3

Doing, Being, and Mindfulness

Doing is just one of a number of different modes in which the mind can work.

We can think of these different modes as somewhat like the different gears of a car, each mode of mind serving a different function or purpose.

And, just as a car can be in only one gear at a time, so the mind can be in only one mode at a time.

This is really important—it means **we can free ourselves from any problems the doing mode creates by moving into another, different mode**—we can learn how "to shift mental gears."

Design a Different Mode of Mind

On the facing page we summarize the seven core features of the doing mind introduced in Chapter 2. Next to each feature is a space for you to write a word or two to describe what the opposite of that feature would look like. The first one has been written in as an example. What would a good alternative to the doing mode look like?

The Seven Core Features of the Doing Mode	**Possible alternative:**
1. Often automatic	1. *deliberate, on purpose*
2. Works through thinking	2. _____
3. Focuses on past and future	3. _____
4. Tries to avoid unpleasant experiences	4. _____
5. Needs things to be different	5. _____
6. Takes thoughts/ideas as real	6. _____
7. Focuses on what needs to be done, ignoring undesirable side effects, such as being unkind to oneself or others	7. _____

Being and Doing

Good news! We **already have** a wonderful alternative to the doing mode of mind. It is the mode of **being.** It is a mode with which most of us are not very familiar, but the exercise you just did may have given you clues as to what being looks like.

In the next few pages, we describe the being mode by contrasting it, feature by feature, with the seven core features of the doing mode.

A central aim of the MBCT program is to learn how to recognize these two modes in your own life so that you know when to switch from doing to being.

As a first step, we invite you to estimate, feature by feature, the balance between doing and being in your own everyday experience. Please circle the appropriate phrase after each pair of boxes to indicate your estimate.

1. Living on "Automatic Pilot" versus Living with Conscious Awareness and Choice

IN DOING MODE we live on automatic pilot much of the time: we drive, walk, eat, even speak without clear awareness of what we are doing. Doing starts up automatically whenever there is a mismatch between where we are now and where we want to be. Focusing narrowly on our goals, we rarely stop and notice the wonder of what is happening around us as we move through our lives. We can end up missing much of our lives, forever postponing the time when life will be less hectic and we'll really notice things again.

THE BEING MODE *is intentional rather than automatic. This means we can choose what to do next, rather than run on old, worn-out habits. This allows us to see things as if for the very first time. We "reinhabit" the present moment and become fully conscious of our lives. Being brings a freshness to our perception. We become fully alive and aware again.*

Based on this feature, which of the following best describes the balance between doing and being in your life from day to day? (Circle one.)

More doing than being | Equal doing and being | More being than doing

2. Relating to Experience through Thought versus Directly Sensing Experience

THE DOING MODE works on *ideas*—that's what goals are. It thinks *about* the world in which we dwell, *about* the kind of person we are, *about* the feelings, sensations, and thoughts we have—thinking, thinking, thinking fills our minds much of the time. When we deal with a thought about life as if it were the "real thing," we live one step back from life—we connect with life indirectly through a veil of thoughts that filters out the color, vibrancy, and energy of life.

IN BEING MODE *we connect with life directly—we sense it, we experience it, we know it intimately by close acquaintance. We get a taste of the richness and ever-shifting wonder of the experience of life.*

For this feature, estimate the balance of doing and being in your life (circle one):

More doing than being | Equal doing and being | More being than doing

3. Dwelling on and in the Past and Future versus Being Fully in the Present Moment

IN DOING, we engage in mental time travel. Our minds go forward to the future—to our ideas of how we want things to be—or back to the past, to memories of similar situations, to see what guidance they can offer. In mental time travel we feel as though we are actually *in* the future or *in* the past. This disconnects us from experiencing the fullness of life in the present. We can easily wind up ruminating on the past, re-experiencing the pain of past losses and failures. Worrying about the future, we experience fear and anxiety over threats and dangers that may never happen.	IN BEING, *the mind is gathered, here, now, in this moment, fully present and available to whatever the universe may offer. We can have thoughts about the future and memories of the past—but, crucially, we experience them as parts of our* present *experience. We witness them without being drawn into the past or future worlds the thoughts might otherwise create.*

For this feature, estimate the balance of doing and being in your life (circle one):

More doing than being | Equal doing and being | More being than doing

4. Needing to Avoid, Escape, or Get Rid of Unpleasant Experience versus Approaching It with Interest

IN DOING MODE the immediate, automatic reaction to any unpleasant experience is to set up a goal—to avoid the experience, to push it away, to get rid of it, or to destroy it. This reaction is called **aversion**. Aversion underlies all the thinking patterns that get us stuck in unwanted emotions.	IN BEING, *the basic response is to* ***approach*** *all experience, even the unpleasant, with interest and respect.* *There is no setting of goals for how things should be or should not be. Rather, there is a natural interest and curiosity in* all *experience—whether it is pleasant, unpleasant, or neither.*

For this feature, estimate the balance of doing and being in your life (circle one):

More doing than being | Equal doing and being | More being than doing

5. Needing Things to Be Different versus Allowing Things to Be Just as They Already Are

DOING is dedicated to **change**—to making things more like we think they should be, less like we think they shouldn't be. Always **focusing on the gap** between what is and what should be, we can have an underlying sense that we or our experiences are falling short in some way—we or they are just "not good enough." This sense of unsatisfactoriness can quite easily turn into self-criticism and self-judgment. There is a basic lack of kindness to ourselves and our experience.

