

# The Two Pillars of Mindfulness-Based Therapy

Yael Schweitzer, LCSW, BC-DMT

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Mindfulness-Based Therapy is an approach in which the principles of mindfulness are applied for therapeutic purposes. What does it practically mean? In my article “Mindfulness and Knowledge“, I pointed out to the 5 basic elements of mindfulness:

1. Pause.
2. Bring awareness in - body, sensations, feelings, thoughts
3. Connect with the breath.
4. Be in the present moment.
5. Adopt a non-judgmental approach - applying compassion.

While working with clients I developed recognition of two main components that emerge from these elements of mindfulness and bring about change in people perspective and consequently in their lives - I call them the two pillars of Mindfulness-Based Therapy. The two pillars are:

1. Observation (emerges from the first 4 elements above)
2. The cultivation of compassion, acceptance and virtues (emerges from the last element)

Observation calls to place attention to the process - it calls us to bring awareness to the way thoughts are coming and going, appearing, developing and disappearing. One is asked to acknowledge patterns of thinking as well as the expression of emotions in the body, the subtle changes in body sensation, the movement of the breath in and out of the body and so forth. Even though the content of thoughts is there and being recognized, the intention is not to be engaged with it, to cling to it or to feed it. In a similar way - in therapy, the past, traumas and personal stories are important to acknowledge, but they don't become the center and focus of the therapy, rather the focus is on what is happening now, how the feelings express themselves in the body and what triggers reactivity. This approach allows a release of attachment to “my story”, “my depression” or “my anxiety”. Observation gives the client the power to develop an ability to choose between letting the thoughts, emotions and even real life events control his or her life, actions and reactions, or alternatively - be more active and present in his/her outer and inner life and choose how to respond to challenges that present themselves at any moment.

Observation calls to bring awareness not just to destructive patterns but also to positive and pleasurable thoughts, emotions and events. Here the observation allows for the positive to be part of the experience of life. While observing, the emphasis is still on the process and not the content - how does a positive experience feel in the

body, how the feeling changes when awareness is brought to it, how positive thoughts appear and disappear and so on.

The second pillar - the cultivation of compassion, acceptance and virtues does call for attention to content. In this case there is an attempt to focus on and produce positive thoughts. Clients are encouraged to wish themselves well while practicing Loving-Kindness meditation and reciting phrases with positive wishes. They are invited to look at and further develop their virtues, and to focus on the good in their lives even when it is small or hidden. The more I work with people the more I realize how much this pillar is crucial for positive change and growth of clients. In this practice it is not just about observing inner activity but rather cultivating and expanding that which is already present. Even when one is not aware of having any compassion for self or having any virtues, we work together on discovering positive elements that do exist and develop ways to integrate compassion, acceptance and virtues in everyday life. I have a few clients who cannot feel any compassion for themselves, but through their ability to feel compassion to others (kids, pets) we can work on slowly shifting the flow of kindness from the heart and direct it to themselves.

Working with these two pillars in mind, I am using two opposite powers to help a client reach balance. The observation helps to *reduce* negativity and unhealthy patterns of reactivity and behaviors, and the cultivation of compassion acceptance and virtues supply the positive energy to help one grow. It helps to *increase* positive attitude, self-esteem, trust in self and healthy activities.

#### **Related reading:**

##### **Mindfulness and Knowledge**

<http://www.yaelschweitzer.com/docs/mindfulnessandknowledge.pdf>