

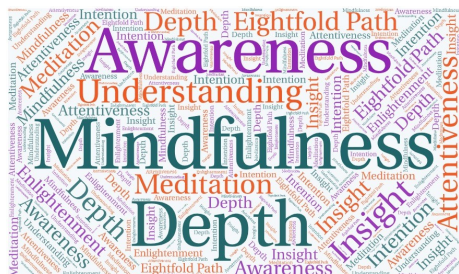


TOUCHSTONES

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Mindfulness



Introduction to the Theme

In his book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Thích Nhất Hạnh shares the following story. "In the United States, I have a close friend named Jim Forest. When I first met him eight years ago, he was working with the Catholic Peace Fellowship. Last winter, Jim came to visit. I usually wash the dishes after we've finished the evening meal, before sitting down and drinking tea with everyone. One night, Jim asked if he might do the dishes. I said, 'Go ahead, but if you wash the dishes you must know the way to wash them.' Jim replied, 'Come on, you think I don't know how to wash the dishes?' I answered, 'There are two

ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes.' Jim was delighted and said, 'I choose the second way—to wash the dishes to wash the dishes.' From then on, Jim knew how to wash the dishes. I transferred the 'responsibility' to him for an entire week.

"If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not 'washing the dishes to wash the dishes.' What's more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact, we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus, we

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Mindfulness & Deepening Connections

The practice of mindfulness in meditation and throughout each day slows us down so that we can attend to all that is happening around us. Being more present to ourselves, we are more present to others, and this is a step toward deepening connections. In place of the judging mind, we find that observing is enough. Relieved of the burden of judging, we seek compassionate understanding. Rather than, "Oh, no!" we often respond to life with, "Ah, yes!" Instead of living on the surface of life, mindfulness equips us to plumb the depths with "full awareness and appropriate attention," according to Thích Nhất Hạnh. He adds, "Our true home is the present moment." Setting aside past and future, we deepen our experience of the present moment and all the connections it involves.

Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>

Wisdom Story

Which Gift Will You Offer?

Sarah Conover & Valerie Wahl, adapted

One day, the Buddha and a large following of monks and nuns were passing through a village. The Buddha chose a large shade tree to sit beneath so the group could rest a while out of the heat.



For a time, he sat in meditation going deep into himself as he sought to still and clear his mind. Slowly, he became more and more relaxed and his followers saw the change on his face. When he opened his eyes, he looked around and carefully took in the details around him: the fragrance of the blossoms on the tree, the breeze providing some relief from the heat of the sun, the faces of the many villagers who had heard about a visiting teacher and had gathered to hear him, the isolated trees and the simple dwellings of the villagers in the distance, and, finally, the mountains rising in the east beyond the fields where the villagers grew vegetables. Out of this mindfulness, the Buddha began to teach. As he spoke, the people became quiet, wanting to hear every word.

One surly young man stood to the side, watching, as the crowd grew larger and larger. To him, it seemed that there were too many people traveling from the

(Continued on page 2)

Deepening Connections

Reflect Goodness

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

city to his village, and each had something to sell or teach. Impatient with the bulging crowd of monks and villagers, he shouted at the Buddha, "Go away! You just want to take advantage of us! You teachers come here to say a few pretty words and then ask for food and money!"

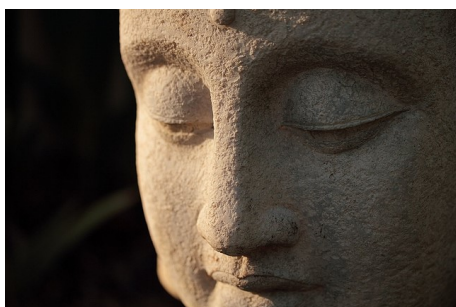
The Buddha was unruffled by these insults. He remained calm, exuding a feeling of loving-kindness. He politely requested that the man come forward. Then he asked, "Young sir, if you purchased a lovely gift for someone, but that person did not accept the gift, to whom does the gift then belong?"

