

MINDFULNESS

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Although mindfulness is often associated with spiritual enlightenment, the origin can be found in a clinical setting: the University Hospital of Massachusetts. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), worked in this hospital in the seventies and he saw patients with chronic pain, often hearing the sentence: “Learn to live with it.” There was one gap: nobody taught the patients ‘how’ to do that.

He noticed that these patients didn’t have one problem, but two problems: 1. The pain. 2. The fight against the pain. Through experience in meditation and yoga, he was convinced that there were other solutions. He combined philosophy of the East with psychological insights of the West. This resulted in the MBSR. Many studies in the past 35 years have shown that practicing mindfulness reduces stress.

When Hanneke Bax, Speech Therapist, did the MBSR-training in 2011 because of burn-out-related complaints, she noticed indeed this described stress reduction. She noticed also more benefits that could be useful for her work as a voice therapist. She noticed she was able to pay more attention to her clients, got a different perspective on the subject of suffering and soon she noticed she could help her clients in a better way. During a trip to Nepal she studied different forms of Buddhist meditation. Finally she found herself back at mindfulness, because of the connection with the Western way of thinking. In 2016 she graduated as a mindfulness trainer and after that she developed a course called ‘Mindfulness for speech therapists’ where Speech Therapists learn how to develop their own mindfulness skills and how to cultivate these skills in clients, as stress is an important factor in voice disorders.

Mindfulness is much more than meditation, but meditations (also called: training of attention) are an important part of mindfulness. On one hand meditation is a moment of silence where the stress around the business of daily life can calm down. On the other hand meditation is an exercise about your patterns of reactivity and reactions to challenges in daily life. It is an exercise of being aware, paying attention, deal with distraction and cultivate kindness. Kabat-Zinn described seven attitudinal factors of mindfulness: Non-judging, Patience, Beginner’s mind, Trust, Non-striving, Acceptance, Letting go. Translating those factors to speech therapy and singing lessons can give a therapist or teacher a different perspective on suffering, striving and development of the vocal behaviour.

During the workshop Hanneke will give a brief introduction to mindfulness: the origin, the development and the basic theory. And just as no one has ever learned to play the piano by reading a book about it; there will be time for practical mindfulness exercises during the workshop.