



SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2026

Interfaith Mindfulness Day

Theme: Action for a Better World

Join us for a day of reflection, connection,
and shared wisdom across faiths.
Featuring a mindful walk, community activities,
and interfaith dialogue.



SATURDAY, 9TH MAY 2026

10:00 AM – 2:00 PM



VARAPUNYA MEDITATION CENTRE

ABERDEEN, AB15 8RB



REFLECT



CONNECT



ACT TOGETHER



www.aberdeeninterfaithgroup.co.uk

Interfaith Mindfulness Day program

9th May 2026

Program:

- 10:00 Gathering and mindful walk
- 10:30 Communal Mindfulness Meditation
- 11:00 Join Traditional Food offering
- 11:30 Community Luncheon
- 13:00 Reflection from all participants

Instruction:

1. The car park is in the field. Kindly Park your vehicle considerately to allow space for others
2. Meeting is inside the new building. Take your shoes off in a provided space.
3. If you are bringing food, please place it inside the Barn room. Do not bring food or drink inside the Hall.
4. Weather relatively good.

Preface

This collection of reflections was written for the annual 'Interfaith Mindfulness Day' during Mental Health Awareness Week 2026 at the Varapunya Meditation Centre by members of Aberdeen Interfaith community. Each contribution speaks and a shared conversation about action, wellbeing, compassion, and community.

At a time when many people feel overwhelmed by uncertainty, conflict, isolation, and the pressures of modern life, these writings remind us that meaningful action does not always begin with grand gestures. Sometimes it begins quietly: through mindfulness, listening, gardening, creativity, prayer, service, exercise, hospitality, or a simple act of kindness. Again and again, everyone returns to the idea that small actions, carried out with care and intention, have the power to create lasting change.

Throughout these pages, action is explored in many forms. Gary reflects on the Taoist principle of effortless action, reminding us that wellbeing grows when we act in balance rather than through strain. Jess invites us to see meditation not as passivity but as a disciplined and transformative form of action that helps us respond wisely to the world around us. Others speak from lived experience: police work, community gardening, interfaith engagement, support for refugees and asylum seekers, faith practice, volunteering, music, mindfulness, and service to others.

The collection also highlights a deeply shared truth across traditions and communities: wellbeing is not only individual but collective. Whether expressed through Sikh seva, Jewish teachings on Tikkun Olam, Buddhist mindfulness, Christian hope, Hindu principles of dharma and ahimsa, or simple neighbourly compassion, there is a common recognition that human beings flourish through connection, mutual care, and shared responsibility.

Several contributors remind us that action must also be balanced with rest, reflection, and humility. Sustainable compassion requires us to acknowledge our limits, care for our own wellbeing, and recognise that we are part of something larger than ourselves. In this way, action becomes not simply productivity or achievement, but an expression of humanity, dignity, and hope.

What emerges from these reflections is not a single solution to the challenges facing our world, but a mosaic of perspectives united by a common aspiration: to create a kinder, healthier, and more compassionate society. Each piece offers a reminder that we all possess the capacity to contribute — through our words, our presence, our creativity, and our willingness to care.

In Aberdeen's diverse interfaith and community networks, these values are already being lived out every day. People of different beliefs and backgrounds continue to come together in solidarity, friendship, and service, recognising that while our traditions may differ, our shared humanity binds us together.

May these reflections encourage readers to pause, reflect, and perhaps take one small step toward supporting their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. As several contributors so beautifully express, action for a better world does not begin somewhere far away — it begins wherever we are, with the choices we make each day.

Ajahn Sujan

The Abbot of Varapunya Meditation Centre Aberdeen, Scotland.

Table of Contents

.....	0
1. <i>Effortless action by Gary</i>	1
2. <i>“Being and doing: meditation as action” by Jess</i>	2
3. <i>Be the Change by David Innes</i>	3
4. <i>Action and Mental health from NHS Inform by Kenneth</i>	4
5. <i>Action by Kate</i>	4
6. <i>Everyday Actions Nourish Wellbeing By Sahar</i>	5
7. <i>God’s plan for your wellbeing by Patricia Dunn</i>	6
8. <i>Mental Health Awareness Week by Esther</i>	7
9. <i>Peace in Christ by Jackie</i>	8
10. <i>Action is louder than words by Suki</i>	8
11. <i>Supporting through community gardening by Rebecca</i>	9
12. <i>Starts with small, but travels far by Sofala</i>	10
13. <i>Activity and our Mental Health by Carolyn</i>	11
14. <i>Being practical By Vivian</i>	11
15. <i>Take action for someone else! By Anne</i>	12
16. <i>Action by Nigel</i>	13
17. <i>Foundations for Action Toward a Better World By A. Madhav</i>	14
18. <i>Action from Jewish perspectives By Orit</i>	16
19. <i>Varapunya and its actions for better world</i>	17



1. Effortless action by Gary

Action is often misunderstood as something we must force, control, or push through in order to succeed. From an early age, many of us are taught that effort must feel like struggle, and that productivity is measured by how hard we drive ourselves. Yet when we look more closely at life, action is not something unnatural or imposed, it is a fundamental part of being human. We act in order to live. We organise, plan, move, and create so that our basic needs, food, shelter, safety, and connection, are met.