The odd question took the young man by surprise. "I guess the gift would still be mine because I was the one who bought it."

"Exactly so," replied the Buddha. "Now, you have just cursed me and been angry with me. But if I do not accept your curses, if I do not get insulted and angry in return, these curses will fall back upon you—the same as the gift returning to its owner."

The young man clasped his hands together and slowly bowed to the Buddha. It was an acknowledgement that a valuable lesson had been learned. And so the Buddha concluded for all to hear, "As a mirror reflects an object, as a still lake reflects the sky: take care that what you speak or act is for good. For goodness will always cast back goodness and harm will always cast back harm." Because of this, practice mindfulness in all that you do so that your reflection is the one that you intend.

Source: Conover, Sarah and Wahle, Valerie. *Anger in Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents*. Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000.



Leaf in the Zephyr

Seeing Truly

Annie Dillard

...Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won't see it. ...I have to maintain in my head a running description of the present.... When I see this way, I analyze and pry. I hurl over logs and roll away stones; I study the bank a square foot at a time....

But there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. ...The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens....

...One evening last summer at Tinker Creek; the sun was low in the sky.... I was sitting on the sycamore log bridge with the sunset at my back, watching the shiners the size of minnows who were feeding..., one fish, then another, turned for a split second and flash! the sun shot out from its silver side. ...It was always just happening somewhere else...so I blurred my eyes and gazed towards the brim of my hat and saw a new world. I saw the pale white circles roll up ... like the world's turning, ...and I saw the linear flashes, gleaming silver, like stars being born ...down a rolling scroll of time. ... I filled up like a new wineskin. I breathed an air like light; I saw a light like water. I was the lip of a fountain, the creek filled forever; I was ether, the



leaf in the zephyr; I was flesh-flake, feather, bone. When I see this way, I see truly.

Source: Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York, Bantam Books, 1975.

Delicious Strawberry

Right Mindfulness

Sylvia Boorstein

Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of present experience. It isn't more complicated than that. ...There are three ways ...to understand ... mindfulness.

The first way is to see how it leads to wisdom. As a person is increasingly able to stay alert and balanced from moment to moment, the fundamental truths of life experience will present themselves as insights. As insight grows, ...the habitual tendency of the mind to continue to cling to what is essentially ungraspable diminishes, and suffering lessens.

The second way to understand how practice works is that the very practice itself deconditions the mind from its habitual pattern of running from discomfort. One sits ...hour after hour, practicing remaining calm and alert through the whole range of body and mind states that present themselves—all the while not doing anything to change experience but rather discovering that experience is bearable. ...The practice ...is an antidote to the ...flurried reaction of the mind....

The third way is ...mindfulness practice ...as freedom.... Any moment of clarity undisturbed by ...rejecting or desiring, is a moment of freedom. ...



A monk, chased by a tiger ...leaps off the cliff, grasping a vine that has grown over the edge. Below him is a long drop to certain death, above him is the snarling tiger. ...A mouse begins gnawing at the vine above him. His position is one of utter precariousness. Growing out of the cliff in front of him is a wild strawberry, which he picks, eats, and says, "This strawberry is delicious." Source: Boorstein, Sylvia. *It's Easier Than You Think: The Buddhist Way to Happiness*. NY, HarperCollins, 1997.

