



**The Essentials of Mindful Movement Handout  
for A Mindful Society Workshop  
with Natalia Fister & Heidi Bornstein  
May 2, 2020 | 1:30 – 2:30 PM EST**

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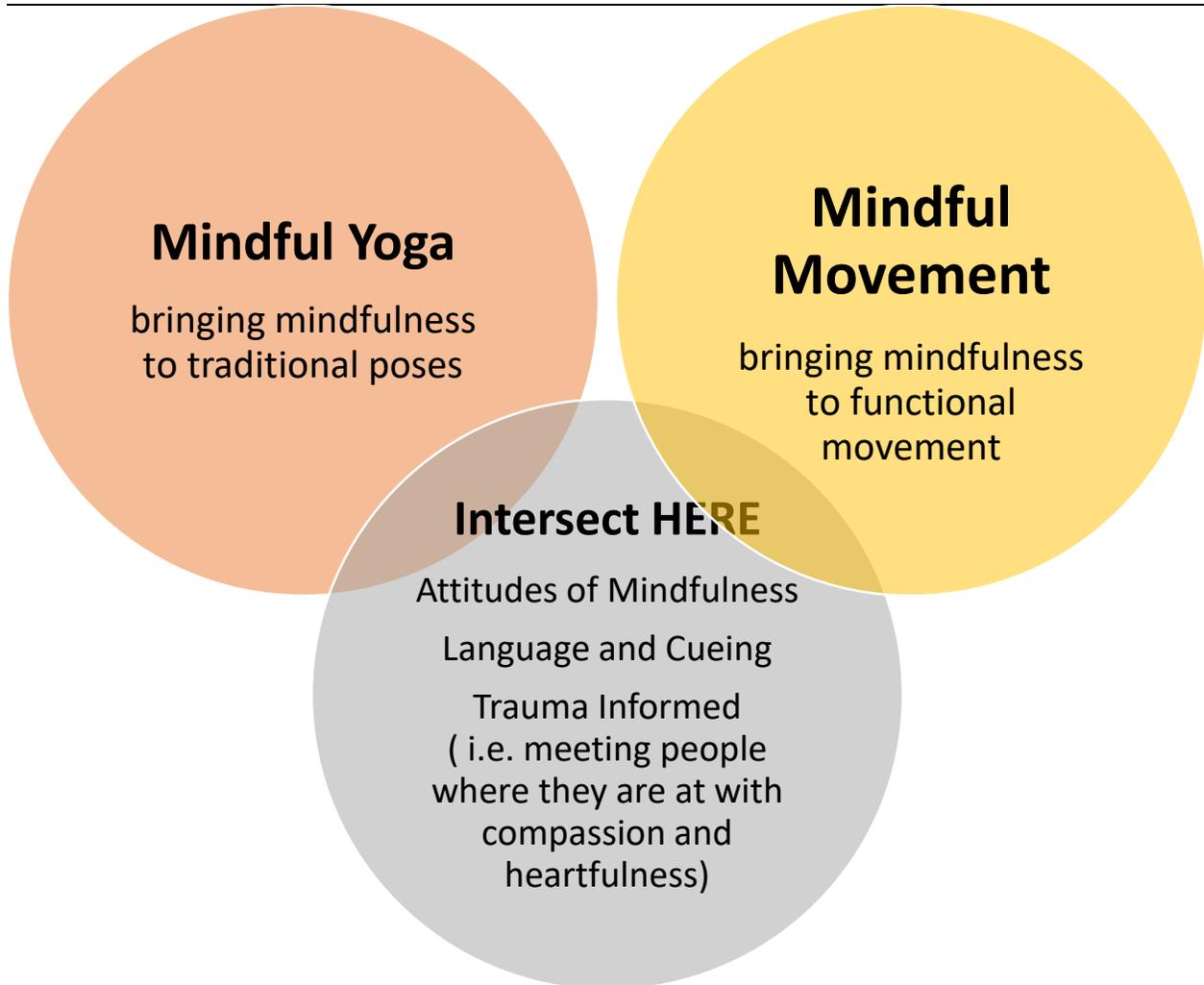
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## Mindful Yoga and Mindful Movement

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### Working with the Breath

- In mindful meditation, we simply notice the breath, without manipulating it in any way, just observing it moment to moment. In mindful movements, the instructions may call for an in-breath or an out-breath to be used in conjunction with a particular movement, while observing the sensations and feelings in the body.
- If discomfort is experienced, it can be attended (or be with it) on an in-breath. Breathing into these regions, with a gentle, curious, nurturing attention on an in-breath. On the out-breath, allowing the body to soften, letting go of any sense of resistance or holding.