Our minds are constantly active in this process, working in the background to coordinate the many moving parts of daily life. However, this activity does not need to feel like a battle. There is another way to engage with action: one rooted in cooperation rather than resistance. When we begin to see life as a collaboration, between ourselves, others, and the world around us, the burden of action softens. Communities share effort, responsibilities are distributed, and what once felt heavy becomes manageable, even meaningful.

Life itself is always changing. Relationships evolve, our bodies shift, economies fluctuate, and nature moves through its cycles. Nothing remains fixed. Within this constant state of flux, wellbeing depends on balance. Too much action leads to exhaustion and burnout; too little leads to stagnation and weakness. The key is not to eliminate action, but to align it.

This is where the Taoist idea of *wu wei*, or effortless action, becomes especially powerful. Effortless action does not mean doing nothing, it means doing what is necessary without unnecessary strain. It is the art of responding to life rather than forcing it. Instead of clinging to outcomes or measuring our worth by achievements, we focus on the quality of the action itself.

In communities such as the Aberdeen Interfaith Group, this philosophy is quietly brought to life. Our work reflects a shared commitment to unity across faiths and for those of no faith, recognising that wellbeing is both spiritual and physical. In a diverse and ever-changing city like Aberdeen, we help create spaces where people come together not to debate differences, but to understand one another and respond collectively to the needs around us.

This collaboration is not a rigid or predefined course of action. It does not seek to impose a single way of being. Rather, it is a gentle call toward unification, a collective willingness to see the light that exists within humanity instead of focusing on the divisions that often separate us. Through shared initiatives, conversations, and acts of service, the load of action is distributed, and care becomes a shared responsibility.

When we act mindfully in this way, each action carries intention. Every gesture, no matter how small, contributes to a wider ripple. Our actions inevitably create reactions, and through conscious awareness, we can shape those reactions into positive experiences for others. In this sense, action becomes not just a personal endeavour, but a communal offering.

To live well is not to escape action, but to refine our relationship with it. When we release the need to force results and instead trust the natural flow of effort and rest, we find a steadier, more sustainable way of living. Action then becomes not a burden, but a pathway, one that supports our individual wellbeing while nurturing the collective balance we all depend on.

- Gary, Chair person of AIFG

2. “Being and doing: meditation as action” by Jess

There is a common misconception that meditation is a passive activity. Anyone who has seriously tried to cultivate a meditation practice will know that meditation when done correctly, is anything but being laid-back and submissive. Rather, it is an active process of training the mind, witnessing our thoughts and habits and cultivating awareness so that we can respond wisely to situations and events. I suggest that before we launch into outward doing, however worthy our intentions may be, we take time to develop the skill of being present, so that our actions may be wise ones.

How then, is meditation an active doing? Meditation involves an engaged effort to stay present rather than falling below thought and drifting into sleep, or in getting lost in past and future thoughts, fantasies and worries. We cultivate being aware, right now and concentrating in what our experience is in the present.

This process of observing our thoughts without getting caught up in them is an action which actually rewires our brains. By staying with the now, we decrease the size and activity of a part of the brain called the amygdala which detects danger so that we feel less anxiety. We are also strengthening another part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex which helps us problem solve and make decisions. Through meditation we are actively strengthening the parts of our biology which will help us in the future to take wise actions.

Meditation allows us to stop frantic planning and ruminating and to come into a space where things can just be. This allows us to increase our capacity to handle stress. We can think of this space as a kind of gap, and I would invite you to “mind the gap”. This means that we create a sense of spaciousness between what happens to us and our reaction to it. We can start to recognise our habitual, unconscious, reactive patterns and respond from a different place using more of our insight, compassion and intelligence.

It may seem counterintuitive, but I would suggest the “being mode” of slowing down is even more important in times of crisis. There are so many crises happening in the world right now, it is easy to become overwhelmed. This could lead to us shutting down entirely or acting from fear and panic, which are unhelpful reactions. By intentionally switching into an active being mode, we calm our nervous system and can turn towards difficult situations and problems with calmness and clarity. We can acknowledge our difficult emotions with compassion and allow them to pass through us without triggering a long-lasting stress response. Through practising the skill of being we can gain the mental space to access our core values and take wise and compassionate actions which may be of benefit to ourselves and others. I invite you to consider being as a kind of doing and see meditation as vital action.

- Jess Copner May 2026

3. Be the Change by David Innes

Recently I was asked to speak to aspiring Head Teachers about “vision and values” and started with 3 quotes which seem to also speak to this 300-word task;

- The first is from Homer Simpson - “I wake up relatively happy each morning, then I interact with people and things change very quickly”.

- The second is from Nelson Mandela - “If you want the co-operation of humans around you, you must make them feel they are important and you do that by being genuine and humble”

- The third is from Mahatma Gandhi - “Be the change you wish to see in the world”.