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "Treat every-one you meet as if they were you." Doug Dillon



Day 2: "Patience has all the time it needs." Allan Lokos

Day 3: "Most of us take for granted that time flies, meaning that it passes too quickly. But in the mindful state, time doesn't really pass at all. There is only a single instant of time that keeps renewing itself over and over with infinite variety." Deepak Chopra

Day 4: "Few of us ever live in the present. We are forever anticipating what is to come or remembering what has gone." Louis L'Amour

Day 5: "In this moment, there is plenty of time. In this moment, you are precisely as you should be. In this moment, there is infinite possibility." Victoria Moran

Day 6: "Life is a dance. Mindfulness is witnessing that dance." Amit Ray

Day 7: "Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't)." James Baraz

Day 8: "Don't let a day go by without asking who you are... each time you let a new ingredient to enter your awareness." Deepak Chopra

Day 9: "Meditation and mindfulness are tools for working with the mind, but where they have led me is to a blossoming of the heart." Narissa Doumani

Day 10: "It stands to reason that anyone who learns to live well will die well. The skills are the same: being present in the moment, and humble, and brave, and keeping a sense of humor." Victoria Moran

Day 11: "Start living right here, in each present moment. When we stop dwelling on the past or worrying about the future, we're open to rich sources of information we've been missing out on—information that can keep us out of the downward spiral and poised for a richer life." Mark Williams

Day 12: "Like a child standing in a beautiful park with his eyes shut tight, there's no need to imagine trees, flowers, deer, birds, and sky; we merely need to open our eyes and realize what is already here, who we already are—as soon as we stop pretending, we're small or unholy." Bo Lozoff

Day 13: "Eventually it will become quiet enough so that you can simply watch the heart begin to react, and let go before the mind starts. At some point in the journey, it all becomes heart, not mind." Michael Singer

Day 14: "Mindfulness meditation doesn't change life. Life remains as fragile and unpredictable as ever. Meditation changes the heart's capacity to accept life as it is. It teaches the heart to be more accommodating, not by beating it into submission, but by making it clear that accommodation is a gratifying choice." Sylvia Boorstein



Day 15: "Compassion is not complete if it does not include oneself." Allan Lokos

Day 16: "...it is often more difficult to remember to be mindful than to be mindful itself." Donald Rothberg

Day 17: "Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet." Thích Nhất Hạnh

Day 18: "No ideals. No illusions. Just reality—but more perfect than you've ever imagined. That's what being mindful and living in the present means." Lidiya K.

Day 19: "Mindfulness is a way of befriending ourselves and our experience." Jon Kabat-Zinn

Day 20: "You are your reality. You are the main individual, who can raise your mindfulness beyond the natural state of being. You are the main person, who can

go into yourself, to know the real 'you.' Knowing the real 'you' is the best way to live in the present moment. That is enlightenment, what we call reality." Gladys Adevey

Day 21: "Mindfulness is intimacy with all things." Jeffrey A. White

Day 22: "It starts with a single breath and the present moment, but where it takes you is into the vast radiance of your true nature, into a magical, spacious life." Narissa Doumani

Day 23: "The mind which is reluctant to change or alter is 'ME and I.' The mind which is ready to get empty and altered is 'BUDDHA.'" Aditya Ajmera

Day 24: "Meditation is to be aware of what is going on: in your body, in your feelings, in your mind, and in the world." Thích Nhất Hạnh

Day 25: "With 70,000 thoughts a day and 95% of our activity controlled by the subconscious mind, no wonder that it feels as though we are asleep most of the time. To awake, we need to train ...Mindfulness." Natasa Pantovic Nait

Day 26: "Mindfulness is not a mechanical process. It is developing a very gentle, kind, and creative awareness to the present moment." Amit Ray

Day 27: "Meditation is the art of silencing the mind so that you may hear the inklings of the Soul." Manprit Kaur

Day 28: "The fact is inner peace isn't something that comes when you finally paint the whole house a nice shade of cream and start drinking herbal tea. Inner peace is something that is shaped by the wisdom that 'this too shall pass' and is fired in the kiln of self-knowledge...." Tanmia Ahsan

Day 29: "Even just taking 20 seconds to truly appreciate your surroundings makes a world of difference." Russell Eric Dobda

Day 30: "The whole present moment was a celebration; it always had been; all I needed was fresh eyes to see it." Narissa Doumani

Day 31: "This isn't just 'another day, another dollar.' It's more like 'another day, another miracle.'" Victoria Moran



Faith and Theology Shut Up

Mindfulness for a More Peaceful Mind

Rev. James Ishmael Ford

Perhaps you're stressed. No doubt this is the age of stress. Fortunately, there are many things you can do about it. Among them, a number of styles of meditation will help to slow things down, give you a bit of space, a moment of calm in the storm. There sure seem to be a lot of storms that need calming. So, it's natural that many are turning to meditation as a significant help toward mental and physical well-being.

