



Mindfulness



One breath at a time.

Story

“An old man in Calcutta would walk to get water from a well every day. He’d carry a clay pot and lower it by hand slowly, all the way down, careful not to let it hit the sides of the well and break. Once it was full, he’d raise the pot slowly and carefully again. It was a focused, time-consuming act. One day, a traveler noticed the old man engaged in this difficult task. More experienced with mechanics, he showed the old man how to use a pulley system. “This will allow the pot to go straight down quickly,” the traveler explained, “then fill with water and come back up, without hitting the sides. It’s much easier and the pot will be just as full with much less work.” The old man looked at him and said, “I think I’m going to keep doing it the way I always have. **I really have to think about each movement and there’s a great**



deal of care that goes into doing it right. I'd imagine if I were to use the pulley, it would become easy and I might even start thinking about something else while doing it. If I put so little care and time into it, what might the water taste like? It couldn't possibly taste as good."— *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* by Rick Rubin

Introduction

Mindfulness arises in an expanded mental field in such a way that awareness simultaneously embraces and releases the objects of awareness as they flow through the conscious mind.

Mindfulness allows for a discrimination in psyche which is free of judgment . . . and which still allows for the influence of the unconscious to be entertained in consciousness. Mindfulness is not looking for a way "beyond," rather it is a posture which seeks insight within and which allows an openness and availability to unexpected and uninvited unconscious content.

Mindfulness is awareness which is not determined by the directedness of the mind, judgment, as much as it is compelled to attend to the predominant object in the field of awareness. It is the compelling nature of the most predominant object within that field which draws the awareness and thereby the object into consciousness. This is also referred to as *choice-less awareness* or *bare attention*.

Mindfulness then becomes a means by which the conscious and the unconscious are mediated without the necessity of giving up conscious direction to the influence of the unconscious or to lose the influence of the unconscious through conscious judgment. (Dukes, 1995 p. 199)

"Sitting" Practice¹

"We'll begin the sitting practice with a very simple object of awareness, mindfulness of breathing. Assume any posture that is comfortable to you, keeping the back straight, without being stiff or strained. If you are in a cramped or bent-over position,

¹ Goldstein, Joseph. (1976). *The experience of insight: A simple and direct guide to Buddhist meditation*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala.

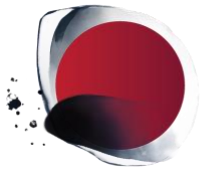


you will more quickly become uncomfortable. You can sit in a chair if you like. The important thing is not to move very often. The eyes should be closed, unless you have been trained in a technique, where they are kept slightly open, and you prefer to do that. Keeping the eyes open is merely a way of putting them someplace and then forgetting about them. Generally, it seems easier if they're closed in a relaxed way. But it doesn't matter.

Awareness of the breath can be practiced in one of two ways. When you breathe in, the abdomen naturally rises or extends and when you breathe out, it falls. Keep your attention on the movement of the abdomen, not imagining, not visualizing anything, just experiencing the sensation of the movement. Don't control or force the breath in any way, merely stay attentive to the rising, falling movement of the abdomen.

The alternative is to be aware of the breath as it goes in and out of the nostrils, keeping the attention in the area around the tip of the nose or upper lip. Maintain the attention on the breath much as a watchman standing at a gate observes people passing in and out. Don't follow the breath all the way down or all the way out; don't control or force the breathing. Simply be aware of the in and out breath as it passes the nostrils. It is helpful in the beginning of practice to make mental notes either of 'rising, falling' or 'in, out.' This aids in keeping the mind on the object.