We cannot live like Homer Simpson, and each day let people bring us down. We need to accept that everyone has a lot of “stuff” going on in their lives and this can come out in ways which can affect others. We need to manage our “stuff” and help others to manage theirs. This is something we should all try to do as members of local and global communities not least because there will be days when our stuff overwhelms us and we will need others to help us.

Which leads onto the idea from Nelson Mandela of “being genuine and humble”. Supporting people and the planet should not be motivated by self-satisfaction or self-gain but come from a genuine love of people and of our world with all of their beauty, variety, complexity and imperfections. The humble element is linked to the Gandhi quote because both ask us not to judge others nor seek praise or reward for our actions. The quotes ask us; to be hopeful and



helpful, to show understanding and compassion to all, to accept both the support and the rejection of others and to keep being there regardless.

- David Innes, Chair, AFW

4. Action and Mental health from NHS Inform by Kenneth

Being active for your mental wellbeing Being active is great for your physical health and fitness, but it can also help your mental wellbeing. Benefits of being active Being active makes the brain release hormones that boost energy and improve mood. These hormones are often called ‘feel-good hormones.

Being active can also: improve your self-esteem and confidence reduce stress and anxiety reduce loneliness, if you do activities with other people help you to feel calmer help you feel more focused and motivated More about the benefits of being active

How to be more active If you want to be more active, think about all kinds of physical activity of all kinds, rather than just exercises. For example, you don’t need to go to the gym or attend a formal class if that doesn’t appeal to you. Being active can just involve moving more in your daily routine.

To be more active, you could: break up periods of sitting with some stretching, or walk up and down the stairs a couple of times do some gardening – check if there’s a community garden in your area, work on indoor plants, or set up a balcony garden if you have limited outdoor space follow YouTube videos for guidance on building strength and movement catch up with friends in an active way – you could walk or cycle to your favourite coffee shop walk to the shops or park a little further away from where you want to travel to If you’d prefer to start doing a specific activity regularly, you could try a few until you find one that you enjoy. If it makes you happy, you’re more likely to keep it up in your daily routine.

5. Action by Kate

As a police officer, I am aware that not everyone sees the uniform as reassuring. In my city, there are a few hundred asylum seekers from a wide range of countries, many of whom have suffered immense trauma and have experienced policing very differently. For some, trust in authority is low, and language barriers can make everyday interactions even more difficult. I wanted to find a way to break down some of those barriers.

With a background in art, I volunteered to attend a Christmas party for New Scots, a group of young asylum seekers, offering face painting as a simple, creative activity. When I arrived, the group were understandably cautious,

especially knowing I was a police officer. There was a clear sense of distance at first.

That began to change when one young person approached and asked for a FC Barcelona badge to be painted on his face. As I worked, others gathered to watch, and gradually more young people came forward with their own requests; football crests, mythical animals, and colourful designs. The human-to-human connection was reassuring and calming and didn't rely on spoken language, making it accessible and comfortable for everyone.

Through gestures, smiles, and translation apps, conversations started to happen. What began as a simple activity became an opportunity to connect. I was able to listen to some of their stories, fears and hopes for the future, helping me to better understand their perspectives.

The experience had a lasting impact on me. It showed how creativity can help build trust in a calm and approachable way. I returned for a second visit and am now exploring how creative engagement can be used more widely to support communities who may feel uncertain or anxious, nurturing understanding on both sides.

6. Everyday Actions Nourish Wellbeing By Sahar

How Everyday Actions Nourish Our Wellbeing and Each Other's

By Sahar Abdulla,
on behalf of "We are nature collective group"

In a world that often feels rushed, heavy, or uncertain, it's easy to forget that wellbeing doesn't always come from grand gestures. More often, it grows quietly from the small things we choose to do; the gentle routines, the shared moments, the acts of care that seem simple but carry surprising depth.

Whether it's a morning walk, a creative hobby, a shared cup of tea, or showing up for a community gathering, these activities do more than lift our own spirits. They strengthen the invisible threads that connect us to others. When we take part in something meaningful even in silence we contribute to a space where people feel seen, supported, and less alone. Recently, I was invited to join various activities by a mindful and creative women in Aberdeen, called "We are nature collective". We were nine women from all walks of life with Olivia the dog, one of the group's regular members. Anastasiia Zyrianova is an artist, who is working on her project at the Gray school of Art in RGU, suggested a walk. The walk started from the harbour in Stonehaven and continued toward Dunnottar Castle. The artist guided the walk asking us to stop at few spots for us to capture the scenery in different ways, drawing small objects or far ones in the horizon. We drew objects, we laughed, we sang, we held hands and sent our prayers and hopes for peace to the world. All of that, may look or sound small,

yet felt transforming. Together, we created something warm, grounding, and unexpectedly powerful. These encounters remind us that wellbeing is not only personal but also shared.

Activities that nurture us also ripple outward. A calmer mind makes room for kindness. A creative spark inspires someone else. A moment of connection becomes a seed of hope. And when these seeds scatter across a community, they begin to shape a culture of care.

