

# THE 10 MINUTE MIND

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Recognising that developing and maintaining a mindfulness practice can be hard work for young adults, **Monique Rhodes** developed an email-based digital mindfulness programme. She describes her work and its reception at University College London.



Some years ago I heard a story by a Tibetan Buddhist lama that moved me deeply. This lama had been imprisoned by the Chinese for 21 years after the invasion of Tibet in 1950. During those 21 years in prison he was subjected to all kinds of physical and emotional torture. Life in prison was extremely difficult. In the first two years of his imprisonment he shared his cell with another man who was the same age as him, and they quickly became best friends. His friend, however, found the

conditions of their imprisonment, the daily physical, mental and emotional difficulties, unbearable. As a learned master of meditation, the lama tried to teach his friend how to work with his mind so that he could cope better with the conditions they both found themselves in. He believed that the origins of happiness and suffering were in the mind.

With tears in his eyes the lama explained how one morning he awoke to discover blood all over him. In the night his friend had found something with which



to cut his own throat and had taken his own life. It was the only way he could find to get out of this unimaginable suffering.

What struck me most about this story was when the lama explained that essentially both he and his friend were exactly the same. They were the same age, came from the same village, were in the same physical health and found themselves in identical conditions in the very same cell. The lama left prison after 21 years and said that he did not experience

suffering while he was a prisoner of the Chinese. His friend, in those exact same conditions, had experienced so much suffering that he took his own life. The only difference between these two men was that one had trained their mind and the other hadn't.

#### **How mindfulness can change us**

I have studied mindfulness meditation for almost 15 years and over those years it has changed me. As a young woman I found it difficult to maintain

a balanced emotional life. I seemed to go from one fear to another, one drama to another. I was not unlike many other young people around me of the same age but I also believed my Sicilian immigrant forefathers had left me with a genetic imprint of passionate feistiness.

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I have since grown into someone who is incredibly steady, consistently happy and vibrant, and I am

literally living the life of my dreams. The younger me would never have imagined these changes were possible. However, I give all credit to learning the skill of mindfulness meditation.

I learnt that there was a gap between me and my thoughts and emotions. As my thoughts arose, I realised I didn't need to get carried away with them. Through the practice of mindfulness meditation I began to see that there was a point where I could choose to go with them, to go into their story and follow them down whatever path they took me, or just let them be, knowing they would naturally dissolve back into my mind. I began to see that my thoughts were as solid as the clouds in the sky, that they were fleeting and ever changing. I stopped taking them so seriously. By seeing that I didn't need to take my thoughts and emotions so seriously, my whole life began to change. For me, learning mindfulness meditation has been the greatest discovery of my life.

In her famous 2008 TED talk, *A Stroke of Insight*, Jill Bolt Taylor discusses what happens when we experience emotional reactions: 'When a person has a reaction to something in their environment, there's a 90-second chemical process that happens in the body; after that, any remaining emotional response is just the person choosing to stay in that emotional loop... if you continue to feel fear, anger, and so on, you need to look at the thoughts that you're thinking that are re-stimulating the circuitry that is resulting in you having this physiological response over and over again.'<sup>1</sup>

For some years now I've been teaching mindfulness meditation in India. I mainly teach young Western tourists, eager to find ways to manage the stress of living in the West. I am particularly interested in teaching this age group. When young people are at school, most of them are in the cocoon of their home and school life. As we get into our 30s, we start to wise up to whatever specific changes are needed to improve our lives,

which is why so many 30 year olds join gyms or start learning yoga and meditation. However, from the age of 18, I believe there is a gap. The transition into adulthood is one of the most difficult transitions we will make in our lives. If the skill of working with our minds can be taught at this age, I believe its benefits can be lifelong.

## Mindfulness for Western audiences

In my work with young Westerners, what I see each year is increasing levels of stress that these young people are having to manage. They are filled with anxiety and worry, the incidence of depression among them is growing at an alarming rate and, due to the rise in personal technology, most of them don't know how to be alone with themselves. Most of them are living in a world now where the societal norm is to be connected all day, and as Sherry Turkle, Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT University, says: 'Loneliness is failed solitude. To experience solitude you must be able to summon yourself by yourself; otherwise you will only know how to be lonely.'<sup>2</sup>

So I teach them to meditate. And often the results we get are life changing. After a short time many of them come back and tell me they are worrying less, they are happier, they are more hopeful and are beginning to calm their minds. They also start to create a real relationship with themselves.

I wanted to see if I could open this skill up to more young people in a way they could relate to. I knew it had to be digital, it had to be easy to maintain, it had to be simple to follow and it had to be enjoyable. So I created a digital programme called 'The 10 Minute Mind'. Each morning a new guided mindfulness track arrives in their inbox. It's only 10 minutes long, which is long enough to be effective and also short enough for them to be able to maintain. Rather than being an app that they would quickly forget, I made it an email that they would see each morning, and it has an inspirational quote to start their day. All they need to do is put on their headphones, click on the track, and it begins. I'm a professional musician, so I compose relaxing music to support their practice and make it more enjoyable. Best of all, every day a brand new track arrives in their inbox – 365 days of the year.

## The 10 Minute Mind in higher education

I then took The 10 Minute Mind to University College London (UCL) and we trialled it for one month. We opened the trial to both students and

staff. Due to the fact that they already had a mindfulness programme in place, they hoped to attract 50 students and about the same number of staff. So, in their minds, 100 participants would have been a success. At the end of the first week we had 802 participants and we finished the trial with 871 participants. At the end of the month we surveyed the participants and had received 221 responses.