### Eyes Open or Closed

- Work with the eyes open sometimes and closed at other times as you see fit, experimenting with your ability to observe and the level of concentration you can achieve.



## **Cautionary**

- Be in tune with your own awareness of what is right for you, rather than pushing beyond limits or being critical and judgmental of your movements. Practicing on the side of caution – never going to the point of strain or pain. If the instructions given do not seem right for you, trust your own awareness and do what feels right.
- Bringing the spirit of gentleness, kindness and compassion to yourself.
- Every body is different; mindful movements are not about comparing or competing. Everyone is invited to work at their own level, exploring their own range of movement.
- If you feel that any of the work is not appropriate for you at this time then just close the eyes, and visualize or sense doing it in as much detail as possible. This has been shown to provide substantial benefit even though it's completely passive.
- Working with the breath: When we experience discomfort, we can attend it (or be with it) on an in-breath, by breathing a gentle, curious, nurturing attention into these regions while on the out-breath, allowing ourselves to soften into it, letting go of any sense of resistance or holding.
- Work with the eyes open sometimes and closed at other times as you see fit, experimenting with your ability to observe and the level of concentration you can achieve.
- Remembering the intention of this practice: to become aware, as best we can, of physical sensations and feelings throughout the body as we engage in a series of gentle movements, honouring and investigating the limitations of our body in every moment, as best we can, letting go of any tendency to push beyond our limits or to compete with either ourselves or others.

## **Language & Cueing**

- Present continuous tense vs imperative
- Invitational, spacious, offering variations and options, clear explicit instructions of what to expect
- Exploring, noticing, playing, being aware of, being curious, letting your body guide your practice, finding the balance between effort and ease, dropping into physical sensation, dropping in to the breath, checking in with physical sensation – do you need more or less, tend and befriend the unpleasant, you might – maybe – perhaps, what happens when/if, if the sensation is unpleasant, can you practice self-compassion, until your body tells you to stop, as best you can – stopping when you reach your limit – if it's ok with you – if it's available to you – checking in –
- stretching – lengthening – extending – reaching – elongating – unfolding – expanding – contracting – compressing – releasing – letting go – opening – softening

## **Expanding Limitations**

Mindful Movements cultivate strength, balance and flexibility, in which each person can explore and discover his or her own limits, without striving to change anything. By bringing awareness to the body and working within its limits, the limits tend to recede over time.

## **Acknowledging Transitions**

Bringing Mindful Awareness in the movement between positions. And allowing for time to integrate.

## **Awareness of Sensation**

Noticing sensation and the qualities of sensations, observing areas of expansion and compression, as well as differences between left and right sides of the body. Being able to “feel” rather than think about sensations.

## **Working with Pain**

Noticing and describing sensation, investigating with a sense of curiosity and interest, rather than pulling away, attending and befriending.

- Is there is centre to the pain?
- Is there a border to the pain – can you detect where it begins and ends?
- Does the sensation shift or change with observation?
- Being aware of associated thoughts.
- Suffering=pain x resistance

## **Benefits of Mindful Movements**

- An important part of mindfulness practice involves getting in touch with the body. Mindful Movements give one ‘louder’ sensations to tune in to, making it easier to connect with the body.
- Mindful Movements helps one to accept the body just as it is in the moment, and one’s own limitations in the moment. This, in turn, helps one develop increased patience and overall self-acceptance.
- Getting reacquainted with your body is one of the most effective ways to begin to understand the concept of being in the moment. Many of us take our body and its functioning for granted in spite of the fact that it is miraculous in the way it operates, regulates and heals itself.
- Try to see this exercise as a continuous process moving mindfully and gracefully from one posture to another, the breath establishing the tempo as if it were a dance, not a series of unconnected events.
- We almost invariably encounter at least some degree of bodily discomfort while practicing stretching through mindful movements. This makes this practice such an effective way for learning how to approach difficult and unwanted moments and experiences with greater acceptance, curiosity, gentleness, and kindness. As well, the skills developed in working with even a mild degree of physical discomfort can be directly applied to situations of more intense emotional discomfort.

