

# Mindful Sound – Resonating Mindfulness

MBSR und Peter Hess® – Sound Methods – an ideal connection

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Photo: Birgit Amann

The finite nature of sound, its creation from silence and return to it, makes sound an especially applicable tool for mindfulness. In mindfulness exercises accompanied by sound, we become aware of what is really good for us and what behavioral patterns we should let go. In our fast-paced and often overstimulated world, these are the precious moments that allow us to gain strength and make a change.

### From where does sound originate?

Sound originates from silence and returns to silence.

It reminds of our own inner silence, bridges the gap between our thoughts and connects us with our inner voice. It is in this connection that our possibilities are opened.

*"There is a voice that uses no words – listen to it".* (Rumi)

Sound is created and exists only in the moment, is always different, and is closely connected to the person who generates sound from the singing bowl. Its vibrations gradually harmonize the body, our emotions, and our thoughts. The goal of connecting mindfulness exercises with sound is not only to expand perception, but also to refine it.

*"Mindfulness is the awareness that is created when we are purposefully attentive in the present moment without judging."* (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

### Mindfulness exercises and their "gifts"

As MBSR-instructor, I teach the classic 8 – week courses based on the teachings of Jon Kabat-Zinn (MBSR = mindfulness based stress reduction). In addition to brief presentations and sharing experiences on subjects like stress, self-perception, and communication, the course teaches specific exercises such as:

- Mindful body awareness at rest (Bodyscan)
- Mindful body awareness in motion (Yoga)
- Meditation while sitting
- Meditation while walking

These are possibilities of mindfulness exercises that – when practiced regularly – can lead to the following:

- We begin to discover ourselves and to understand how internal and external processes are interconnected.
- We learn what thoughts we have and how these influence our wellbeing.
- We increasingly understand the interplay of stimuli, emotions, thoughts, body sensation and our actions.
- We learn which patterns and beliefs determine who we are without our prior awareness of them.
- We learn to first accept what is.
- We can consciously decide to follow our patterns or to try new alternatives.

- We can choose between resistance, change, and acceptance with greater awareness.
- We separate inner processes and can observe them individually.
- Through pure observation, dualistic thinking is reduced.
- The flood of thoughts levels off.
- We develop compassion for ourselves and others.
- We become more confident and less reactive.
- We develop serenity.

### "Sound in mindfulness" – the connection between MBSR und Peter Hess®- Sound Methods

When I met Peter Hess at the beginning of my MSBR training, the correlation between the sound therapy developed by him and mindfulness became increasingly clear. In the meantime, I begin my exercises for body awareness and perception of our thoughts and emotions with sound, and also end them with sound.

And together with Peter Hess, a seminar was developed in which we combine elements of MBSR and Peter Hess®- Sound Methods. It is entitled "Harmony in Mindfulness" and is designed as a weekend seminar or intensive vacation course. It does not replace a traditional 8-week MBSR course but can serve as a refresher course or an introduction to MBSR.

The combination of both methods within the framework of the seminar is *"wonder-ful"* in the literal sense of the word, per one participant, *"because it leads to wonders happening and us as human beings becoming fully aware."* (Marina V.)

Peter and I are happy that the combination of these two methods is apparently very successful, as reflected in the feedback from one of our participants:

*"A successful seminar in every respect, in which the elements from MSBR easily combine with those of sound therapy – as though they had always been united. The sounds support the effect of the mindfulness exercises and vice versa. Room that allows for self-perception and recognition of inner patterns as well as the ability to develop something new is created. A big thank you; I enjoyed the seminar very much and it has touched me deeply to be able to share this with others."* (Angela M.)

## The "mindful spirit" – inner attitude is the key

Parallels between MBSR and Peter Hess®-Sound Methods can be drawn especially with regard to inner attitude. Within the framework of the MBSR concept, we refer to the "mindful spirit" that is based on seven pillars and is very different from the "everyday spirit".