What we found was that most participants had never practised mindfulness before. Ninety-eight per cent surveyed said they found the tracks helpful. When asked the question, 'How have they helped you?', 29 per cent said they calmed their minds, 28 per cent said they left them feeling positive afterwards, and 23 per cent felt they helped them with their stress levels and to feel calmer. Ninety-nine per cent of participants said they felt more relaxed at the end of the tracks. When they were asked if they would like to continue learning mindfulness with The 10 Minute Mind, 100 per cent of them said 'yes'.

At the end of the six months we surveyed them again. One third of the respondents were practising The 10 Minute Mind every day with another third practising most days. Ninety-one per cent of them said they were able to apply what they were learning in The 10 Minute Mind to everyday life.

Here is a taste of what some of the participants wrote in:

*'I just love it! It changes my life! Every day I am grateful for this because it helps me start the day in a new manner, reminding me to be, to take care of myself and others, to be in my body... During the day, I realise that*

*more and more of my actions or words are naturally the ones I need to have/say (they feel right to me), with gentleness. I thank you so much again! Wonderful!'*

*'I have got so much out of just taking time to sit with myself. I am much calmer and more relaxed and feel*

*like I am concentrating more easily in my study.'*

*'It has had such an impact in my life: my semester has been incredibly difficult on a personal level and also very busy with school, but this daily practice has made my life so much easier. I feel I am becoming a "better" person... or perhaps I should say, I am getting more aligned with what I want to be.'*

*'The 10 Minute Mind is my main way of helping to cope with anxieties.'*

*'Simply; it's changed my life.'*

*'I live in a student flat where we are now all waking up in the morning to do the 10 Minute Mind together. At the end of the day we discuss the word we focused on for the day, to see how we did. We are 10 Minute Mind groupies!'*

*'I love it!'*

### Email-based mindfulness: what makes it distinctive?

It's extraordinary for so many people to be so touched and moved by an online programme. What is it that sets this mindfulness programme apart from others and why was it so successful at UCL? I think there are a number of factors.

One way in which The 10 Minute Mind is different from other mindfulness courses is that there is an integrated and holistic approach and quality to the programme. I create and weave every single element together myself: I write and record the meditations; being a professional musician, I compose and produce the music for each track; and I personally write and send out every email.

We live in a world where people are constantly distracted, fragmented and disconnected. As a result, I believe there is a subtle impact when a programme is created with care and personal investment. It feels genuine and individual. It feels warm and authentic. And from that place, the subtle impact I see is that people trust they are being gently held throughout the very personal journey of learning to work with their own minds. I think this is one of the reasons so many people we trialled at UCL felt so touched by The 10 Minute Mind. One participant wrote, 'I have meditated for over 30 years, but I find The 10 Minute Mind – perhaps as it is complete and compact – gets me focused and present. Monique's voice has a beautiful, gentle and perfect balance which inspires me to apply myself.'

Another special element of the programme is that I send a fresh track every day. There is no copying and pasting from other programmes. And there is no bundle of mindfulness tracks to work your way through. Instead, participants are gently and deliberately guided through a process of creating a daily mindfulness practice.

It's not easy to create a habit. And often things that are good for us are the hardest things for us to give to ourselves. However, if all a person needs to do is open their inbox, put on headphones and be guided

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through a process that leaves them feeling better, then creating that habit and reaping its benefits certainly becomes easier. As another participant wrote, 'I am so appreciative this sort of course is being offered in a way that I am able to easily do it. I have such time constraints in my day and in just 10 minutes I am able to turn a stressful morning into a mindful one.' Group mindfulness practices are helpful; however, they suit a particular type of person, one who is happy to come once a week for a teaching session and then is able to maintain practice at home by themselves. The 10 Minute

Mind, on the other hand, has much greater reach because it allows students the support to practise daily, at the ideal time of first thing in the morning and from the comfort of their own home.

**IT'S ONE THING TO BE MINDFUL, BUT AT A TIME OF SUCH IMBALANCE IN THE WORLD, I FEEL IT IS VITAL TO BE MINDFUL FROM THE BEST PART OF OURSELVES**

The other special element of The 10 Minute Mind is that it is not just a mindfulness practice. At the end of each track I introduce a positive quality as a reflection for the day. Consequently, the course is not just about being still and focused. It is also about integrating our own goodness into our mindfulness practice. It's one thing to be mindful, but at a time of such imbalance in the world, I feel it is vital to be mindful from the best part of ourselves. The 10 Minute Mind reminds people of their own goodness. Through this final reflection, perhaps to their surprise, they realise they have this quality, however small. And therefore they are subtly able to use their mindfulness practice to become saner, happier people. There is no doubt the world needs saner and happier people.

And, as neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor said, when addressing a 2013 TEDx youth event: 'I believe those of you who are willing to create a *conscious* relationship with your brain, *you* will be the leaders who will help guide humanity back to mental health and *you* will be the game changers who help bring our planet back towards balance.'<sup>3</sup> ●



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from New Zealand, **Monique Rhodes** has studied mindfulness meditation extensively for over 15 years. Based in India for much of the year, she has taught meditation to thousands of travelling Westerners.

Monique has worked with some of the best known spiritual teachers of our time to create the album, *Heartbeats*, combining spoken word with music. Monique has also worked for His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the word and music project, *Gems of Wisdom*. Monique has lived most of her life as a professional musician, performing worldwide with acts such as the father of rock 'n' roll, Chuck Berry.

In 2010 Monique was nominated for the New Zealander of the Year Award for her charity work as a musician in New Zealand.

Monique is passionate about bringing the practice of mindfulness meditation to as many people as possible, to help them cope with the increasing stress and pressures of the modern world.

[www.the10minutemind.com](http://www.the10minutemind.com)

[monique@the10minutemind.com](mailto:monique@the10minutemind.com)



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