing meditation of inner immersion. If you prefer to do mindfulness and insight meditation, however, focus attention on the mechanisms of thinking and feeling, as well as the sensations of the body. You will then be more engaged with thinking and thoughts, but try to remain firmly in the role of observer."

This is not to say that no thoughts arise at all during a meditation of inner immersion. Through sustained concentration, the mind becomes calm and the orientation changes – from outward (sensory perception, thoughts, etc.)²¹ more to inward. From this level, insights can then also arise. Instead of intellectual thinking, we are speaking here of intuition and of inspiration and epiphany. It is a higher mental level than the level of the normal intellectual approach, where there is no discursive process.²²

Naturally, there are many other metaphors that can be used as meditation aids in place of the monastery in San Marco. For example, one can imagine a visit to the doctor. First, one comes into the waiting room. After a certain time, one is called and comes into the consultation room. In this room you are with the doctor. Here, too, you can imagine your own meditation object instead of the doctor. The thoughts, feelings and physical sensations remain in the waiting room.

Of course, all this is not easy. The thoughts are back in the small San Marco monastery cell or in the doctor's office faster than one "thinks". We then just gently push the thoughts out again. Without inwardly thinking: "I can't do that!" or "I am not suitable for meditation after all!" It's the same with feelings and physical sensations. These, too, are to be ignored. However, if there is real discomfort in the body, it's of course important to pay attention to it and, if necessary, to discontinue the meditation.

¹
kurz vor GM



¹ Shortly before "Gemeinsames Meditieren" (meditating together) | ² The inner level |

³ Thoughts creep in again and again | ⁴ Put thoughts gently outside again | ⁵ They don't know that you are not supposed to go in there | ⁶ Thoughts | ⁷ They are curious to know what's going on |

⁸ "Thoughts are curious"

Beyond thoughts

In the book *Mindfulness and Meditation at University. 10 Years of the Munich Model* there is a sample practice from the teachings of Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981), presented by his long-time student and founder of quantum psychology, Stephen H. Wolinsky, Ph.D., in the film *I Am That I Am, Experience the Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*.²³

In the context of my events I usually lead the exercise in a shortened and slightly modified form.

Instructions²⁴

A singing bowl is struck once, if desired

What is the “I am”?

To give you an experience of what the “I am” is, I want to ask you as the listener to “let your eyes close for a moment.”

Without using your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you a man, a woman or neither?

If you do not use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you defined, undefined or neither?

Without using your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you clever, not clever or neither?

If you do not use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you attractive, not attractive or neither?

When you do not use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations, or perceptions, are you perfect, imperfect or neither?

Without using your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you worthy or unworthy or neither?

When you do not use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, notice the no-state state of the “I am”. Without thoughts, memories, emotions, associations or perceptions.

In a moment I will ask you to open your eyes, just come back to the room a part of your awareness back there in the no-state state, without thoughts, memory, emotions, associations and perceptions.

And when you let your eyes open, a part of your awareness can be back here in the room, so you are splitting your awareness in two directions.

Maharaj spoke about the “I am” in terms of the verbal “I am” and the non-verbal “I am”. For example: the verbal “I am” would be “I am good. I am bad. I am smart. I’m stupid, or whatever!”

He said, cut that out first and just stick with the “I am”; let go of “bad, good, whatever shows up and just stick with the verbal ‘I am’.”

Without your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, you have what he would have called the non-verbal “I am”.

Let’s go over it again.

Let your eyes close for a moment.

Without using your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you clever, not clever or neither?

If you don’t use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, what does clever or not clever even mean?

Without using your your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you perfect, imperfect or neither?