BEING *brings with it an underlying attitude of "allowing" to ourselves and to our experience. There is no demand that experience fit in with our ideas of how it should be—being allows experience to be just as it already is. We can be content with experience, even if it feels unpleasant. We can be content with ourselves, even if, from the perspective of the doing mode, we are not all we should be. This radical acceptance embodies a basic attitude of unconditional kindness and goodwill.*

For this feature, estimate the balance of doing and being in your life (circle one):

More doing than being | Equal doing and being | More being than doing

6. Seeing Thoughts as True and Real versus Seeing Them as Mental Events

DOING MODE treats thoughts and ideas about things as if they were the same as the things themselves. But **the thought of a meal is not the meal itself**—a thought is just a mental event—very, very different from the reality of the experience it is about. If we forget this and treat thoughts as reality, then when we think "I'm a failure," we can feel as if we had just *experienced* being a failure.

IN BEING, *we experience thoughts as part of the flow of life—in just the same way we experience sensations, sounds, feelings, and sights. We cultivate the ability to experience thoughts* ***as thoughts****—as mental events that enter and leave the mind. With this shift, we rob thoughts of their power to upset us or to control our actions. When we see thoughts for what they are—just thoughts, nothing but passing mental events—we can experience a wonderful sense of freedom and ease.*

For this feature, estimate the balance of doing and being in your life (circle one):

More doing than being | Equal doing and being | More being than doing

7. Prioritizing Goal Attainment versus Sensitivity to Wider Needs

IN DOING MODE, we can become relentlessly focused on pursuing highly demanding goals and plans with a sort of tunnel vision, excluding everything else, including our own health and well-being. We may give up activities that nourish us to focus on what seems more important. Our inner resources can become depleted, leaving us feeling drained, listless, and exhausted.	IN BEING *we remain sensitive to the wider picture. Aware of the costs of a narrow focus on reaching goals, we can balance achievement with a kind and compassionate concern for our own and others' well-being. We value the quality of the moment, rather than focusing only on the distant imagined goal.*

For this feature, estimate the balance of doing and being in your life (circle one):

More doing than being	Equal doing and being	More being than doing

What did you notice about the overall balance of "doing" and "being" in your life?

Chances are that, like most of us, you may have recognized that doing mode is around much of the time. The problem is that, once in doing mode, the mind can so easily slip into driven–doing: rushing from one task to another without really knowing what you are doing, often judging yourself harshly, dimly sensing there must be more to life than this. By contrast, "being mode" may seem like a far-off land, a place you rarely visit or know how to find.

Whatever you discover about how much the doing mode dominates your life, the good news is that **recognizing this** is the first step to a different way of living.

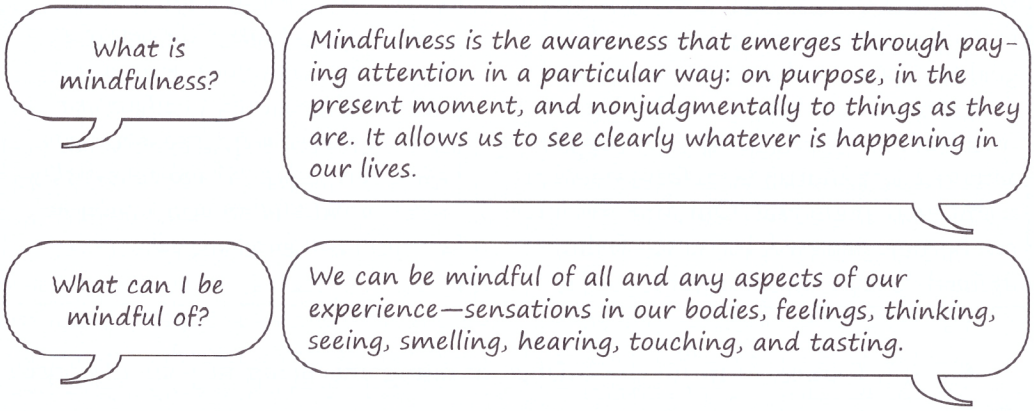
Why?

Because if we can **see clearly** the different disguises in which the doing mode shows up in our daily lives, we'll see how, in feature after feature, being mode offers an alternative that will free us from the grip of the ruminative worrying mind:

- Being is a way to get out of our heads and into actually experiencing what is here in this moment—rather than endlessly thinking about it.
- Being brings acceptance to ourselves and to our experience—rather than focusing on the ways in which they fall short and need to be changed.
- Being allows us to see that thoughts don't necessarily reflect reality but are just events in the mind—in that way it strips thoughts of their power to drive our mood down further.
- As a bonus, being also allows us to be fully present with our experience of this very moment. Surprisingly, this simple shift can open a door on a whole new way to live our lives.