Mindful Spirit	Everyday Spirit
Non-judging	Evaluate, analyze, judge
Patience	Impatience, demands, unrest
Maintain a beginner's mind	Expert mind, "I know what to do"
Trust	Doubt
Non-striving	Ambition, forcing
Acceptance	Resistance
Letting go	Holding on

Figure: The "mindful spirit" describes the inner attitude on which mindfulness practice is based.

We are almost constantly busy automatically judging inner and external experiences and reacting to them. For a **non-judging attitude**, we must first learn to observe our judgments and reactions from a distance.

When exercising mindfulness, the goal is to recognize the judging mind as soon as it appears and to gain a broader perspective by consciously refraining from judgment and, to the extent possible, assuming the role of neutral observer who does nothing other than observe whatever happens, including our reaction to it.

This requires **patience**, as so many other things in life. Patience is wisdom, a kind of inner knowledge that reflects that we understand and accept that things sometimes require their own time to unfold, or that their effect takes time to develop.

Ultimately, the complete fullness of life is in the experience of the present moment, the now. But too often, we stand in our own way of this experience. We do not see anything for what it is because we superimpose our own opinions and thought patterns. We presume that our everyday per-

ception is the only one that is correct, and we thereby lose our sense for the extraordinary in the ordinary. To see the richness of the moment, we must develop a **"beginner's mind"** that is ready to look at everything as though seeing it for the first time.

A substantial part of meditation exercises consists of developing **trust** in yourself and your own feelings. It is much better to follow your own voice and to trust your inner authority than to wait on instructions from the outside, even if you make the occasional "mistake". In every form of meditation, this attitude of trust in yourself and the validity of your own feelings is very important. When practicing mindfulness, we simultaneously practice accepting responsibility for our self-being and learn to listen to and trust our own inner voice. The more trust we develop in ourselves, the easier it becomes for us to encounter our fellow human beings with trust and to see the essential good in them.

Meditation is different from all other human activity, although it requires a lot of work and effort in its own way, in that it is not an activity in the regular sense, but rather active non-activity. The only "goal" of meditation is to be yourself – now, since every human being is already his/her own person, this goal seems to be paradoxical. But it is exactly this seeming paradox that points to a new form of self-reflection. We consciously create this kind of self-reflection, self-reflection that is focused less on volition and more on being, through a **non-striving** attitude.

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, it is literally the practical definition of healing: coping with what is. We have to accept ourselves and things the way they are before a change can be made. As soon as we decide to take this inner step, this constitutes an act of higher intelligence and empathy with our self. When we begin to regard things in this manner, they lose their significance, and a change can be made more easily. In this way, through the deliberate fostering of **acceptance**, we create a climate in which healing can take place.

One of the basic prerequisites for mindfulness meditation is the practice of the self in an attitude of **letting go** or not hanging on. Letting go means letting be. It means accepting things the way they are. If we notice that our mind is in an attitude of hanging on or resisting, we can remind ourselves of our intent to let go of these impulses and to simply observe what happens next. This is how we imagine things that refer to the past or future. We simply observe and let

them go in quiet awareness. Some thoughts have such a power over us, that letting them go seems almost impossible. In this case, we can turn our attention to what effect hanging on has on us. Whether we are successful in letting go or not – through exercises in mindfulness we learn to deal with hanging on more profoundly, to the extent we are ready to do so. Our recognition of our own fixations and their consequences sharpens, both for the moment of letting go, and for what significance it can have for us.

In similar form, all these aspects are also described in sound massage training or in instructions for sound exercises as presented by Peter Hess in his book "Singing Bowls – My Practical Guide"<sup>2</sup>. They are particularly reflected in the principles of Peter Hess®-sound methods: attentiveness, appreciation, holism, less-is-more principle, resources orientation, togetherness in dialogue. And thus, these two methods connect to form a wonderful synthesis.