As we move through the weeks ahead, perhaps the question is not how much we can do, but what small thing we can offer to ourselves and to the world around us.

What is one thing you can try this week to support your wellbeing and someone else's?

To know more about the group and the artist, you may look at these links:
<https://www.grassroots2global.org/wearenaturecollective>.

<https://www.instagram.com/anazy.art/?hl=en>

7. God's plan for your wellbeing by Patricia Dunn

During Covid (which seems so far away now) some friends and I studied a book with this title on a weekly basis on-line. We all had sons struggling with their mental health and this also was affecting their Mums, like me.

In studying this seven -week course we were able to share common feelings and difficulties as well as learn from this book about ways to help ourselves as well as our sons. This was a very worthwhile activity, at the time and since. The book and course have been recommended to many friends since, which hopefully will have had spin off for themselves as well as those they try to actively support and help. Maybe you have a book or course you can recommend to others who feel their or their loved one's well-being is not as good as it could/should or might be.

This book covers physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, financial and vocational wellbeing. Although written from a Christian perspective it has much to help those with no faith or another faith.

In the section on Physical well-being, Exercise is one of the key aspects.

As I have been working with asylum seekers since Aberdeen Interfaith organised our "You, Me and a Game of Sport" events, the guys have enjoyed being active by playing tennis, pickleball and table tennis. I have seen and heard how this has had a great effect on their mood, relieved some of their anxiety or at least taken it off them for a while and helped them de-stress. They have enjoyed our company, and we have been privileged to hear some of their stories. They will share some of their thoughts with us about how being active has helped them cope with their frustrating times in the hotel and worrying about

their families back home as well as waiting for the Home Office to hear their case and grant them refugee status.

I am grateful to them for giving me something to do to feel useful (where we can feel useless and powerless to change major attitudes and issues concerning the asylum system) for including my son in the activities and most of all for calling me “Mum”!

8. Mental Health Awareness Week by Esther

With the world as it is, peace of mind can feel hard to come by. If are a person who cares, it can feel like a constant bombardment of distressing news and competing crises. I’m fortunate to work as Coordinator for Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR), a partnership that brings faith communities together to support refugees and people seeking asylum. It is an incredible privilege to get to do this work.

But it isn’t always easy. Over the past year, the news has felt relentlessly bleak: harsher policies, hostility outside asylum accommodation, and wars driving people from their homes. Of course, the greatest burden is shouldered by refugees themselves. But in conversations with volunteers and colleagues, I’ve noticed a growing weariness too. The sense of things getting worse rather than better takes its toll.

So, what can we do? We can be intentional about how much news we consume, build in practices of reflection or mindfulness and make space for rest. But I also believe action can be powerful. Rolling up our sleeves, thoughtfully and with intention, can help us feel capable, connected, and part of something larger than ourselves.

We need to be careful: doing too much can lead to exhaustion or burnout. And in the face of such enormous needs our actions can feel insignificant. But we can still make a difference for New Scots in our communities.

I grew up in church singing hymns, and one I fell out of my cradle singing is “Jesus Bids Us Shine”. As twee and saccharine as it is, it has grown on me in recent years, especially these

lines:

“In this world of darkness, we must shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine.”

Sentimental? Yes. But it reminds me that, in a world that can feel overwhelmingly dark, we are not alone. There are many of us, and that solidarity brings me comfort and the energy to keep going.

- Esther Moodie, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees

9. Peace in Christ by Jackie

Just recently I attended the funeral of a young friend taken suddenly, sometimes life isn't fair. We hear of wars and rumours of wars, we don't know what tomorrow will bring.

As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints I believe that it is possible to have a better world, to remind myself to look for a better world.

When my mind is in turmoil I like to think on a song we often sing at church.

It is called Peace in Christ.

This is the chorus!

He gives us hope

When hope is gone,

He gives us strength

When we can't go on,

He gives us shelter

In the storms of life,

When there's no peace on earth,

There is peace in Christ.

I believe as we live the way he lived we can hope for positive action to make the world a better place.

10. Action is louder than words by Suki

Across many faiths, a shared call to compassionate action unites humanity. In this spirit, Sikh teachings offer a powerful model for interfaith collaboration toward a better world.

In order to spread the message of taking action to achieve a better world the Sikh Guru's and prominent Sikh figureheads lead not just by giving teaching but also themselves practically carrying out those actions for others to follow. In Sikhism, the concept of Seva (selfless service) transforms the idea of "action" from a mere task into a spiritual necessity. It teaches that faith is incomplete without active participation in the welfare of others. This is rooted in the principle of Vand Chakko—sharing what you have with the needy before consuming it yourself. By serving others without desire for reward or recognition, a person chips away at their own ego (Haumai), which Sikhism identifies as the primary barrier between humanity and the Divine. Whether it is through the communal kitchen of Langar, which fights hunger and caste hierarchy simultaneously, or through environmental stewardship, Sikh action is always grounded in the belief that the Creator resides within the creation. Furthermore, action in the Sikh tradition is guided by the ideal of the Sant-Sipahi

(Saint-Soldier). This lens calls for a balance between inner spiritual reflection and outward social justice. It isn't enough to be piously silent; one must possess the courage to stand up against oppression and Asat (falsehood). To act for a better world means practicing Sarbat da Bhala, or seeking the "well-being of all" regardless of religion, race, or status. This creates a proactive framework for global citizenship where one's hands are busy with service while the heart remains attuned to ethical integrity, ensuring that every action contributes to a more equitable and compassionate world—an aspiration shared across interfaith communities working together.

