

The Gift of Being Mindful

Mindfulness is an ancient practice. It is a simple and profound practice; it requires a person to believe in nothing other than the value of their own life. Mindfulness teaches a person to view whatever is happening in life disengaged from habitual narratives and free of mental constructs. It is sometimes called “bare attention”. Most often it is initially taught as a meditation practice; our minds need “practice” quieting down and learning to be still. Then as one begins to experience some calm, the practice of mindfulness can be extended out into whatever aspect of life one chooses.

Experiment with the following exercises:

(1) Take a few moments and close your eyes: What do you hear? Try to hear the sounds without attaching thoughts to hearing them. Notice your tendency to identify the sounds and describe them to yourself perhaps even qualify them as pleasant or unpleasant. Focus on your breathing for three deep, slow breaths and then try to just listen again. Do you notice a difference? You may find it a bit easier to just listen without the inner commentary.

(2) As you sit down to eat, try make it in a quiet place. Take three deep breaths and then begin to eat. Bring your attention to the smells and textures of your food. Bring the food to your mouth and chew it slowly, savor it. Put your fork down while you chew noticing the tendency to be ready to go for the next bite while you are chewing.

This is the practice of mindfulness. It is so simple but it can have profound and deep implications for our lives. It enables us to experience our life with all its beauty, love, joy, pain, disappointment and boredom. People who have learned mindfulness to help cope with devastating pain or illness report before all they could see was the pain and their suffering until mindfulness practice, moment to moment awareness, showed them that there were times in the day when they had no pain or the pain was more bearable. By being able to be more fully aware of those times of respite, they experienced an ameliorating effect on the rest of their day. They began to see how their thoughts and ideas about their pain gave it strength. Mindfulness does not encourage you to escape from unpleasantness and move toward something pleasant, it teaches you to ground yourself and be aware no matter what comes your way. Mindfulness supports response rather than reaction.

Mindfulness of sounds can be extended to listening with attention and carefully choosing our words when we speak; mindfulness of eating can be extended into issues of food choices or the amount we eat

Mindfulness is a practice of paying attention. The value of mindfulness is realized through its practice. Mindfulness only costs us our intention to be present for our life regardless of what manifests itself.

The benefits of mindfulness are proven. Research studies on mindfulness have demonstrated positive outcomes for symptoms associated with stress, chronic pain, anxiety disorders, psoriasis, menopause, and depression. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapies have been developed. Mindfulness programs have been developed for corporations, schools, prisons, inner city residents and medical students. Numerous studies are underway to further evaluate the impact mindfulness can have on a variety of physical and mental health issues.

You can begin to incorporate the practice of mindfulness into your life right now, in this moment. There are classes available in many areas to support your commitment to make mindfulness a part of your life. You only have to choose to begin.....

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