

Ludwig J. Grepmair

AWAREAIDON-METHOD

„Swim Disks“ for Training Mindfulness/Meditation

Manual accompanying Grepmair's AwareAidOn Device/PC Program



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American/English Version
German Version

Scientific foreword by Dr. Ulrich Ott
Spiritual foreword by Fumon Nakagawa Roshi

Range of Application:
Practicing Mindfulness/Meditation in Spirituality,
Medicine/Psychotherapy, Education

PIAP Regensburg

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About this manual

This manual provides you with an easy-to-understand description of the method behind AwareAidOn, its scope of application, its benefits for the user as well as its spiritual and scientific basis.

The name ‚AwareAidOn‘ is a blend of words consisting of three elements: (1) **A**ware(ness), (2) **A**id, and (3) **M**étron (measurement), → Awareness aid and measurement/focusing skills. It refers both to the innovative method described below *and* to the device/PC program developed/invented to support awareness and meditation practices using this particular approach.

GREPMAIR'S AWAREAIDON offers you a highly efficient support for mindfulness/meditation practices of all kinds (various spiritual, medical and educational orientations).

‚AwareAidOn‘ denotes an approach based both on spiritual and scientific grounds, and at the same time refers to the device developed for the practical application of this particular approach.

AwareAidOn involves the use of sound, which defines the nature and frequency/occurrence of which can be modified according to a sophisticated system in order to support mindfulness/meditation practices.

AwareAidOn should *not* be understood to be a new type of mindfulness/meditation practice. Instead, AwareAidOn will support practitioners in doing what they are intent on doing: namely practicing mindfulness/meditation. In this sense, AwareAidOn is not what will be *essential* for their practice. What is essential, and what remains unchanged and the major point of focus for the practitioner, is the awareness/meditation exercise as such. AwareAidOn, however, provides practitioners with a valuable tool for realizing that which is really essential.

L. J. Grepmair explored the effect of AwareAidOn phenomenologically on himself and on his own clients, with experienced meditators also serving as test subjects. The results revealed that AwareAidOn really provides helpful support for many mindfulness and meditation practitioners.

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About the author and developer

LUDWIG J. GREPMAIR is a psychologist, psychotherapist and trainer. He is based in Regensburg, Bavaria/Germany. He completed more than 20 years of therapy trainings in various modalities and was trained in several spiritual traditions. After having held the position of Chief Clinical Psychologist at a psychosomatic clinic, he founded an academic training practice, which he then complemented by a private institute for mindfulness and psychotherapy.

What established his international reputation in the area of mindfulness research among peers were his research contributions around mindfulness in psychotherapeutic practice. After many years of phenomenological research, he, together with Prof. Dr. Marius K. Nickel/Bad Aussee, Austria, and Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Regensburg, Germany, presented groundbreaking pioneering studies (2006a, b; 2007a, b, 2008) which were the first ones to document the positive impact of mindfulness on the part of the psychotherapist with regard to treatment results. The *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness* by F. Didonna (2009), among others, identifies these studies as the beginning of research in this field (also cf. e. g. Walach 2008). Together with Prof. Nickel, L. J. Grepmair also authored the very first book in this area of expertise, a monograph in which the authors also were the first ones to describe psychotherapy as a Zen healing modality (Grepmair & Nickel 2007a).

It was L. J. Grepmair's confrontation with his own challenges in practicing meditation/mindfulness which led him to develop the AwareAidOn approach and device.

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Guiding principle

„Zazen means awakening from distraction and confusion and from dullness and fatigue, awakening to zazen billions of times“.

(Uchiyama Kosho 2002, p. 120)

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Table of contents

Scientific foreword by Dr. Ulrich Ott.....	9
Spiritual foreword by Fumon Nakagawa Roshi	11
Acknowledgements	14
1 History and foreword.....	18
2 Mindfulness/meditation exercise.....	21
3 The key challenge faced by mindfulness/ meditation practitioners	23
4 The nature of the method und device	25
5 Further details including the spiritual and scientific basis.....	27
1 The quality of the sound events.....	27
2 The timing and frequency of the sound events.....	30
6 Areas of application and precautions	
1 Areas of application and beneficial health effects	33
2 Precautions and warnings.....	34
7 Exercise instructions.....	36
Closing remark	42
Literature	43

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Scientific foreword

Meditation is a dynamic interplay between practitioners' efforts to practice their chosen approach, and them drifting off into thoughts and daydreams. Again and again, not only beginners, but also advanced students find themselves confronted with the challenge to be and to remain mindful during meditation. Meditation is a learning process. The focus is on expanding the periods of mindfulness while reducing those of drifting away. Bringing oneself back on track, returning one's focus to meditation again and again is not an easy task.

