

ITP 379 - Mindfulness - Professor Tart

Fall 2002, Tuesday afternoons, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

This is an example of the syllabus I use when teaching my Mindfulness course at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. It's posted here as an example of the kind of teaching carried out at the Institute and to illustrate some of the components of mindfulness education.

It is, of course, subject to change in the future.

Charles T. Tart

Conceptual Framework and Rationale: The only "tool" you really own is your consciousness: this includes your skills to perceive, to reason, to emotionally evaluate, to control your body, to access your instincts and higher faculties, etc. While high levels of development of consciousness are needed to cope adaptively with the world, especially in interacting with others, our educational system strongly tends to assume that we already have great skill in managing our consciousness, and spends its time filling us with more and more content to be managed. On many occasions you need to focus your attention in spite of distraction or conflicting emotions, e.g., but how many of us have had "Concentration 101" in college? Or "Emotional Discrimination 101?" Or "Subtle Bodily Perceptions and their Role in Health, 101 and 102?" The enormous amount of maladaptive perception, thought, feeling and behavior in everyday life, among people who are stuffed with more intellectual knowledge than most of the "wise" people in history ever had, testifies to the results of not teaching basic skills in understanding and using consciousness.

Contemporary psychology is just beginning to become aware that one of the most significant psychological dimensions affecting people's behavior is, to use Harvard psychologist Langer's term, "mindlessness." We now have enormous numbers of both experimental and clinical demonstrations to show that much of the time we live inside a kind of waking daydream. This means that our perceptions are often distorted and biased, as are our thinking and emotional evaluations. Consequently our behavior, based on biased and distorted understandings of our selves, of other people and of physical reality, is not only maladaptive but pathological in a way that further affects and distorts other's perceptions and reactions to us, in a vicious cycle.

G. I. Gurdjieff was an early pioneer in taking internal skills for developing awareness, perceptiveness and wisdom, taught in the East, and experimenting with ways of making them accessible to modern Westerners. This course (which may be repeated if a

student finds it useful) uses two books by the instructor and one by Gurdjieff's best-known student, P. D. Ouspensky, to provide a conceptual scaffolding for the idea that we tend to live in a waking daydream, as well as drawing on modern psychological research. The primary emphasis, however, will be on learning and practicing techniques to bring attention back to basic perceptions of self, others, and world *in the moment* in order to produce more accurate perceptions of world and self.

In science, theory and understanding rest on fact and observation, *data*. A brilliant thinker, working with biased and inadequate data, will come up with intellectually (and emotionally) stimulating theories that are *wrong*: they don't really explain reality. Similarly in life, our beliefs and concepts can be no better than the data they are based on, so this course will constantly pull attention back to the raw data of perception and stress checking our concepts and understandings against this improved perception/data.

While useful for *everyone*, these techniques are especially valuable for counselors and therapists, where accurate perception of the client is of the essence.

Course Format: Ten¹ two-hour classes, sometimes with a *brief* break toward the middle of class or, more likely, no break in the middle and ending slightly early. Class time will be both intellectual and experiential, stressing mindfulness of the moment. Discussion will be about both the reading and concepts and about experiential effects on the students of the mindfulness procedure.

Much of the important work of the course will be done in your everyday life, as you practice the primary mindfulness technique there.

Goals, Structure and Objectives of the Course: The objectives of this course are, (1) on the academic level, to familiarize the student with the nature of ordinary consciousness and its to often mindless nature, and with the possibilities of becoming more perceptive, mindful and sensitive in life, (2) on the professional level, to sensitize the student to recognize the occurrence of relatively mindless functioning and its implications for dealing with the person experiencing them, and, (3) on the personal level, to foster sensitivity to variations in the functioning of consciousness and so be able to discern more appropriate and mindful styles of cognition and action. These objectives are congruent with the general ITP learning objectives of *mindfulness* (what state is a person I'm interacting with in, e.g., and how does that influence their view of their world and their selves?), *compassion* (empathizing with the apparent absolute truthfulness of an emotional state, e.g., while mindfully seeing its embeddedness in a greater whole and so being able to evaluate and communicate more effectively), *appreciating differences* (the assumption that we are all in the same "normal" state of consciousness and so see the world the same way, e.g., is quite misleading) and *discernment* (seeing how, e.g., various automatized and mindless states give particular views of the world that seems true within

¹ The instructor will be away at a meditation retreat on the next to last class day (Dec. 3), so a stimulating video about Gurdjieff's life and ideas will be shown that day.

those states, but that must be understood in a broader context to move closer toward real truth).