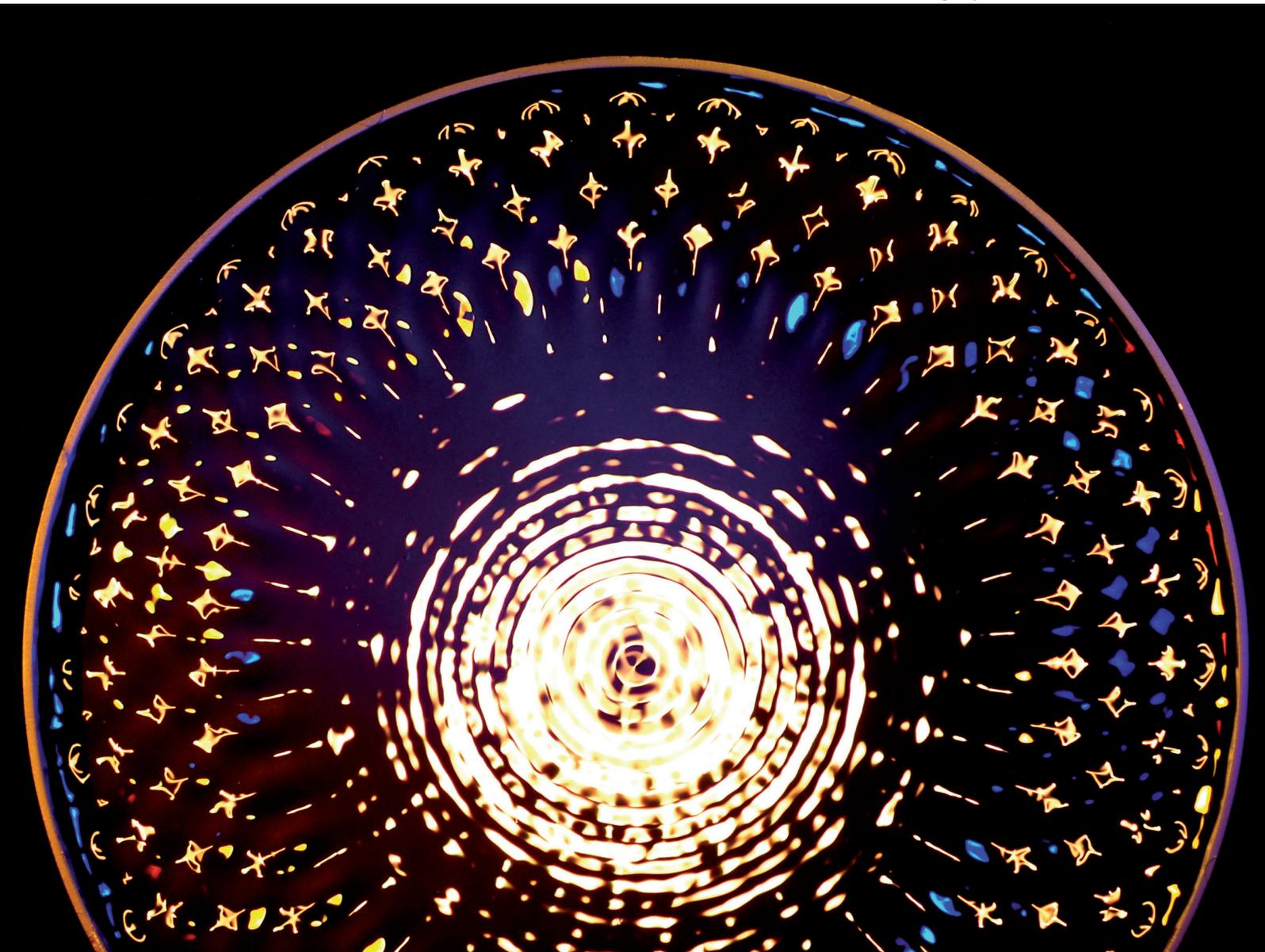
## Mindfulness practice with sound

Sounds affect the entire being in complex ways and are therefore especially applicable for mindfulness training. When looking at the water-sound-images by Alexander Lauterwasser, you can easily imagine the effect of sounds on our body fluids. They also underscore that we must handle the sounds with which we confront our body very carefully and deliberately.