This is where AwareAidOn as developed by Ludwig Grepmaier provides a useful tool. Here, self-selected sounds and noises at varying intervals serve to interrupt chains of thoughts and daydreams. As long as the practitioners' internal mindfulness has not yet sufficiently evolved, they will benefit from this external 'alarm call' inviting them to investigate whether they managed to maintain their state of mindfulness. The regular, constant acoustic signals provided by other programs are less suitable for this purpose, since fixed intervals will quickly lead to the formation of expectations on when the next event will occur (conditioning), and also because people soon become used to the signal, which will weaken their response to it (habituation).¹

AwareAidOn is intended to serve as a resource which will ultimately render itself superfluous. This can very appropriately be illustrated by the metaphor of swim discs. AwareAidOn, however, places higher demands on those using it. While the rules for a proper use of swim disks are obvious, we hardly know as yet how the process of learning to master mindfulness can be supported optimally via sounds. Here, research is still in its infancy, and every user is called upon to find out for himself/herself which sounds at which intervals are optimally supportive for his/her practice.

Initially, not being „caught“ daydreaming by a sound can be an incentive. Nevertheless, meditation should by no means mutate into waiting for the next sound event. The essential part will always be how practitioners focus their attention within, which also applies when doing their practices using AwareAidOn. Frequent sessions without the device are important in order not to develop any dependency and also for monitoring personal progress. For those who have progressed to the stage of maximum achievement, mindfulness cannot be increased any further using external stimuli; the device will then have rendered itself superfluous, and the „internal AwareAidOn“ will have taken over this job completely.

Studies have shown that training mindfulness has numerous benefits. AwareAidOn can contribute to promoting the learning process within the scope of trainings of this kind. I wish the device and its users success and expect to gain important new insights both for basic research and clinical application.

Dr. Ulrich Ott
(Bender Institute of Neuroimaging, University of Giessen,
Germany)

¹ Author's note: Dr. Ott was not aware of any studies on the use and efficiency of acoustic tools in the context of meditation.

Spiritual foreword

Life in Zen monasteries is typically accompanied by various sounds, most of them produced by instruments made of metal and wood. Sometimes these sounds are very low, at other times they are very loud; sometimes they are pleasant and melodious, at other times they strike abruptly and are like wakeup calls. There are also alternating sounds with two or three corresponding instruments. For the listener, they can have a number of different impacts, such as, among other things, a sense of harmony or the impression of a clear mind. Participants in my courses frequently ask, „Why do you strike all these different instruments in the monastery?“ Usually I am not even able to provide a direct reply to this, but here I am willing to try.

These sounds are not music; they do not reflect any musical principles. Instead, whoever listens to them can have the experience how through the clarity of these sounds the mind and the soul can also turn clear. This way, the sounds become the expression of our awakening spirit. Those who assume the task of striking one of these instruments must be as awake and aware as possible. In this case, being awake means being in alignment with yourself, with the instrument, with the vibrating air, with the atmosphere in general, and therefore ultimately with the universe in which we are and which we are ourselves.

Against the background of his own meditation experience, Ludwig Grepmaier understood the effect and purpose of the sounds very accurately. As a result, he can now make the impact of the sounds which have been part of everyday life in Zen monasteries since ancient times accessible to everybody via his spirito-therapeutic approach. For people of today who are not familiar with Asian customs while at the same time seeking a neutral spiritual path and practice, this is a very valuable achievement.

As far as psychotherapy goes – at least from my point of view – we should remind ourselves that the psychotherapeutic process always involves a range of needs and dimensions. The goal and desire of people with psychological difficulties initially consists in wanting to become healthy in the sense of developing a certain stability in a „normal“ self, which enables them to lead a normal everyday life in society. This is definitely one of the major tasks of psychotherapy. But it is exactly in fulfilling this task that psychotherapy can and should open a door to a spiritual path. After all, people with a healthy, „normal“ sense of self will naturally ask questions about the purpose of life – which is a question which automatically brings us beyond a limited self. It is obvious that conventional psychotherapy reaches its limits here.

Exactly this is where the first dimension of spiritual practice begins, e. g. in the form of meditation. It is an exercise aimed at trying to let go of the „self“. Or, to be more precise, it is an exercise of awakening to this orientation: There is no self that you could let go of. From the perspective of spiritual practice, there is the saying that being firmly convinced of the existence of a self is blindness or delusion. Those, however, who eagerly attempt to „let go of their self“ might become seriously ill. Therefore: let go, really let everything go! And exactly when you think there is nothing left to let go of, let go of that thing, too! So this is how you could describe the essence of meditation on the second level.