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## Language and Cueing

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### 1. Invitational, offering variations and options:

“Closing the eyes—or not”

“Choosing the variation most appropriate for your body in this moment”

“If this is available to you”

“It’s just an invitation”

“Playing, exploring, moving into, adventuring (trying something new)”

### 2. Present continuous tense vs imperative

“Lowering the leg to the floor” vs “Lower your leg”.

### 3. Avoiding negative languaging.

“Resisting the urge to round the back” vs “Don’t round the back.”

### 4. Clear explicit instructions of what to expect. (Length of time, types of movements, lighting, props, etc.)

“The conscious movement portion of the class today will be 20 minutes.

I will be dimming the lights and providing you with a blanket and strap for your comfort. We will be doing gentle, functional movements and offering several variations each time to honour the diverse and unique bodies showing up in class today. Trust the intuition of your body to guide you through each movement, never compromising the well-being of your body. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?”

### 5. Avoid these cues:

- Rolling up or down through the spine
- Dropping the head back.
- Pulling the shoulder into the socket (should be pulling the arm into the socket)
- Non-secular words like Namaste (unless expanded to include other cultures / Religions / spiritual traditions)

### 6. Contraindications to be aware of:

- Forward bending with a rounded back (vertigo, migraines, osteoporosis or osteopenia, glaucoma)
- Rounding of the back
- Wrist strain (options of using fists)
- Hyper extension of knees, of neck, of elbows
- Shoulder girdle stability (when raising arms, keeping arms in shoulder sockets)
- Rotator cuff injuries (work within your limits – smaller, less intense movements)



## **7. Introductory explanation of the philosophy of mindful movement.**

- The purpose of today's movement class is not to get a "workout" but to build on the body, mind, breath connection, to connect the dots so to speak.
- The suggestion is to work within the body's limits at all times, with the intention of observing and exploring the boundary between what the body can do and where it says, "Stop for now." Never stretch or contract beyond this limit to the point of pain.
- Can you give yourself permission to skip a pose if your body feels it isn't right for you?
- You might find yourself at some point comparing yourself to others in class. This is human nature, but can you challenge that thought, asking yourself: Is this a helpful thought? Is this a compassionate thought?
- Allowing the body to guide the movements and not the ego mind.
- If you experience any unpleasant sensations or emotions, the invitation is to practice self-compassion, attending and befriending that sensation, treating it as valuable information in developing the mind-body connection.

## **8. Closing comments/questions for the group:**

- What did you notice about your body today?
- What was your rose (enjoyable) ? What was your thorn (challenging or unpleasant)?
- Did anyone find themselves judging his/her body or its abilities? Feeling frustrated? Irritated by a particular movement? Welcome to being human!
- Did anyone notice that their attention wandered? Welcome to being human.
- Was there a cue or phrase that was particularly helpful?



## Imbedding the attitudes of mindfulness into conscious movement

<b>Awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking in with/dropping into physical sensation</li> <li>• Dropping into the breath—what is the quality of the breath right now?</li> <li>• Do you notice any emotion percolating up in this posture? Calm? Frustration? Anger? Curiosity? And can you be with that emotion without judging it?</li> </ul>
<b>Curiosity Beginner's mind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this pose.... exploring... noticing...playing with.... being aware of.... being curious,</li> <li>• You might notice– maybe this feels...perhaps you are feeling... what happens when/if....</li> <li>• Staying curious, as if we are doing this posture for the first time.</li> <li>• Being curious about our bodies every time we practice; our bodies are constantly changing, moment by moment.</li> <li>• Asking yourself, “What wants my attention?”</li> <li>• Being curious about our response to the posture each and every time; our practice, our bodies, and our response to the practice is always evolving. Staying curious!</li> <li>• Thinking of yourself as a scientist in the laboratory of your own body, experimenting and investigating with curiosity.</li> <li>• Can you try this pose without expectation of how it should be?</li> <li>• Exploring what it means to “meet my edge and soften.”</li> </ul>
<b>Kindness &amp; Compassion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you experience any unpleasant sensations, can you practice self-compassion?</li> <li>• Can you choose the variation that feels most compassionate to your body?</li> <li>• Asking yourself, “Is this is a healthy challenge for my body?”</li> <li>• Moving slowly into the pose until your body tells you to stop.</li> </ul>
<b>Non- judging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If an unpleasant sensation percolates up, instead of judging it, attend and befriend it. Be curious. Breath into the area of discomfort nurturing it with your breath. Perhaps not going as deeply into the movement.</li> <li>• Do you finding yourself judging your flexibility/strength/mobility/sensations in this posture? Can you shift from judgment into curiosity?</li> <li>• Has your mind wandered? This is normal. You are human. No need to judge the wandering mind. Just inviting the wandering mind back to the room, <b>relaxing back</b> into the breath, back into physical sensation.</li> <li>• If you become aware of an unpleasant emotion rolling up, can you suspend judgment and just be with it?</li> </ul>
<b>Patience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering and exiting the postures slowly, mindfully, with the breath. Slow and sure wins the race. Except there is no race.</li> <li>• Using finesse not force; this avoids injuries and pain.</li> <li>• Letting our body unfold at its own natural pace.</li> </ul>