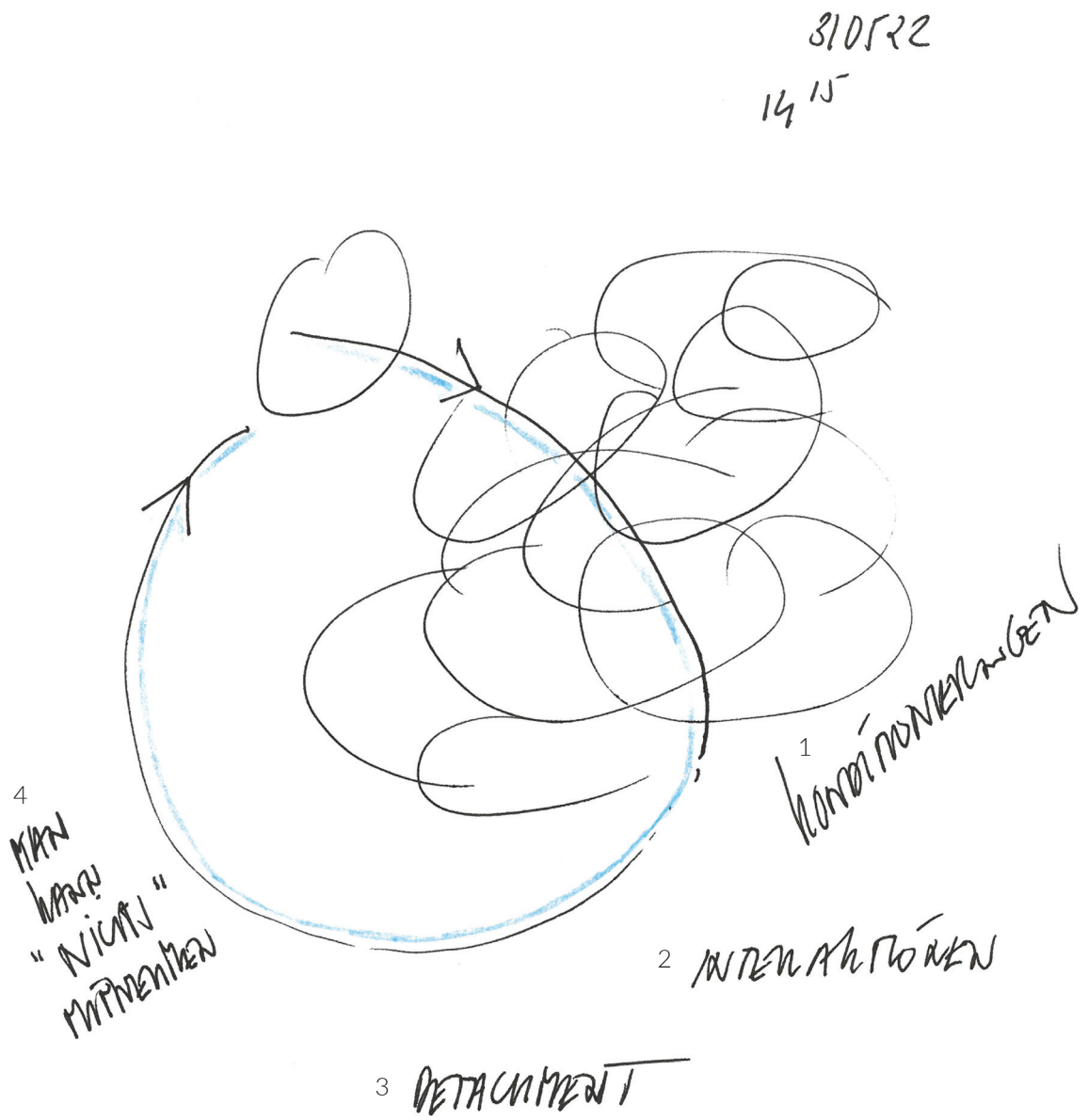
If you don’t use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, what does perfect or imperfect even mean?

Without using your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, are you worthy or unworthy or neither?

If you do not use your thoughts, memory, emotions, associations or perceptions, what does worthy or unworthy even mean?

Slowly we open our eyes again...

A singing bowl is struck 3 times, if desired



- 1 Conditionings
- 2 Interactions
- 3 Detachment (calmness / non-attachment)
- 4 You can't take anything with you

After a short moment of silence, a reflective conversation can now follow, to discuss how the participants experienced the exercise. First in groups of two or three, then in the entire group session.

Nisargadatta Maharaj repeatedly said that everything you know about yourself comes from the outside and is defined, and therefore advocated that one take the path inside to meet one's own true Self.