11. Supporting through community gardening by Rebecca

Simple, practical activities like gardening can create routine, purpose, and connection, helping people feel more grounded and positive. Through CFINE's Grow Indoor Edible Gardens Project, we saw how taking part in hands-on growing activities gave children, young people, and adults the opportunity to improve both wellbeing and confidence.

At Earth & Worms Community Garden in Tillydrone, CFINE worked with YAHYAS Hub to bring together young adults seeking asylum and local young adults through a five-week gardening programme. Participants learned how to grow food and developed skills in urban community gardening, but the benefits reached far beyond gardening itself. People spoke about feeling welcomed, having a sense of purpose, and taking responsibility for their surroundings. Spending time outdoors, being physically active, and working together created positive effects for both physical and mental health. Participants also described the pride that came from contributing to the garden and producing food that would benefit the wider community.

With children at Muirfield Out of School Club, gardening created excitement, curiosity, and joy. Watching seeds grow, planting, harvesting produce, and even making apple crumble with local apples gave children simple but meaningful experiences of achievement. These practical activities helped them connect with nature and learn through doing.

Gardening reminds us that growth takes time, care, and patience. It offers space to slow down, be present, and see positive change happen in front of us. In a busy world, taking action through gardening can be a powerful form of mindfulness, helping people feel healthier, calmer, and more connected to themselves and others.

Creative action through music offers many of the same benefits. Through CFINE's Community Music Project, participants from a wide range of backgrounds came together in community gardens to write songs inspired by nature, community, and wellbeing.

Participants described feeling relaxed, confident, respected, and socially connected. Many said the project helped reduce isolation, improve anxiety, and give them a stronger sense of voice and belonging.

One participant shared that the group had become “a wee community,” helping them wake up in a better mood and feel more secure in themselves. Others spoke about how writing songs helped them process difficult emotions and build confidence.

Activities like gardening or songwriting can help you to reconnect with yourself and with others and boost your health and wellbeing.

By Rebecca Dunn, Community Growing Development Worker at CFINE & folksinger, songwriter and creative practitioner
www.rebeccadunnmusic.com | www.cfine.org

12. Starts with small, but travels far by Sofala

Goodness is like a ripple—it starts with small, but it travels far.

One morning in Aberdeen, I was walking back from Lidl when I saw an elderly beautiful woman. She was dressed in golden brown colors, her outfit and jewelry perfectly matched, like a soft piece of art. I couldn’t stop myself—I told her she looked beautiful. Her face bloomed into a smile. She told me her day had begun badly, but my approach changed everything.

Later, on my way to Union Street, a young girl walked past me, then suddenly turned back. She looked at me and said I looked beautiful in my hijab. I was so surprised. I hadn’t done anything special that day.

That day felt like a circle—kindness given, kindness returned.

We often think happiness is something big, something we must chase. But sometimes, it is as small as a smile, a kind word, or a moment of care. These little things connect us in ways we don’t always see.

A kind heart is powerful. It can lift someone who is tired, calm someone who is hurt, and bring warmth into an ordinary day. And this kindness should not stop with people—it should reach plants, animals, and the earth itself.

Everything around us is connected, like threads in one fabric. When we care, the world feels softer, calmer, and more alive.

This world is our shared home. If we fill it with kindness, even in the smallest ways, we make it a better place—not just for others, but for ourselves too.

13. Activity and our Mental Health by Carolyn

Why is activity important for our mental health?

A simple answer might be “because it makes me feel better”. However, we now know that engaging in activity, other than distracting us from negative or stressful thoughts, can actually change our brain chemistry and alter our thought patterns.

Physical activity can act as a natural painkiller and lift our mood.

Keeping the brain active can prevent or ease the experience of anxiety and depression.

Spiritual activity, (which doesn’t necessarily mean religious) like mindfulness, meditation and prayer, a sense of purpose, or trying to live your life according to your core values and beliefs, can give you a greater sense of wellbeing and reduce stress.

The “best” activity for you is of course subjective. If you find an activity is unpleasant, difficult or even boring, it isn’t likely to benefit you.

Research has shown that social isolation, particularly for older people, can be very detrimental to mental health. So taking part in any activity you enjoy, alongside people who you feel relaxed with can have additional benefits.