As expressed by John Kabat-Zinn<sup>1</sup>, from a mindfulness perspective, there is more that is ok with us than not ok. Each of us has numerous resources and capabilities to conquer life's challenges. However, we are often not in touch with these sources because we are not present in the moment.

During mindfulness exercises with sounds, we center ourselves through the conscious perception of audible and sensible sound. Through this process, our constantly active mind can calm down and we can connect with our body.

*Water-Sound-Image by Alexander Lauterwasser*



We train ourselves to be more present in our selves. Mindfulness exercises as well as sound methods are substantially about making deeper contact with our inner selves and strengths. To capture the present moment as consciously and attentively as possible and to perceive everything that happens – external circumstances as well as inner experiences – without judgment and from an attitude of openness and relaxation. Sounds are ideal for supporting this process, as they invite us to focus our attention and often awake feelings of comfort and security. During the act of listening to and perceiving the sounds, it is generally easy for most people to attain a relaxed, non-judging presence. Experiencing the present moment, and thereby being awake and present for the uniqueness of the present, is soothing and healing. We become more sensitive to our body sensations and our deeply rooted, autonomic patterns of thoughts and feelings. This sensitivity allows us to not

necessarily react to circumstances with activity. It creates space that allows us consider problems from a distance and gain clarity for new, creative decisions and actions. Experience has shown that the exit from a life on autopilot that is associated with mindfulness exercises often presents unexpected possibilities. A helpful attitude is to let go of your own expectations and the need for results.

### Sounds intensify mindfulness because:

- with their support, rambling thoughts are bundled,
- the rhythm of sounds and their varying frequencies facilitate body perception and awareness,
- with the help of sound, repressed feelings come to light and we can practice facing them attentively.

Photo: Anna Avramidou



*By listening to the sounds, we delve completely into the here and now.*

## A sound–body journey as short sound mindfulness meditation while sitting<sup>3</sup>

In this brief meditation, address your body "with warm, friendly eyes" from the inside. You can carry out this exercise with a universal singing bowl. Ideally, you also have a Zen singing bowl with a high, clear tone available for the conclusion. Plan on approximately 3 to 5 minutes for this exercise.

- Make yourself comfortable in a chair/armchair. Get settled, take the singing bowl and place it on your plate or in front of you on a tray.
- Now, softly tap the upper third of the bowl a few times from the outside and listen to the sound.
- Make contact with your respiration and body in an attentive and deliberate way.
- Once your body calms, your mind can also quiet down.
- Assume a dignified posture and close your eyes after every tap of the bowl.
- Bring your attention to the present and become aware of the sounds.
- Concentrate on yourself and become aware of how your body feels. Be attentive to your body sensations.
- Meditating is easy for you when you let go, let go of thoughts – let them pass without judgment.
- Breathe in deeply several times and relax.
- Now, sense the area of your body that feels really good right now.
- Divert your attention and love to that place. Sense how good it feels there.
- Now, breathe in light and energy over this area with each breath, with every expiration, let the light and energy spread through every area of your body – radiate – the sounds accompany you.
- If it helps you, say to yourself: light and energy in – radiation out.
- For conclusion, tap the Zen singing bowl three times.
- Slowly return to the here and now.
- Take a few more deep breaths and stretch – just the way it feels good to you!



### Suggestions for subsequent reflection:

- What perceptions did you make?
- How did you feel emotionally?
- What was especially helpful?
- What was especially nice?

### Literature:

- 1) Gesund durch Meditation (on english: Full catastrophe living) of Jon Kabat-Zinn. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 7. Aufl. 2009
- 2) Singing Bowls - My practical companion of Peter Hess, Verlag Peter Hess, 2019
- 3) Sound: Source of Inner Strength, The sound bowl as valuable life companion published by European Association of Sound Massage Therapy e.V., 2019



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