The above-mentioned book contains descriptions of some of the experiences participants have had after doing the exercise.²⁵ What has not yet been described is that some participants who do these exercises report a distressing feeling as a result of the emptiness that arises, while others perceive the experience as more relaxing or even liberating. These experiences are well understood. Getting beyond thoughts and attributions for a brief moment and thus being confronted with de-conditioning can evoke loneliness and also a kind of indifference as well as futility; as in "...if nothing matters anyway, what's the point?"

However, being able to see through and let go of the pressure of conditioning and attributions can also translate into freedom. To experience that there is something in us that has nothing to do with conditioning also makes us curious. What is that level? How do I get there? This is what Nisargadatta is aiming at.²⁶

The point of this exercise is not that we should fundamentally "deny" the outer world, but that it is important to know that there are two directions: one leads to the outer experience and one to the inner experience. This distinction also helps us not to identify too much with our own thoughts, feelings and physical sensations that belong to the outer plane.

¹ See de Bruin, A. (2021). *Mindfulness and Meditation at University. 10 years of the Munich model*. Bielefeld: transcript, pp. 101-166.

² Schoeberlein David, Deborah (2009). *Mind Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness. A Guide for Anyone Who Teaches Anything*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, pp. 93ff.

³ Gunaratana, Bhante Henepola (2019). *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, pp. 65f. The book also offers a number of valuable tips on how to conduct a meditation practice responsibly.

⁴ How we can gain more sense of our breath is shown by mindfulness trainer and craniosacral bodywork practitioner, Maria Kluge through the concept she developed, "The Toolbox is You!" On the website <https://www.thetoolboxisyou.com/>, in addition to the free download of the manual, there are also video sequences showing the practical implementation of mindfulness work; see Kluge, Maria (2019). *The Toolbox is You!* Osterloh: Verein für Achtsamkeit in Osterloh e.V.

⁵ Cf. Thich Nhat Hanh (2008). *Breathe, you are alive! The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*. Berkeley: Parallax Press; see also de Bruin 2021, pp. 159f. The explanation of the Breath Sutra and the various sets of exercises have also been recorded as a lecture, see "Thich Nhat Hanh – The First 8 Exercises of Mindful Breathing", www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_iDaIAPrGo (last accessed: 02.05.2022).

⁶ Sri Chinmoy (2021). *Meditation: humanity's race and Divinity's Grace, part 1. The Works of Sri Chinmoy*, Tome 35. Oxford: Ganapati Press, p. 292.