Where, then, does mindfulness fit into the picture?

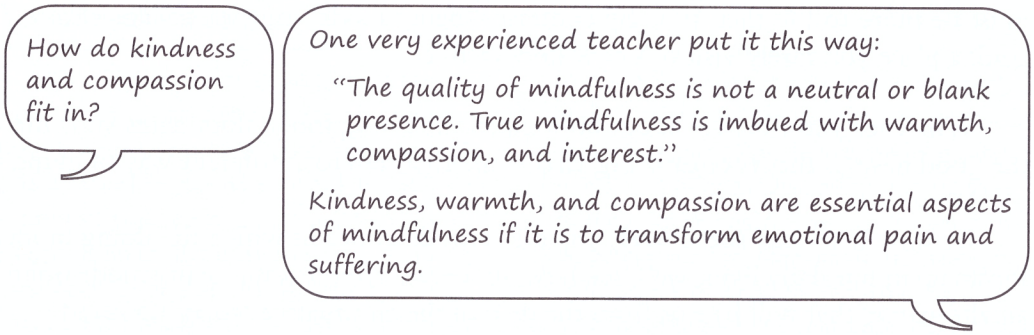
Mindfulness



Research studies from all over the world show that the daily practice of mindfulness allows us to be fully present in our lives, improves the quality of life, and enhances our relationships.

By allowing us to be fully present, mindfulness helps us recognize and let go of habitual, automatic emotional reactions to everyday events. It provides us with a scientifically researched approach to cultivating clarity, insight, and understanding.

Mindfulness will not eliminate all of life's pain and stresses, but it can help us respond to them in a way that is kinder and more compassionate to ourselves and to those around us.



The emphasis on warmth and compassion in true mindfulness echoes the themes of approach, acceptance, and care for ourselves and others that characterize the mode of being.

Nurturing these qualities of good will counters the qualities of ill will—not wanting—that keep us stuck in emotional distress.

There are many other striking parallels between mindfulness and the being mode of mind. In fact it turns out that:

Mindfulness practice is the way
to cultivate the being mode of mind.

Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness unlocks the mind that has been imprisoned by overuse of the driven–doing mode of mind.

Mindfulness is cultivated by gently learning how to pay attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to things as they are. This practice, also known as mindfulness *meditation,* is the core of MBCT.

Everything in the 8-week MBCT program is designed to help you become more aware of the seven signs of driven–doing and cultivate the precious human potential for mindfulness we all possess:

- We learn how to wake up from autopilot so that we don't sleep-walk through the moments of our life.
- We learn how to come close to our experience directly—rather than seeing life through thoughts narrowly focused on reaching particular goals.
- We experience a mode in which we are here, in the present moment, rather than lost in mental time travel.
- We discover firsthand how living mindfully allows us to see more clearly the little points of reactivity that can easily build into emotional turmoil. Mindfulness means we can make more conscious choices at these points—we can move from **reacting** to **responding**.
- We see how this way of being reveals a basic stance of warm kindness and compassion to ourselves and our experience.
- We learn to relate to thoughts for what they are—events in the mind—rather than as "me" or "reality."
- We nurture our capacity to nourish ourselves, rather than exhausting ourselves by striving for goals to the exclusion of all else.

In all these ways, mindfulness practice cultivates a powerful and attractive alternative to the driven–doing mode.

It pulls the plug on rumination and allows negative emotions to pass in their own time without getting us stuck in long, drawn-out misery.

Mindfulness also brings **a new way of knowing**—a direct, experiential, intuitive knowing: **knowing what we are experiencing as we are experiencing it.**

Mindfulness means we can know our mode of mind from moment to moment. This means we can be aware when we are falling into the grip of the driven–doing mode.

And, at that very moment, mindfulness itself opens the door to the healing and life-affirming qualities of being.

This new way of knowing is vital if we are to go beyond the habitual, automatic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that get us trapped in ruminative thinking and cramp our wider potential to live life more fully.

Mindful awareness offers us the freedom to deliberately *choose* and shape the way we respond to life.

Mindful awareness is the heart of the MBCT program.

Chapters 2 and 3 have offered a way to understand how we get stuck in unwanted moods and how mindfulness training can get us unstuck.

In the next chapter we turn from theory to practice and look at how you might begin to get ready for that training.

Before moving on, let's reprise the key ideas covered so far:

- Emotions themselves are not the problem; the problem is the way we react to those feelings.
- Our "natural" automatic reaction to try to get rid of unpleasant feelings will often keep us stuck in the feelings. Ruminative worrying can transform passing sadness into lasting depression and fleeting fears into persistent anxiety.
- Ruminative worrying is a product of the driven–doing mode of mind, working (ineffectively) to try to get rid of feelings we don't want to have.
- We can think of driven–doing as one of a number of "mental gears" in which the mind can operate. We can free ourselves from ruminating, worrying, and getting stuck in painful emotions by learning how to "shift mental gears."