I am sure that for both dimensions the methodological guide by Ludwig Grepmaier will be a valuable help in connection with the practice of mindfulness meditation. I would like to recommend this method to all those who wish to approach a spiritual path such as meditation from the therapeutic side.

I was very happy to make the everyday sounds from the Daihizan Fumonji, Zen Center Eisenbuch(x), available for this purpose. May all seekers and everybody practicing mindfulness meditation truly recognize the preciousness of human life and of our universe!

Gassho

Fumon S. Nakagawa, Docho

Abbot of the Zen-Monastery Daihizan Fumonji 1.12.09

(x) CD Recitations from the Zen-Monastery Daihizan Fumonji,
www.eisenbuch.de

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Acknowledgements

My wonderful parents generously provided me with the foundation for everything I managed to achieve in my life and for everything I have become.

I was and am very fortunate to have enjoyed the privilege of studying with some excellent spiritual masters and psychotherapeutic trainers, most of them with some spiritual orientation. They provided me with the basis for my work. In particular, I would like to highlight the following:

Prof. Dr. Willi Butollo. Willi introduced me to authentic, dialogic psychotherapy involving personal presence.

Dr. Rita Ullrich de Muynck and Dr. Rüdiger Ullrich taught me clear thinking and to base my work on a sound theoretical background.

For many years, I studied with Dr. Hunter Beaumont. For me, Hunter was the embodiment of intuition, mindfulness and a psychotherapeutic concept not limited to any particular school. He showed me what it means to touch the heart of a human being.

Furthermore, Dr. Larry Heller and Dr. Raja Selvam have influenced me with the power of the „mindfulness field“ involved in their work.

Dr. Ursula Franke and particularly Itta Wiedenmann taught me how relieving – and just as efficient – unpretentious working styles are for our clients.

I am very grateful to my former Zen master of many years, Willigis Jäger Roshi, for his warm support, which always uplifted me and inspired me with confidence.

Fumon S. Nakagawa Roshi taught me to appreciate an authentic spiritual tradition. For me, he has come to represent exemplary modesty.

I am also extremely grateful to my present masters and teachers not mentioned here.

My dear research partners and mentors, Prof. Dr. med. Marius K. Nickel, Bad Aussee, University of Graz/Austria, and Prof. Dr. med. Thomas Loew, University of Regensburg/Germany promoted me selflessly and patiently in the scientific world. With them, I share my love for therapeutic relationship work.

My companions, friends and peers I would like to thank very warmly for their contributions to the development of AwareAidOn – let me acknowledge them in the order in which they became involved:

I give special thanks to my wife, Roberta. She chaperoned my work related to AwareAidOn from the very beginning and has always been a benevolent – while at the same time truth-loving – and indispensable dialog partner. Last but not least she also consented to shouldering the tremendous financial burden involved in the development costs together with me.

In the early stages, the sympathetic exchange I had with Max Straub, who is a spiritual teacher, therapist and longtime companion of Fumon S. Nakagawa Roshi. It was his spontaneous statement that AwareAidOn might be a „valuable help for many“ which significantly encouraged me to launch the project. It was also him who pointed out the affinity of the project with spiritual traditions, and with Zen in particular.

Prof. Dr. med. Guido Frank, a psychotherapist and brain researcher from Denver/US and I have been connected via a research co-operation for some time. I would like to acknowledge Guido

for the „validations“ he provided me with in an absolutely trusting, warm atmosphere and helped me adjust my orientation, and for his encouragement as well as his input on brain research findings and last but not least for proofreading.

Michael Weber was the one who programmed the first trial versions of AwareAidOn, thus enabling me to experiment with them. He untiringly kept programming numerous modifications, extensions, corrections etc. His wife provided me with an instrumental tool helping me to interpret my observations depending on the level of progress achieved over the course of the exercises.

Bruno Seher, a deeply upright judge and contemplation teacher, was kind enough to check the technical and linguistic accuracy of the manuscript. Most of all, however, he made decisive contributions to the design of the device.

Bernhard Kreuzer, a sound engineer and musician from P&P Studios Regensburg recorded my “sound interpretations”. Recordings with him have been a pleasure, and I particularly enjoyed his sensitive responses to the sound events.

Dr. Ulrich Ott, a German mindfulness/meditation expert, has been doing years of scientific research on the process of attention regulation during meditation – which is exactly the level I found to be impacted by AwareAidOn. His spontaneous interest as well as his tremendous cooperativeness and cordial openness have been a great source of support and inspiration for me. I owe him numerous relevant pieces of information related to meditation practice and research, as well as both critical and favourable comments, suggestions for improvement and a fruitful spontaneous exchange of opinions. Dr. Ott and I fully concur in saying that the development of mindfulness as a skill and learning process has previously been completely ignored in research, although it is of paramount importance for practitioners. Last but not least I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ott for assisting me with writing this manual and for drawing up the foreword.

