

Mindfulness at Work -Transforming Stress into Well-Being

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Mindfulness at Work - TSW - is a course applying Buddhist teachings to everyday life. In 2015, I joined students from Brazil, Germany and the USA for twenty weeks of online classes with Dharma Publishing's Center for Skillful Means. The classes were taught with gentleness and sensitivity by Els Geilens, a Kum Nye instructor from Ratna Ling.

Mindfulness at Work is based on *Skillful Means: Mastering Successful Work* by Tibetan Buddhist lama, Tarthang Tulku and *Living Without Regret* by senior Nyingma teacher, Arnaud Maitland. It draws readings and practices from Tarthang Tulku's classic texts, *Joy of Being* and *Kum Nye Relaxation*.

When we can transform stress into well-being, says Tarthang Tulku, *"life becomes an art, an expression of the flowing interaction of our bodies, minds, and senses with each experience in our lives. We can rely on ourselves to fulfill even our innermost needs and thus we become genuinely free"*.

The lessons begin by exploring our potential for inner freedom, and the obstacles that cause inner freedom to fall away. Each student examines the events and experiences that activate stress in their own mind and body. The exercises and weekly homework helped me look deeply into my mental processes in stressful situations.

Through practical exercises, we learn how to use Skillful Means to apply mindfulness in everyday life and work. TSW believes our stress responses result from embedded negative patterns of mind, emotion and body. By exploring these habitual reactions, we can understand them better, and discover more positive ways of behaving.

In keeping with Buddhist philosophy, TSW invites us to take responsibility for our reactions, and seek alternative responses that avoid the repetitive patterns that lead to stress. In various insightful and transformative exercises, I learned how to seek "new knowledge" to guide my decisions in stressful situations.

This sounds simple in theory, but is quite challenging when applied to personally difficult situations. Part of my learning was to let go of expecting other people to change, and focus instead on what I can change to prevent my own stress reactions. I found increased freedom by confronting my assumptions about how things "should be".

The second half of the course explores new ways of developing balance. I found these lessons rich and enjoyable, as they taught me how to nurture my senses and energy system, and cultivate subtle opportunities to receive as well as give, in everyday life. These lessons deepened my appreciation of the many simple forms of nourishment that are available in the environment, if we tune in through awareness, visualisation, energy or breath.

In TSW, I learned how to bring a meditative attitude to everyday situations such as driving, working and interacting. Each week involved interesting practices that employed imagination, connecting with the body or opening the senses. I particularly enjoyed learning how to utilise the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and space) in managing stress. By practicing the exercises for short periods each day, I strengthened my sense of joy and positivity in ordinary experience.

The course involves weekly homework, which is emailed to the teacher. In addition, I enrolled for the teacher training component of the course, which involves preparing a half-hour lesson each fortnight and presenting it via video link. I received constructive feedback on my lessons and learned to teach from a place of embodied connection. By successfully completing all the requirements, and agreeing to teach the material as presented, I was then accredited as a teacher of TSW.

I regularly call on my learning from the course to open my mind in challenging situations, and appreciate the nurturing qualities that are available, both outside and inside the self. TSW gave me many practical tools for transforming and letting go of negatives, and cultivating the positives that maintain flow and balance. I recommend it to anyone who is interested in cultivating inner joy and applying mindfulness skills amid the challenges and possibilities of daily life.