Whilst meditating on our own can improve our mental health, practising or praying with others offers additional physiological and psychological benefits. Being part of a supportive group can encourage long term habits and when we feel comfortable enough with others to share our feelings, listening deeply to theirs, there is now scientific evidence that this interactive process can help another better manage their emotions through calm presence, empathy and connection.

Walking meditation is another activity which can improve our mental health. It can be more accessible for those who may find it difficult to sit still in silence, as it can provide a “physical anchor” through steady leg movement, making it easier to stay present.

It is interesting to know that spiritual activities which have been practised for centuries can now be scientifically proved to benefit our mental health, although of course not everyone needs that proof.

14. Being practical By Vivian

"This year for me has begun with an episode of fear and urgency. I nearly lost my father to an acute, critical illness, while my mother suffered a stroke caring for him. After organising my works, I rushed home to Taiwan to be by their side. Perhaps it was the excellence of medical care, my brother’s tireless communication with doctors, or the quiet blessings of family love, faith and

beliefs — within a week of my arriving home, both of my parents were discharged from the hospital, safe and recovering.

In those moments of panic, the world does not stop. Life continues, indifferent to our distress. What remained within our control, in those critical moments of our lives, are simple: return the thought and focus back to the single point of breathing. Again and again, I choose to take the action of returning to a single point of awareness. This small act has compassionately helped me navigate conflict, uncertainty, and helplessness.

Mindfulness is not about emptying the mind or achieving perfection. Mindfulness is a sequence of mindful actions to, gently, respectfully, pick up the thoughts, one by one, and to lead them out of the mind, even just for a 3-minute moment. While in this small period of moment, in this mental landscape, we intentionally, mindfully create and focus on one simple thing, the most wonderful, marvellous thing - being alive, in the living. Through one of our inborn autonomic nervous systems, breathing, that guides us to the presence of here and now.

Action being the theme of this year is fitting, because the environment, the surroundings, the societies, the world may have been growing unkind, strange. The action of taking charges of our breathing, our thoughts and our attitudes in life are the skills and the personal power we can foster, can train and can polish, to make our mindscapes a beautiful place, like lotus flowers in the muddy pond - starting from us, one lotus at a time, gradually the world will be cultivated a better place."

15. Take action for someone else! By Anne

This call to action reminds me a story I was told by an African Tradeswoman. She was given the job of handing out grants to farmers on the shore of Lake Malawi. 50% up front and the remainder to be paid on receipt of baskets made from reeds.

The men gathered and received their advance. However, one guy was very late. The others pleaded that he should also be given the grant, and they would stand guarantors for him.

2weeks later----

The baskets are ready to be checked and the balance paid. However, the guy who was late at the first grant was nowhere to be seen. There was a silence, and then one guy stood to speak "we will pay for his advance out of our money, but maybe you should know, he was so weak from hunger, that on the way home to make his baskets, he died. So, he has no baskets to bring."

The African lady who brought us this story concluded—"you see, for you Fairtrade is a choice, for us it is a matter of life and death". We have the choice to be wise consumers thinking of the producers of our clothes, food, household

items and luxuries and trying to play fair –or to be driven only by cost and ease with no regard to those who have worked hard to produce our goods.

Fairtrade products guarantee a fair deal for overseas producers. Ensuring a fair price, healthy conditions, environmental awareness and no child deprivation. The Fairtrade Mark make a great choice. Fairness isn't a given, but when we listen to producers and farmers and put pressure in the right places, we have the power to change that.

16. Action by Nigel

J.S. Mill, the 19th century Philosopher, once defined happiness as a life with few pains and plenty of pleasures, with a predominance of active pleasures over passive pleasures.

Definitions of happiness are legion, but this is to my mind significant. Active pleasure is the satisfaction of exercising a skill, being creative, meeting a challenge, pursuing a project. Passive pleasure resides in pleasures of sensation from eating a good meal, tasting a pleasant wine, hearing beautiful music or seeing a beautiful painting. Often the two are involved in the same activity. Listening to music may both be the enjoyment of the tune or harmony as such and also the careful attention to or interpretation of what is going on in the music.

Another way into this is to reflect on what Wittgenstein said: what is the difference between my arm moving and my moving my arm? Whatever willing involves (a much-debated issue) it is clearly linked to having a purpose. This might be the kind of purpose that characterises virtually all behaviour of conscious humans – getting up, washing my face, drinking tea, moving my pen in a doodle. But the kinds of action that is more significant to mental health is linked to much more complex purposes like the activities Mill associates with active pleasures.

Agency is often linked to ideas of autonomy and empowerment – one's having a sense of control to some extent in one's life or acting in such ways that make a difference not just for oneself but for other people or in promoting some vision or goal. But agency also has its limits and part of mental health resides in recognising and accepting this. Merleau-

Ponty the French philosopher once talked of our freedom (of action) being 'situated' – limited by many factors. For religious people submission in some sense or other is part of this (cf. the serenity prayer*). In any case the exercise of agency is I would suggest essential to some degree to mental health, but it is by no means sufficient. A Hitler or lesser control freak may certainly exercise agency aplenty, generally at the expense of disempowering (many) others or worst, but that agency may be the product of sick and unhealthy mind.

