

Central Elements of MBSR: The Essence of the Dhamma

Underpinnings: Buddhist Psychology Principles and MBSR Adapted from Bob Stahl, Ph.D.

I. Four Noble Truths

1. There is suffering (stress): (birth, illness, aging, death)
2. Suffering/stress has a cause: Unawareness that leads to craving for sensual delight, craving to be someone, and the craving to feel nothing.
3. As we gradually lessen unawareness and craving, suffering and stress are lessened
4. There is a path to freedom. This 8-fold path involves:
 - Integrity/Virtue (wise action, wise speech, wise livelihood)
 - Concentration/Steadying the mind (wise effort, wise mindfulness, wise concentration)
 - Wisdom (wise intention, wise understanding)

II. Three Marks of Existence

1. Suffering (dissatisfaction)
2. Impermanence (constant change)
3. No Self (ownerless nature of this life/body/lived experience)

III. Four Foundations of Mindfulness (all are inter-related)

1. First Foundation: Mindfulness of the Body
 - Breath
 - Postures of the body (sitting, lying down, walking, standing)
 - Clear comprehension of being mindful during daily activities
 - 32 Parts of the Body Meditation
 - 4 Material Elements
 - Nine Cemetery Meditations
2. Second Foundation: Mindfulness of the Feelings (Sensations)
 - To feel and to know: Pleasant, Unpleasant, or Neutral
3. Third Foundation: Mindfulness of the Mind
 - Contemplation of mind states (thoughts and emotions)
4. Mindfulness of the Teachings
 - Five Hindrances (wanting, aversion, restlessness, sleepiness, and doubt)
 - Seven Factors of Awakening (mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, calmness, concentration, and equanimity)
 - Five Aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness)
 - Six Internal and External Sense Bases (eye/see, ear/hear, tongue/taste, nose/smell, body/sensations, mind/thoughts and emotions)
 - Four Noble Truths

How and Where Buddhist Elements Show Up in the MBSR Program

Without explicitly naming the four noble truths, four foundations of mindfulness, and three marks of existence, these teachings are embedded within MBSR classes and held within a field of loving-kindness. MBSR is a full expression of the four noble truths: suffering, its causes, and the path to freedom.

Class 1 contains the first noble truth and marks of existence on what brings us here: Stress, pain, or illness. The meditation practices include:

1st Foundation - Body: AOB, Body Scan, Postures (awareness while sitting, standing, lying down), and mindfulness in daily activities.

2nd Foundation – Feelings - Sensations: Various pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings from the Body Scan.

3rd Foundation – Mind States: Various thoughts and emotions evoked by the Body Scan.

4th Foundation: Working with the hindrances, factors of awakening, and other Dhammas.

3 Marks of Existence: There is suffering/dissatisfaction; things are impermanent and constantly changing; and the selfless nature are all evoked by the body scan.

Class 2 looks at perception—how we see things. Also as discussion arises on how the home practice went, awareness arises.

1st Foundation – Body: AOB, Body Scan, Postures, mindfulness in daily activities.

2nd, 3rd and 4th Foundation and 3 Marks of Existence are evoked through practice and teachings (as in first class).

Class 3 brings awareness/perception to movement by deepening mind/body understanding through yoga.

1st Foundation – Body: AOB, Body Scan, Postures, Yoga, Walking (if introduced) and daily activities.

2nd, 3rd, and 4th Foundation and 3 marks of Existence evoked through practices and teachings.

Class 4 begins to investigate the causes of stress/suffering (2nd Noble Truth): Automatic, habitual stress reactivity and patterns (unawareness, grasping and aversion).

1st Foundation – Body: AOB, Body Scan, Postures, Yoga, Walking (if introduced) and daily activities.

2nd, 3rd, and 4th Foundation and 3 marks of Existence evoked through practices and teachings.

Class 5 points to the 3rd Noble Truth: There is a way to decrease stress and suffering by mindfully responding rather than mindlessly and habitually reacting (Mindfulness Mediated Stress Response). Pausing allows a space from which fresh possibilities arise and old habitual reactive patterns begin to fade.

Class 6-8 draws from the 4th Noble Truth, the 8-fold path: To live with greater integrity that supports concentration and wisdom. We bring mindfulness practice to communication, relationships, roles, time, food, media and all activities in daily life and see how they affect us.

1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th Foundations and 3 Marks of Existence are evoked through practice and teachings.