<p><b>Trust</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If any one pose doesn't feel right, trusting the wisdom of our bodies, and giving ourselves permission to not do it.</li> <li>• Please put up your hand for a variation if this/any pose doesn't feel right.</li> <li>• Checking in with physical sensation – do you need more or less sensation?</li> <li>• Choosing this variation only if it's available to you. Trust your body to guide you in this decision.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Non-striving</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing the variation most appropriate for your body in this moment"</li> <li>• Pausing and doing the 3 bears test: Is this variation "too little?", "too much?" or "just right?"</li> <li>• Can you try this pose without any expectations, without being attached to the outcome?</li> <li>• Final relaxation is a great pose to practice non-striving ☺</li> <li>• Can you find the balance between effort and ease?</li> <li>• Attempting the posture as best you can – stopping when you reach your limit.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Acceptance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepting the limitations of our bodies, not trying to change anything in the moment of doing a pose; instead, observing it all with kind and curious attention.</li> <li>• Conscious movement/yoga isn't about self-improvement—its about self-acceptance ☺</li> <li>• Accepting that it is the nature of our mind to wander, missing instructional cues; we simply re-focus when we catch our mind wandering and anchor back to breath and physical sensation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Letting go</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once we exert the effort to get into the posture, we let go, "melting into it", surrendering to the wisdom of our body and breath.</li> <li>• We let go of any ideas of the "perfect yoga pose". We suit the pose to our body, not our body to the pose or some perceived state of perfection.</li> <li>• In final relaxation, we let go of controlling our body &amp; breath, letting go, letting go.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gratitude</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's thank ourselves for committing our time and effort to this practice, contributing to the peace of the planet through our practice.</li> <li>• Thanking the miracle of our body.</li> <li>• Taking this opportunity to thank others in the class for sharing their light/energy and contributing to the creation of a peaceful and loving community.</li> <li>• Thanking all our teachers, past present and future.</li> <li>• If an unpleasant sensation percolates up, can you thank your body for providing you with this information so you can better <b>attend and befriend</b> it.</li> </ul>

## 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness Place Mat

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>On the Cushion</i>	<i>On the Mat</i>	<i>In the World</i>	<i>What comes to Mind?</i>
<i>Non-judging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being an impartial witness of our own experience requires that we become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are normally caught up in, observing it, and stepping back from it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid “stinking thinking”. For ex, “Why am I so inflexible”, “That person has a better downward dog than me”, “Why can’t I ...”</li> <li>• Instead, endeavoring to observe our bodies with curiosity and kindness</li> <li>• Choosing self-compassion over self – judgement, especially in regards to aches and pains, physical limitations, our wandering minds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner thoughts and outer experiences. We are constantly judging things, people &amp; ourselves as either being “good “or “bad”.</li> <li>• Mindfulness encourages us to step back from it and observe it all with kindness and curiosity.</li> </ul>	
<i>Patience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A form of wisdom, it demonstrates that we accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time.</li> <li>• We intentionally remind ourselves not to be impatient with ourselves because we are tense or agitated or frighten--especially our wandering mind during meditation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering and exiting the postures slowly, mindfully, with the breath.</li> <li>• Using finesse not force; this avoids injuries!</li> <li>• Always being SAFE! Slow and sure wins the race.</li> <li>• Letting our body unfold at its own natural pace.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being patient with ourselves and others, especially when challenged.</li> <li>• When things don’t go our way, instead of reacting with impatience, responding by seeing it as an OTP moment: Opportunity to Practice mindfulness.</li> </ul>	
<i>Beginner’s mind</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An open, beginner’s mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise. No moment is the same as any other--each one is unique and contains unique possibilities.</li> <li>• Are we able to see the sky, the stars, and the trees, with a clear and uncluttered mind?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying present, as if we are doing each posture for the first time</li> <li>• Being curious about our bodies every time we practice; our bodies are always changing.</li> <li>• Being curious about our response to the posture each and every time; our practice, our bodies, and our response to the practice is always evolving. Staying curious!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging our habits is one way to foster beginner’s mind: Sitting in a different chair, folding our hands in the opposite way, brushing our teeth in a different pattern, trying new things.</li> <li>• This also means trying old things with a new eyes, new ears, new taste buds. For example, eating a strawberry as if it were the first time.</li> </ul>	