*The most widely recognized version of the Serenity Prayer reads:

"God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

17. Foundations for Action Toward a Better World By A. Madhav

Dharma, Ahimsa, and Seva: Foundations for a Better World

Building a sustainable and peaceful world requires more than technology or policies. It calls for a deep shift in values and daily actions. Rooted in ancient Hindu-Bauddha wisdom, the principles of Dharma (righteous duty), Ahimsa (non-violence), and Seva (selfless service) offer a practical ethical framework. Together, they recognize the divine essence (Brahman) in all beings and nature, promoting unity, compassion, and collective responsibility over individualism.

Dharma is the commitment to moral order and righteous living. It involves fulfilling one's duty in alignment with harmony, justice, and the greater good. Contextual rather than rigid, dharma encourages ethical choices in business, governance, consumption, and community life. It prioritizes long-term well-being and balance over short-term personal gain, guiding individuals to act as responsible stewards of society and the planet.

Ahimsa, or non-violence, extends far beyond physical restraint. It means minimizing harm in thoughts, words, and actions. This principle views all life as interconnected and sacred. Practicing ahimsa often leads to vegetarianism or veganism to reduce animal suffering, environmental damage from industrial farming, and resource depletion. Broader applications include peaceful conflict resolution, ethical consumerism, and mindful communication that avoids emotional harm. In today's world of conflict and ecological crisis, ahimsa breaks cycles of violence and cultivates empathy.



Seva embodies compassion through selfless service. It involves giving time, resources, or skills without expecting rewards—whether volunteering, mentoring, supporting charities, or participating in community projects. Seva

dissolves ego, builds genuine connections, and turns goodwill into real impact. In an age of digital isolation, it strengthens social cohesion and creates ripples of kindness.

Practical Pillars of Action

These principles translate into meaningful everyday practices. Environmental Stewardship (Bhumi Seva) treats the Earth as sacred. It involves protecting ecosystems, conserving resources, reducing waste, supporting biodiversity, and shifting to renewable energy. Because all life is linked through Brahman, caring for nature ensures our own survival and that of future generations. The guiding vision is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — “the world is one family.” This promotes global citizenship, cross-cultural collaboration, and solidarity beyond borders, religions, or species. It inspires equitable policies, climate action, and inclusive support for the vulnerable.

Yoga and Meditation provide the inner foundation. These practices develop self-awareness, emotional resilience, and a lived sense of unity. Regular practice strengthens clarity and commitment, helping individuals sustain ethical action amid challenges.

Every choice generates Karma — the law of cause and effect. Actions aligned with dharma, ahimsa, and seva produce positive outcomes for both self and society. Small consistent steps, such as reducing plastic use, choosing plant-based meals, or offering help locally, accumulate into significant change.

Synergy and Hope

When integrated, these principles create powerful synergy: dharma ensures balanced responsibility, ahimsa minimizes harm, and seva channels compassion into service. Supported by oneness, inner practice, and karmic awareness, they form a complete path for transformation. In daily life, this might mean reducing waste, volunteering, adopting compassionate diets, and meditating regularly. At the societal level, it supports regenerative economies, empathy education, and policies prioritizing well-being over endless growth. Though challenges like consumerism and political inertia remain, history — from Buddha’s whom Hindu believe as a ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, an almighty God, non-violent movement to modern environmental efforts — shows these values drive real progress. Living by dharma, ahimsa, and seva is both a personal journey and shared duty. It invites us to see the sacred in all, act with integrity, serve selflessly, and protect our common home. Through mindful, consistent effort, we can co-create a more sustainable, just, and peaceful world — one conscious choice at a time.

18. Action from Jewish perspectives By Orit

In Jewish tradition, physical, spiritual and social activities are understood as interconnected ways of caring for both body and soul.

Judaism emphasises active engagement with life as a means of fostering joy, purpose and community connection—factors that can reduce anxiety and support mental well-being.

There is a strong emphasis on connection and balance, encouraging care for oneself, for others and for the wider world. Emotional health is seen as integral to daily life, including an awareness of our vulnerabilities and the support we may need to navigate life's challenges. Jewish teaching also recognises that different situations call for different kinds of support and forms of activity.

The connection between body and soul (spirit) is central, highlighting the importance of nurturing and healing both. Mental health is therefore a core part of overall well-being. The balance between the physical and emotional is expressed through the ways we support ourselves and others.

The importance of community and relationships is emphasised through the values of kindness and service to others; responsibility towards each other, feeling supported, seen and connected, reduces isolation and boosts mental health. Thus, giving to others, through volunteering (for example), acts of loving kindness and compassionate support, fuel both the recipient and the giver, fostering community and connection to everyone's benefit.

This sense of responsibility also extends to the natural world. Through the principle of Tikkun Olam—repairing the world—Judaism teaches care for the environment. Spending time in nature and making mindful choices can be grounding and restorative, supporting emotional balance and a sense of agency.