...Whatever the reason we take up meditation, what I've found is that when we stop and look, step away from our assumptions just for a moment, and take up the spiritual discipline of practice, things do happen. ...An old and dear friend summarized this, observing how the cultivation of a "peaceful mind can blossom into a profound mind."

...Here's what I have to offer: ... **Sit down. Shut up. Pay attention.** These are the points that allow the synergies to happen. As the modern Chinese master Sheng Yen said, "As the mind becomes clearer, it becomes more empty and calm, and as it becomes more empty and calm, it grows clearer." ...

Sit Down

...True meditation. ... starts by taking our place, by sitting down. Just sit. If you can hold your body upright it is better. You can sit on the floor, on a pillow, or on a chair. Whichever you chose, it helps to have your bottom a bit higher than your knees. This establishes a triangular base that supports your torso. Pushing the small of the back slightly forward and holding the shoulders slightly back helps create that upright position. Sitting this way, you can immediately feel your lungs opening up and each breath invigorating your body.

Place your hands in your lap. In Zen, we like to sit with our eyes open. Many traditions prefer to close the eyes. Experiment a little. Find what seems to

work best for you. Personally, I like to see where I'm going.

For the most part, we are running a steady commentary on life. We're judging, we're refining, we're planning, we're regretting. We tend to run tape loops around anger or resentment, around desire and wanting, around how we think things are or are supposed to be. What if we ...just shut up?

...The invitation here is not to put a complete stop to our thoughts, whether they're those old tape loops we run over and over, or more creative and possibly even useful thoughts. Truth is, stopping all thought is a biological impossibility. But we can slow it all down. We can stop our thoughts and feelings from grabbing us by the throat.

Shutting up is the invitation.

Just be quiet.

Pay Attention

But pay attention to what? Our minds can wander, and wildly. We plan and we regret; we wish for something else. We rarely are simply present. So, how to deal with it?

Here's a start. Take five breath cycles, putting a number on each inhalation and exhalation, counting one as you inhale, two as you exhale and so on to ten. The invitation here is to notice. When you don't notice—and realize you don't notice—return to one. Don't blame yourself. Just return to one. Don't blame something else. Return to one. Just notice. Just pay attention.

Or you allow your attention to ride on the natural breathing without counting.

Or you can just pay attention.

Many years ago, there was an American who made his fortune doing business in East Asia. Financially comfortable, he decided to retire and to enjoy the fruits of his labors. Along the way he'd become fascinated with jade, and decided to learn all there was to know about it.

He hired the foremost authority on the subject, who instructed him to come to her home once a week for a tutorial. As

he arrived on the first day, he was greeted and given some tea. Then the man was handed a large piece of jade, and with that, the tutor disappeared for an hour. When the tutor returned, she claimed the jade, thanked the patron for his time, and told him his next appointment was scheduled for the same time the following week. The man wasn't sure what to make of this experience, but he'd learned patience in his years in business, and deferred for the time being to the reputation of his tutor.

Sure enough, the same thing happened again the next week. This time the patron was less willing to defer, but he restrained himself, and came back for a third time. And then a fourth time. Each visit repeated itself exactly: some tea, some small talk, the piece of jade was put into his hand, and the tutor left for an hour.

Finally, after many weeks, he was once again handed the jade and the tutor departed. At the end of that hour, he couldn't contain himself any longer. Everything that had been boiling within him burst forth when the tutor returned. "I have no idea what you think you're doing! But I'm no fool. You've just been wasting my time and my money. And now, to add insult to injury, this time you put a piece of fake jade into my hand." And he was right—it was fake.