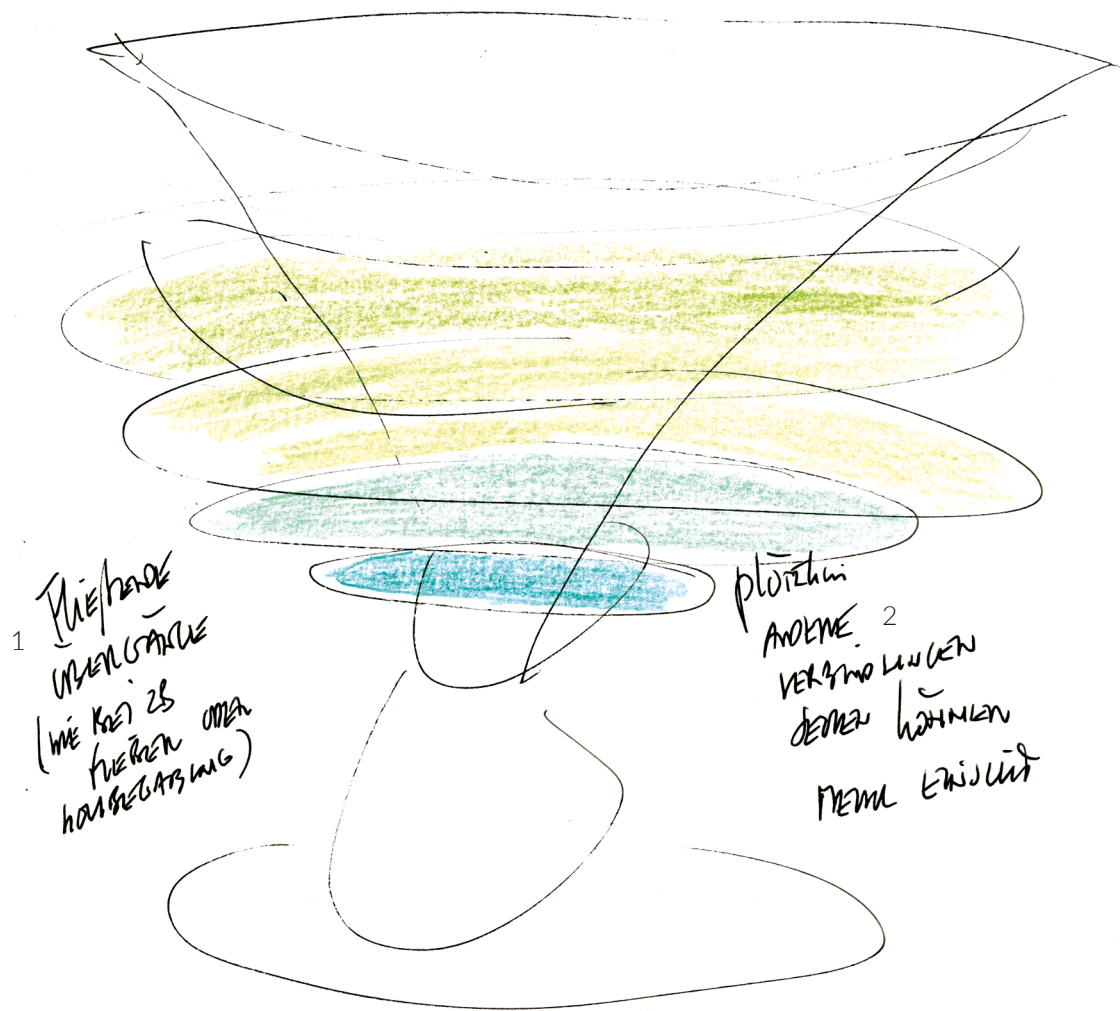
⁷ Sri Chinmoy 2021, p. 293.

⁸ Sri Chinmoy (2021). *Experiences of the higher worlds. The Works of Sri Chinmoy*, Tome 35. Oxford: Ganapati Press, p. 434.

⁹ Also in the context of the Munich model, it is evident that among the circa 2500 students so far, a large number do not choose the breath when practicing meditation of inner immersion. Cf. de Bruin 2021, p. 103.

¹⁰ Vishnu Devananda (1981). *Meditation and Mantras*. New York: OM Lotus Publishing Company, pp. 2f.