Behavioral Objectives: There are three primary objectives:

- To intelligently discuss course material from lectures and readings in class.
- To intelligently discuss course material from lectures and readings in assigned papers.
- To carry out and report on effects of mindfulness exercises, both verbally and in written form.

Required Papers: Beginning with the second class, a two-page, double spaced, *typed* paper is due at the beginning of each class, dealing with the readings assigned for that day and/or your reactions to the primary mindfulness exercise as used in both class and your everyday life. The final paper should be about 6 pages and cover your general learning in the course. Because of the importance of APA style at ITP, *use APA style whenever you can in your writing.*

Five copies of each paper are to be handed in, one for the instructor to comment on, one for the instructor's research project on the effects of teaching mindfulness², and three for other students who will write comments on them and return them to you at the next class. This latter feature will add to the sharing dimension of the class, as well as give some preparation for being teachers yourselves some day.

Attendance: Our class meetings are carefully sequenced for optimal learning, and the experiences and discussions in class are an important part of that learning and integration process, so please attend all classes. Life does interfere at times, though, so if you should miss a class, please study and reflect on the assigned readings and keep up with the regular writing and mindfulness assignments. You can miss one class in a quarter with no problem as long as your regular writing assignments are completed in a reasonably timely way, but if you miss more than one class, you should write an extra paper, commenting on the readings assigned for that class, for each class you miss. Please indicate at the top of this paper that it's a makeup for (which one?) a particular class you missed. If more than two classes are missed and not satisfactorily made up, ITP policy is that you cannot receive credit for the class.

Assessment: Students will receive ongoing formative feedback from the instructor as part of class discussions. The summative assessment will be based primarily on successful completion of paper assignments, described below, as well as class discussion and attendance. The paper assignments also provide formative feedback from both the instructor and from other students.

² The instructor may quote material from these papers in later publications, but anonymously, so no one may be identified.

ITP 379, Mindfulness, Professor Tart - Reading and Paper Assignments

Abbreviations: WU=Tart, *Waking Up*; LML=Tart, *Living the Mindful Life*;
ISM=Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*

Week	Date	Turn in	Topic	Readings
1	Oct 1		Enlightenment & endarkenment	
2	Oct 8	1 st paper	Consciousness not needed for life	WU: intro, 1,2,3,4,5; ISM: 1
3	Oct 15	2 nd paper	Living in a simulation of reality	WU: 6,7,8; ISM: 2; LML: intro, 1
4	Oct 22	3 rd paper	Trance/hypnosis of everyday life	WU: 9; ISM: 3; LML: 2
5	Nov 5	4 th paper	Consensus trance	WU: 10; ISM: 4; LML: 3
6	Nov 12	5 th paper	Identification & identity states	WU: 11,12; ISM: 5; LML: 4
7	Nov 19	6 th paper	Defense mechanisms, groups, problems	WU: 13,21,22; ISM: 6; LML: 5
8	Nov 26	7 th paper	Balance, false personality, essence	WU: 14,15; ISM: 7; LML: 6
			Thanksgiving BREAK	
9	Dec 3	8 th paper	Video: <i>Meetings with Remarkable Men</i> *****	Rest of WU & LML
10	Dec 10	9 th paper ³	Putting it all together	Article: Tart, C., 1989, Extending mindfulness to everyday life. <i>Journal of Humanistic Psychology</i> , 30, 81-106.

Professor Tart's office hours will be in half hour blocks on Tuesdays, about 1:30 to 3:00 pm, and by appointment. Phone consultation is usually available on Wednesdays during the day at 510 526-2591, between 9-11:30 in the mornings and 1:30-4:00 in the afternoon. Please try to call just during these hours so my writing schedule won't be interrupted.