Just pay attention.



Perhaps you're stressed. Perhaps you have some burning question about life and death. Perhaps you intuit there is something more to all this than you've been told. Sit down. Shut up. Pay attention. You never know when it will reveal what is true and what is fake.

Source: <http://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-meditate-mindfulness-for-a-more-peaceful-mind-by-james-ishmael-ford/>

Sitting Still Like a Frog

The book, *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)* by Eline Snel, is a wonderful resource to teach mindfulness practices to children as young as four years old. She chose a frog because a frog can sit very still, but when it gets agitated it can jump very far. In addition, if you look at a frog it is easy to see it breathing. And paying attention to our breathing is a core mindfulness practice. Finally, frogs pay attention to their surroundings, without constantly reacting.

Snel describes what mindfulness is and how mindfulness-based practices can help children calm down, focus, fall asleep more easily, manage anger, and become more patient and aware.

As an example, the exercise, “the weather forecast,” helps children learn how to give words to their inner “weather.” Like the weather outside, they learn that their inner weather will change on its own. The point is for them to become aware of and accept their feelings as they give names to the “weather” inside. By being aware of this weather, they learn more about accepting their feelings, even if they are unpleasant. One review noted that these exercises remind children and parents alike “just how easily thoughts can move us off our lily pads.”



The 112-page (2013 edition only) comes with a sixty-minute CD of guided meditations read by Myla Kabat-Zinn, co-author of *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*. The book is published by Shambhala. Snel published an activity book in 2019 with 75 mindfulness games under the same title.



Family Activity: Mindfulness Activities for Children

Annaka Harris, author of the children’s book, *I Wonder* and a volunteer teacher for *Inner Kids*, offers three mindfulness exercises for children ages six to ten. 1. Friendly Wishes, 2. Mindful Hearing & 3. Mindful Breathing

Her guided meditations are recorded on her web site at <https://annakaharris.com/mindful-breathing/>

Family Activity: Focus on Mindfulness

Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of the book, *The Mindful Child*, offers several audio resources about mindfulness for children <https://www.susankaisergreenland.com/mindful-games-listen>

Greenland presents her approach to teaching mindfulness in this TED Talk, *Teaching the ABCs of Attention, Balance and Compassion* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpMvTTIr2p4&t=316s> (17:03)

In addition to the book above, *The Mindful Child*, parents may also want to review the journal article, *Teaching Mindfulness to Children*, in a 2008 edition of *Gestalt Review*, by Karen Hooker and Iris Fodor. While the first half of the article is directed to practitioners and teachers, the second half offers a number of mindfulness exercises for children. Go to <http://www.dririsfodor.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/FodorHooker-Mindfulness-to-Children.pdf>

The Shadow Side of Mindfulness

David R. Loy

Suddenly the mindfulness movement has become mainstream, making its way into schools, corporations, prisons, and government agencies including the military. The media now regularly cite scientific studies that report on the numerous health benefits of mindfulness meditation....

These are beneficial and promising developments—yet they have a shadow, perhaps most evident in some of the ways that corporate cultures have embraced the practice. Some Buddhists have celebrated the success of the mindfulness movement as the “Trojan horse” that is helping Buddhism to infiltrate and transform modern society, but, if that metaphor is apt, it is not yet clear which is the horse and which is Troy.

...Proponents of mindfulness training often ignore or de-emphasize its Buddhist roots.... While a stripped-down, secularized approach — sometimes disparaged as “McMindfulness” — often makes it more palatable to the business world, decontextualizing mindfulness from its original, liberative and transformative purpose, including its foundation in social ethics, can lose sight of why it is so important. Rather than mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the “three poisons” that the Buddha identified—the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will, and delusion—it is sometimes refashioned into a technique that can indirectly reinforce those roots.