- ¹¹ For a successful example of how insight into feelings – one’s own as well as those of others – help children resolve conflicts, see Ambo, Phie (2013). *Free the Mind. Can one breath change your thinking?* Köln: mindjazz pictures, 58:43-1:01:46 min.
- ¹² The Indian spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti always pointed out in his teachings that in order to truly perceive something new, it is important to be absorbed in the experience, to BE, and not to separate oneself from the object of experience as a pure observer, as an “I-person.” For example: “I see the rose”, where through the “I” a separation between me and the rose arises, becomes “seeing the rose”, the separation dissolves, cf. Krishnamurti, Jiddu (1989). *Think on These Things*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, pp. 195f.; see also Krishnamurti – How to observe, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cxy8p-gcCN0> (last accessed: 02.05.2022) as well as de Bruin 2021, pp.32f.
- ¹³ Gilman, Sylvie / Lestrade, Thierry de (2016). *The Altruism Revolution*. Köln: mindjazz pictures, 21:20-27:46 min. An important component that determines the extent to which this preference is actually expressed as an action is connectedness; see in documentary film 37:56-43:56 min.
- ¹⁴ For more information, see: <https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum> (last accessed: 02.05.2022).
- ¹⁵ See Davidson, Richard J. (2019). “Interview”, in *Moment by Moment*, Volume 01/2019. Freiburg: Hammer Solutions Media, pp. 48-52.
- ¹⁶ For examples of exercises, see de Bruin 2021, pp. 143ff; see also Kornfield, Jack (2008). *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*. New York: Bantam Dell; and Kornfield, Jack (1993). *A Path with Heart. A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. New York: Bantam Books; and Ricard, Matthieu (2015). *The Art of Meditation*. London: Atlantic Books.
- ¹⁷ Vishnu Devananda 1981, p. 3.; see also TED talk “Matthieu Ricard - The Habits of Happiness,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRbZpxTgpPE> (last access: 02.05.2022).
- ¹⁸ The talk is available at “Fred Rogers Acceptance Speech”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Upm9LnuCBUM> (last access: 02.05.2022).
- ¹⁹ Regarding the alignment to the inner level, psychologist and psychotherapist, Harald Piron, Ph.D., describes in his book *Meditationstiefe. Grundlagen, Forschung, Training, Psychotherapie [Meditation Depth. Basics, Research, Training, Psychotherapy]* different meditation forms and distinguishes five depth areas in meditation practices, namely obstacles, relaxation and calming, the art of attention control, essential qualities, and non-duality; see Piron, Harald (2020). *Meditationstiefe. Grundlagen, Forschung, Training, Psychotherapie*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, pp. 27ff.
- ²⁰ See Scudieri, Magnolia (2010). *The Frescoes by Angelico at San Marco*. Florence: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino, pp. 46ff.
- ²¹ Cf. de Bruin 2021, p. 39.
- ²² See interview “Intuition as a Subject of Study”; see also de Bruin 2021, pp. 37ff.
- ²³ See the film: *I Am That I Am. Experience the Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj – Part 1* (2009, 7:33-16:39 min.). See as well: Wolinsky, Stephen H. (2010). “Nisargadatta Maharaj / Experiential Meditation”, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE6kS7vVsXw (last access: 02.05.2022). This exercise is reprinted with the kind permission of Stephen H. Wolinsky, Ph.D.
- ²⁴ For a description of Dr. Stephen H. Wolinsky’s , Ph.D., original instructions, see also de Bruin 2021, pp. 108ff.
- ²⁵ See de Bruin 2021, p. 109.
- ²⁶ See Nisargadatta, Maharaj (2009). *I Am That. Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*. Durham: The Acorn Press, p. 201; see also Nisargadatta Maharaj (2014). *Beyond Freedom. Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*. Mumbai: Yogilmpressions, p. 15. The need to break free from one’s conditioning in order to find one’s true purpose in life is also pointed out by Krishnamurti, see Krishnamurti, Jiddu (2018). *What Are You Doing with Your Life?* London: Rider, pp. 118ff.



- ¹ Smooth transitions
(as in e.g. fever or giftedness)
- ² Suddenly being able to see other connections
More insight
- ³ Expansion of consciousness



Prof. Dr. Andreas de Bruin teaches at the Munich University of Applied Sciences (HM) and additionally through an educational partnership at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University (LMU) Munich and the Technical University Munich (TUM). His main fields of research and teaching are mindfulness and meditation and their effects on physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels. He also teaches conscious awareness in painting and classical music; other subjects are giftedness as well as creativity in general.

Andreas de Bruin is the founder and director of the Munich model “Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context” – one of the first programs in Europe to offer courses in mindfulness and meditation and to implement them in the university curriculum. Besides regular classes, he also organizes additional courses for students, alumni, faculty and university staff. In order to share his experiences, de Bruin works closely with other universities in Germany and abroad. Likewise, there is an extensive cooperative network with numerous daycare centers, schools and other educational institutions.

Further information: www.hm.edu/meditationsmodell



This publication about the Munich Model “Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context”, further explores important topics such as the attitude of mindfulness, the difference between self and personality, the importance of intuition as well as the method “Meditation and Art”.

Additionally, it examines various mindfulness and meditation exercises that form part of the Munich Model program offerings but which, up to now, have not been published.



A valuable supplement to the first volume *Mindfulness and Meditation at University. 10 Years of the Munich Model* (published by transcript).