At the same time, caring for ourselves, others and the world require balance. Sustainable compassion depends on self-care. This is reflected in the observance of Shabbat (the Sabbath), which invites rest, gratitude and a pause from the demands of daily life.

In Jewish tradition, activity—in all its forms—is a vital expression of living well, through an overarching framework of self-care, compassion to others and balance nurturing both individual and collective well-being.

Adapted from Jewish Care (Mental Health Shabbat)

19. Varapunya and its actions for better world

The Varapunya Meditation Centre (VMC) serves as a significant hub for **Theravada Buddhism** and the practice of mindfulness in Scotland. Founded in **2012**, the centre was established to provide a "central space" for both locals and people of all nationalities to systematically study and practice the Dhamma. Its motto, "**Helping hands, Healing Hearts**," encapsulate its mission to cultivate merit and provide spiritual and mental support to the wider community.

Action for a Better World: Socially Engaged Buddhism

The centre operates on the principle of **Socially Engaged Buddhist practice**, extending its role beyond its physical walls to contribute to a better society through various outreach and environmental initiatives.

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Under the vision of "Revitalizing the Land," the centre has transformed its five-acre grounds into a "**Mindfulness Woodland Park**". This involved planting **more than 3,000 trees** to create a serene "Contemplative garden" that serves as a living sanctuary for nurturing inner peace and connection with nature. The centre also hosts events like the **Fire Labyrinth** to celebrate the spring equinox, often in collaboration with local Pagan practitioners, highlighting a shared respect for the natural world.

- **Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation:** VMC is an active member of the **Aberdeen Interfaith Group (AIFG)**. It hosts annual events like **Interfaith Mindfulness Day** during Mental Health Awareness Week, bringing together representatives from diverse traditions—including Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities—to participate in mindful walks and reflective storytelling.

- **Support for Vulnerable Individuals:** The centre collaborates with local organizations such as **Aberdeen in Recovery (AIR)** to provide Dhamma-based mindfulness programs specifically designed to assist individuals recovering from **drug and alcohol addiction**.

- **Educational Outreach:** Members visit local schools to share Buddhist teachings, aiming to **increase understanding and reduce prejudice** towards different cultures and faiths. Ajahn Sujana has even authored a book titled "**Your Questions My Answers**" based on these school interactions.

Mental Wellbeing and Mindfulness

A core strength of the Varapunya Meditation Centre is its commitment to improving **mental health and spiritual wellbeing** through structured mindfulness programs.

- **Partnership with the NHS:** Since January 2017, the centre has collaborated with **NHS Grampian** to conduct free "**Mindfulness Mondays**" at

the Aberdeen Health Village. These monthly sessions are designed to support the mental wellbeing of **patients, healthcare staff, and the general public**, helping them manage worry, anxiety, and stress through Buddhist approaches to emotional balance.

- **Mindfulness as "Self-Treatment":** The centre teaches mindfulness meditation as an effective, **cost-less skill for self-awareness** and dealing with physical and mental health issues. It offers instructions in two primary forms: **Serenity** meditation for developing calmness and **Insight** meditation for investigating the true nature of oneself and eradicating the roots of dissatisfaction.

- **Pandemic Support:** During the Covid-19 pandemic and post, VMC transitioned many of its offerings online, providing **daily meditation sessions** to help the community cope with the psychological challenges of isolation and uncertainty.

- **Academic Integration:** The centre maintains an academic partnership with other organisations, offering short mindfulness training courses that integrate contemplative practice into a global academic framework.

Historical Milestones and the Uposatha Hall

The development of the centre has been marked by several historical milestones that demonstrate its growing stability and influence in Scotland.

- **Foundation and Legal Status:** After its initial foundation in 2012, the **centre** was officially registered as a Scottish charity in **May 2013** (Charity No: SC043989).

- **Permanent Sanctuary:** In **2016**, the society took a loan and purchased the **Easter Mains Cottage** and five acres of land for £360,000, establishing a permanent base for its activities.

- **The Uposatha Hall Project:** A major recent undertaking was the construction of the **Uposatha Hall**, which serves as the spiritual and ceremonial heart of the centre. Consecrated in **May 2026**, this hall marks a historic milestone as the **first of its kind in Scotland**, enabling formal monastic acts like higher ordinations to take place within the country.

This landmark stands as a symbol of the flourishing of the Dhamma in Europe and the collective faith of international community supporters who made it possible.

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to *love*.”

Nelson Mandela





Scottish Mental Health Awareness Week

*Aberdeen Interfaith Group &
Varapunya Meditation Centre*

cordially invite you to join annual event



Interfaith Mindfulness Day

Theme: Action for a Better World

Mindful walk, and Reflections from different faith groups.

Saturday 9th May 2026

Tentative program

- 10:00 Introduction & Mindful walk
- 11:00 Join Traditional Food offering
- 11:30 Sharing Lunch
- 13:00 Reflections & Activities

Venue:

Varapunya Meditation Centre
Aberdeen, AB15 8RB
varapunya@gmail.com



Scan for more detail
interfaithab@gmail.com