I thank my psychotherapists in training, my clients, my patients; I thank the spiritually oriented practitioners with longstanding meditation experience for having the great openness to try AwareAidOn in practice and whose feedback has been indispensable for me. I have the greatest respect for them all.

Once I was fully convinced that practitioners would benefit from my invention and once my ideas about the concrete design of AwareAidOn had reached maturity, I commissioned Gefasoft GmbH Regensburg with its programming. Harald Grünbauer, Christian Schindlbeck and Andreas Fischer then took on the state-of-the-art final realization of the AwareAidOn programs.

My special thanks goes to Fumon Nakagawa Roshi, Eisenbuch/Bavaria, Germany, whom I appreciate very much. I found the profound and warm conversation I had with him very enriching. I am exceptionally happy that he wrote the present foreword to this book. Last, but not least, I thank him for his generous gift of making the everyday sounds from his Zen monastery available.

1 History and foreword

Perhaps it might be interesting for some of you to learn something about how AwareAidOn happened to be created. The key was an experience I had during a meditation exercise:

I became aware that I managed to bring myself back to the exercise again and again with the utmost effort of will, and yet my willpower and concentration were powerless against the overwhelming pull towards fatigue and trance. Suddenly, an inner knowledge surfaced which made me understand that exactly at this moment I would need some external help, namely in the form of the sound of a singing bowl which would vitalize me. It was also clear to me in this moment that I needed a type of help which was not yet available. And this triggered an inner process which led me to develop the AwareAidOn.

What turned out to be inspiring for me in the subsequent period were meditative chores (gardening, cleaning, sweeping etc.) in a Ridhwan training similar to the ones practiced in Zen, when Ridhwan teachers boosted the participants' mindfulness by striking singing bowls unexpectedly again and again.

Another stimulus for me was a visual representation of the process of mindfulness by Lammers & Stiglmayr (2004). It was embedded in the context of mindfulness exercises representing the „moments of mindfulness“ alternating with „moments of distracting/judgemental thoughts“. I was processing all that, and later, when I was in a semi-somnolent state, it all combined to become something which then resulted in the initial tentative design of AwareAidOn. Many more development steps were to follow, but this was the beginning.

Then a training course in the profoundly philanthropic therapeutic approach designed by Peter Levine (1998) definitely opened my perception for whatever *necessary and appropriate external*

help (which he calls a „resource“) might be available. For me, there is a connection between this attitude and my AwareAidOn philosophy on one hand, and the following story on the other:

My son was 4 ½ years old when he wanted to learn how to swim. He was the youngest kid in a swimming class with probably the best swimming instructor in Regensburg.

At the beginning, the children were provided with many, many swimming props: swim discs to be fastened around their upper arms, plus a „swimming noodle“ which you can push ahead and hold on to, and also a so-called „rocket“ which got strapped around the child’s body – all these props were meant to ensure that no child would drown. The swimming instructor was convinced that in view of the many other swimming aids, two swim discs would be enough. My son, however, really was just very little and scared of water, so he demanded the highest number of swim discs available, namely three on each upper arm. Without this massive support, he refused to swim and even wanted to stop attending the swimming lessons completely. The instructor, too, was inclined to terminate, since he felt that a child as anxious as my son would never be able to learn to swim. I got in touch with the instructor and managed to convince him that initially he would allow my son to use all the swimming aids available, including three swim discs per arm. During the very next swimming class, my son was totally relaxed and began to imitate the swimming movements demonstrated by his instructor. He deliberately began to take off more and more swimming aids, deciding for himself from when on he needed less of them and reducing their number accordingly. After 15 lessons, the training was over. My son was not the only one who was happy about this: his instructor, too, beamed and was elated, visibly proud to witness my son’s success, which was also his own. As for the other children, only those aged eight or nine were able to swim without any props when the course was over the way my son did.

Reading this manual will require some basic knowledge about mindfulness or/and meditation. I recommend you to read books on these subjects, e. g those by Jack Kornfield (2005) or/and Thich Nhat Hanh (2005).

Applying AwareAidOn requires instruction/facilitation/treatment by a teacher/master/therapist/psychotherapist/medical doctor authorized/qualified to offer mindfulness/meditation training.

In the meantime, as you might be aware, there are not only many different spiritual traditions in which mindfulness/meditation exercises play a major role, but also an abundance of Fülle spiritual, medical/psychotherapeutic and educational approaches (cf. 6.1). AwareAidOn can be used in all these cases, it is a neutral „tool“ so to speak. My recommendation would be for you to apply it with love for yourselves.

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