## 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness Place Mat

<b>Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a basic trust in ourselves and our feelings is an integral part of meditation training.</li> <li>• Trusting in our meditation practice—that whatever “shows up” belongs, and that it is all “grist for the mill”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering the posture slowly to see If it feels right for our own unique body</li> <li>• If it doesn’t feel right, we don’t do it, trusting our intuition, the wisdom of our own body, over the authority of the teacher.</li> <li>• Asking the teacher for a variation when something doesn’t feel right.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is far better to trust in our intuition and our own authority, even if we make some mistakes, than always looking outside ourselves for guidance.</li> <li>• Trusting in our own intrinsic goodness.</li> </ul>	
<b>Non-striving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation’s only goal is for us to be ourselves (which we already are! We just have to “feel it”).</li> <li>• Sometimes we try too hard when we meditate. We grip too hard around the goal of “stilling the wandering mind”.</li> <li>• When we catch the mind wandering, we <b>relax</b> back into presence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not competing with fellow students or comparing ourselves.</li> <li>• Trying a yoga pose but being unattached to the outcome. It is not important to do any one variation of the pose.</li> <li>• Not trying to get into a pose we are not ready for—we just end up hurting ourselves.</li> <li>• Sivasana (final relaxation) is a great pose to practice non-striving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness invites us to a new way of seeing ourselves, where we are trying less and being more.</li> <li>• We are not “human DOINGS” after all...we are “human BEINGS”.</li> <li>• Mindfulness invites us to <i>BE more</i> by <i>DOING less</i>.</li> <li>• Observe moments in our day where we are perhaps gripping too hard around an outcome/ goal, and loosening that grip.</li> </ul>	

## 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness Place Mat

<b>Acceptance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We accept things as they are in the present moment, especially OURSELVES, instead of wanting <i>people/events</i> to be different.</li> <li>• When meditating, unpleasant sensations and thoughts can arise. These are opportunities to practice not only accepting the unpleasant, but even leaning into it, so when these moments arise in life, we can respond to them instead of react.</li> <li>• We can practice saying, “This too belongs” to unpleasantness, recognizing it as part of the human condition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepting the limitations of our bodies, not trying to change anything; instead, observing it all with kind and curious attention.</li> <li>• Yoga isn’t about self-improvement—its about self-acceptance ☺</li> <li>• Accepting that it is the nature of our mind to wander, missing instructional cues, etc.</li> <li>• We simply re-focus when we catch our mind wandering and anchor back to breath and physical sensation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicing accepting the present moment in the course of our daily lives.</li> <li>• We often waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is already fact (for ex, a past experience, like a relationship ending, or a perceived injustice).</li> <li>• Mindfulness encourages us to accept the present moment with a sense of equanimity, understanding that we grow from all experiences, most importantly from challenging ones. This does not mean accepting injustices BTW.</li> </ul>	
<b>Letting go</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When we meditate we start paying attention to our inner experience.</li> <li>• We rapidly discover that there are certain thoughts and feelings and situations that the mind seems to want to hold on to and others that we try to get rid of.</li> <li>• In mindfulness, we let our experience be what it is. Letting go is a way of letting things be as they are. This sets the stage for letting go of perfectionism, judgements, the past, people in our lives etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once we exert the effort to get into the posture, we let go, “melting into it”, surrendering to the wisdom of our body and breath.</li> <li>• Yoga is finding the balance between this effort and ease.</li> <li>• We let go of any ideas of the “perfect yoga pose”. We suit the yoga pose to our body, not our body to some perceived state of perfection.</li> <li>• In sivasana, final relaxation, we let go of controlling our body &amp; breath, letting go, letting go.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In our lives, we might start noticing that we are better able to let our experience be what it is, letting go of limiting expectations (“my friend should act more like this” or “If only I could have this... then I will be happy” and “I have to achieve this goal to feel successful”) .</li> <li>• Letting the present moment be what it is sets the stage for letting go of perfectionism, judgements, the past, certain people etc.</li> <li>• Letting go does not mean giving up; it means freedom from reactivity.</li> </ul>	