³ This should be a 3-6 page paper on what you've learned from the course.

Faxes can be sent to me at 630 604-3279. E-mail to me at address cttart@ucdavis.edu gets to me quickly, as I usually check it several times per day. Some relevant materials can be found on my web site: www.paradigm-sys.com/cttart/

Further Clarification: What my mindfulness course is and isn't

Charles T. Tart

In a school with a recognition that learning and growth involves emotional, bodily and spiritual, as well as intellectual, creative and community processes, there is sometimes confusion over what is expected and appropriate in a particular course. This note is to clarify this matter for my course on Mindfulness, in the hope of maximizing learning and minimizing possible misunderstandings and inappropriate expectations.

This is a course that is both intellectual and experiential, surveying an important area of knowledge and being. The intellectual aspects of the course contribute to the experiential and visa versa.

The experiential exercises I will suggest to you and ask you to report on involve learning to pay clearer and sustained attention to your ongoing experience in a purposeful and somewhat detached way, in order to increase your understanding of yourself and of the world. But the course is not intended to be or represented as a form of therapy, spiritual growth, or emotional process work, although I certainly hope that the intellectual and experiential content of the course may sometimes contribute to your personal growth. I state these limitations here because, among other things, I am an educator and scientist, not a psychotherapist nor spiritual teacher.

I do not intend to denigrate nor disregard individual experiential, emotional or spiritual knowledge, resources, growth challenges or problems. I respect and honor your personal process! Indeed when your individual knowledge of this sort is relevant to expanding or clarifying the conceptual or experiential material we discuss it is welcome and enriching, both in class discussions and papers!

I ask you to consider and honor the following points, adapted from standards of personal responsibility used by Professor Jill Mellick in her classes at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. While they are phrased for courses deliberately involving fairly powerful emotional and growth work, they are relevant in the context of this intellectual and experiential course.

♠_ ***Be aware of the context in which you are experiencing your own growth, both personal and intellectual.*** This is a class; while I hope it will be beneficial to you personally as well as academically, the class is not individual or group therapy.

♠ ***Please set clear protective boundaries for yourself.*** Some of the topics or exer-

cises in this class may evoke personal issues with which you need/want to deal. You are welcome to clarify these issues in your papers or class discussion if they are relevant to the class, and you might reach new understandings through doing so. *But remember that the class is not an appropriate context in which to actually work through your personal issues.* Such issues are best worked through with a qualified psychotherapist or spiritual teacher.

♠ ***Please respect your own material and the limitations of your peers.*** In class discussions and experiential exercises you are often including your personal history, implicitly if not explicitly. In the case of conflictual, emotional, unresolved material, respect yourself by sharing only material which is reasonably well resolved or which you are comfortable *not* having resolved. A statement that an area under discussion is very difficult for you may be a useful contribution, but don't bring it up if it's too difficult for you to handle in the intellectual context of the class.

♠ ***Please respect your own privacy and the overall purpose of the class.*** Share only material you are willing to have become part of current and later class discussions. Note too that in spite of the following point, privacy of your discussion contributions cannot be guaranteed.

♠ ***Please respect your peers' privacy.*** If a classmate shares important personal material, please do not talk about it to anyone outside the class unless (a) it is intellectually or compassionately useful to do so **AND** (b) you can disguise the identity of the person sufficiently so that they cannot be recognized. If in doubt about your ability to adequately disguise the identity of the person from others who may know them, don't mention the material. To put it another way, avoid gossip or story telling that may hurt someone else. Of course if you think a classmate is at serious risk and is not receiving professional help outside the classroom (such as being in therapy), do notify appropriate administrative authorities who may be able to help.

♠ ***Please recognize and respect your own and others' capacities.*** If a certain part of the discussion or an experiential exercise looks as if it will be too difficult for you emotionally, please inform me (no explanation is needed) that you don't want to take part in that part of the discussion or participate in that exercise. If much of the class causes this kind of problem, of course, we should discuss whether you should be in the course.

This note is meant to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, not the final word on human life, so please take it in that spirit. Class discussion of these considerations is appropriate.