In the first few minutes see which object appears more clearly, either the rising, falling or the in, out. Then choose one place of attention and stay with it, do not go back and forth. If at times it becomes less distinct, don't switch to the other object thinking it's going to be easier. Once you have decided where you're going to cultivate your attention keep it there and try to remain with it through all the changes. It is sometimes clear, sometimes not, sometimes deep, sometimes



shallow, sometimes long, sometimes short. Remember, it is not a breathing exercise, it is the beginning exercise in mindfulness.” (Goldstein, 1976, pp 4-5)

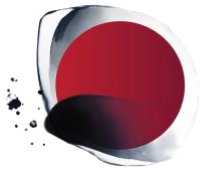
Walking Practice

“The walking practice is done by noticing the lifting, forward and placing movement of the foot in each step. It is helpful to finish one step completely before lifting the other foot. Lifting, moving, placing, lifting, moving, placing.’ It is very simple. Again, it is not an exercise in movement. It is an exercise in mindfulness. Use the movement to develop a careful awareness. In the course of the day, you can expect many changes. Sometimes you may feel like walking more quickly, sometime very slowly. You can take the steps as a single unit, ‘stepping, stepping. Or you may start out walking quickly and, in that same walking meditation, slow down until you are dividing it again into the three parts. Experiment. The essential thing is to be mindful, to be aware of what is happening.

In walking, the hands should remain stationary either behind the back, at the sides, or in front. It’s better to look a little ahead, and not at your feet, in order to avoid being involved in the concept of ‘foot’ arising from the visual contact. All of the attention should be on experiencing the movement, feeling the sensations of the lifting, forward, placing motions.” (Goldstein, 1976, pp. 5-6)

Rationale

In this world of complex relationships, it is safe to say that if relationships are to change or transform, we will have more success practicing and cultivating more choice and change within ourselves than we will have in changing the world around us.



This mindfulness practice is useful for stress reduction, focusing, and is the basis for cultivating qualities of mind such as concentration and compassion. The practice is also useful to establish a baseline for the development of “internal” awareness.

Potential Outcomes

- Increased Capacity for Empathy
- Enhanced ability to self-reflect.
- Supports a more accurate ability to witness and mirror others.
- Supports a foundation for heartfulness and mindfulness.
- Leads to clarity of intention and perception.

Summary

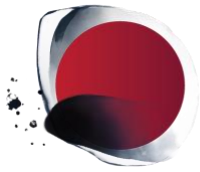
- It is useful to practice several times a day on a schedule or whenever you think about it.
- You may do this exercise with the eyes open or closed.
- This should be an effortless undertaking and perceived more as a gift than an obligation.

Parable of the Strawberry

“A man was wandering in the wilderness when a tiger appeared and began to chase him. Panicked, he fled to the edge of a cliff with the ferocious beast on his heels. Spotting a thorny vine rooted on the rock, he swung himself down over the chasm.

Above, the tiger howled and pawed at the rock; below, he saw the gaping jaws of a second tiger. Suddenly, a white mouse and a black mouse appeared and began to gnaw at the vine, but the man did not notice. He had found a plump, red strawberry growing on the face of the cliff. Holding onto the vine with one hand, he plucked the fruit with the other and popped it into his dry mouth. How sweet it was.”² (Hansen, Lulu)

² This is a parable from the Sutras told by the Indian Patriarch, Bodhidharma (A.D. 4th-6th C.). Bodhidharma is credited with bringing Zen to China in A.D. 527.



References

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Habsen, Lulu. (2004). *Fishing for the moon: And other Zen stories*. NY: Universe Publishing.

Links

Learn to Meditate: Half Day and Full Day retreat schedule:

<https://alifeofproductivity.com/free-template-at-home-meditation-retreat/>

Guided Meditations with Tara Brach:

<https://www.tarabrach.com/guided-meditations/>

Talks on Meditation and Practice

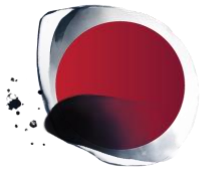
<https://dharmaseed.org/>

Remembering Tulku Thondup Rinpoche

<https://www.shambhala.com/remembering-tulku-thondup-rinpoche/>

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