## 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness Place Mat

<b>Generosity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carving out the time each day for a meditative practice is an act of generosity to ourselves and to others.</li> <li>• We are cultivating our equanimity, so that we can play it forward and be an anchor of calm and peace for those around us.</li> <li>• We are gifting ourselves and others at the same time 😊</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similarly, committing to a regular yoga practice is act of self-care that benefits us and those around us.</li> <li>• When we practice self-care, we model it for others and inspire them to practice self-care as well.</li> <li>• We can also be generous by encouraging others in class, smiling, connecting before and after class, etc 😊</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is the virtue of being unattached to material possessions, often symbolized by the giving of gifts, the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly.</li> <li>• But it also means being generous with our time and undivided attention which fosters deep &amp; authentic connection.</li> <li>• This also means being generous with ourselves, nurturing ourselves, practicing self-care, giving ourselves the gift of time, of non-doing and just being.</li> </ul>	
<b>Gratitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can we be grateful for all our meditation practices? Even the most challenging ones where unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations may have percolated to the surface?</li> <li>• As Jon Kabat Zinn says, if we are breathing, there is more right with us than wrong.</li> <li>• Grateful for the ephemeral glimpses of freedom we are gifted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanking ourselves for committing our time and effort to the practice, contributing to the peace of the planet through our practice.</li> <li>• Thanking the miracle of our body.</li> <li>• Thanking the people in the class for bringing their light/wonderful energy into the room, creating a peaceful and loving community.</li> <li>• Thanking all our teachers, past present and future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is the quality of being thankful, the readiness to show appreciation for all the small, moment to moment experiences in life ... like a snowflake landing on our tongue on a bright winter day, or sitting down to a good meal with family and friends, or looking into the eyes of an adoring pet. Savoring it all! Not taking any of it for granted.</li> <li>• Gratitude journals rock!</li> </ul>	

## 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness Place Mat

<b><i>Forgiveness</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forgiving our wandering mind when we meditate—it was DNA’d to do this!</li> <li>• Attending and befriending the hurt that often rolls up when we meditate. If we can practice leaning into the pain, instead of recoiling from it, we can sometimes find our way to forgiveness.</li> <li>• Forgiveness can be a road to freedom, but only if we are ready and don’t force it—otherwise it can feel imprisoning, just one more crushing expectation we put onto our shoulders.</li> <li>• Forgiveness might not always be possible and should never be rushed or an expectation we have of ourselves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forgiving ourselves for not always achieving the perfect yoga posture!</li> <li>• Forgiving the person beside us who we perceive as achieving the perfect yoga pose—grrrr! 😊</li> <li>• Forgiving our wandering mind—it was DNA’d to do this!</li> <li>• Forgiving the perceived imperfections of our body.</li> <li>• Forgiving ourselves for not always being in the “perfect mood” during yoga.</li> <li>• Forgiving ourselves for being restless in Sivasana instead of blissed out and relaxed.</li> <li>• Forgiving our yoga teacher for not always being the perfect yoga teacher 😊</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before we begin to forgive other people, we need to forgive ourselves for all our wonderfully human imperfections. “What is life but a series of experiments, mistakes and failures.” We learn from these experiences. They keep us humble and allow us to feel empathy for others when we see them making similar mistakes.</li> <li>• When someone has hurt us, forgiveness becomes a process. We have to give ourselves time to heal from the wound. But forgiveness is something we do for ourselves, not the other person, so that we can be free of the past.</li> </ul>	
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