...Media portrays mindfulness in terms of stress reduction and attention-enhancement, yet mindfulness ...is a *distinct quality of attention* that depends upon... the nature of one’s thoughts, speech, and actions; one’s way of making a living; and one’s efforts to avoid unwholesome and unskillful behaviors, while developing those that are conducive to wise action, social harmony, and compassion. Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/27818>

Empty your bowl of yesterday's rice

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life.”

In mindfulness, the depth of time is revealed and experienced if and when we approach life with what the Buddhists call beginner's mind. The purpose of beginner's mind is to bring about a piercing clarity as we set aside assumptions, opinions, and prejudices, even as we set aside so-called facts. A story from the Buddhist tradition illustrates this.

One day an important man, a man used to command and obedience came to visit the master. “I have come today to have you teach me about Zen. Open my mind to enlightenment.” The tone of the important man's voice was one used to getting his own way.

The Zen master smiled and said that they should discuss the matter over a cup of tea. When the tea was served the master poured his visitor a cup. He poured and he poured, and the tea rose to the rim and began to spill over the table and finally onto the robes of the wealthy man. Finally the visitor shouted, “Enough. You are spilling the tea all over. Can't you see the cup is full?”

The master stopped pouring and smiled at his guest. “You are like this tea cup, so full that nothing more can be added. Come back to me when the cup is empty. Come back to me with an empty mind, a beginner's mind.”

Come back when the cup is empty. Come back when you have learned how to see. Come back with a beginner's mind. The personal physician to His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said, “Empty your



bowl of yesterday's rice.” When you do this, you let go of your perceptions and assumptions and allow yourself to look at life with new eyes and a beginner's mind.

For M. Scott Peck, the work of attention is a way of defining love. He wrote that love “is work or courage directed toward the nurture of our own or another's spiritual growth.” To pay atten-

tion is to listen deeply to another, to be mindful. If we are really present, then we are deeply connected in the moment without a thought of past or future, without a thought to distract us or call us away.

Sometimes we are forced to pay attention. This can happen when all the distractions are stripped away. This is what happened to David Abram, an anthropologist, in 1985. Living on Long Island, he, along with other inhabitants, rode out a strong hurricane that left roads littered with fallen trees, downed power lines, and interrupted telephone service. People could not drive their cars and were forced to walk to a store or other destination. Of the experience he wrote, “The rhythms of the crickets and birdsong became clearly audible. Flocks were migrating south for the winter, and many of us found ourselves simply listening, with new and childlike curiosity, to the ripples of song in the still-standing trees and the fields.

“And at night the sky was studded with stars! Many children, their eyes no longer blocked by the glare of houselights and streetlamps, saw the Milky Way for the first time, and were astonished. For those few days and nights our town became a community aware of its place in the cosmos. Even our noses seemed to come awake, the fresh smells from the ocean [were] somehow more vibrant and salty.

“The breakdown of ...technologies had forced a return to our senses.... We suddenly found ourselves inhabiting a sensuous world that had been waiting ...at the very fringes of our awareness—an intimate terrain infused by birdsong, salt spray, and the light of distant stars.”

The hurricane had made people mindful as they slowed down. Antoine de St. Exupéry asks, “What are you worth when motionless?” Could it be in those moments, that your worth is immeasurable? In truth, the purpose of life is not to go faster, but deeper. This is what the Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh means by the “miracle of mindfulness.” It is by going slower, by being mindful, by expanding the present moment that we are able to go deeper.

You're Right!

Choose Mindfulness

Jack Kornfield

Great spiritual traditions in every age offer many vehicles for awakening. ...Each practice brings us into the present with a clearer, more receptive, more honest state of consciousness, but we must choose.

...Two disciples of a master got into an argument about the right way to practice. As they could not resolve their conflict, they went to their master, who was sitting among a group of other students. ...The first talked about the path of effort. He said, “Master, is it not true that we must make a full effort to abandon our old habits and unconscious ways? We must make great effort to speak honestly, be mindful and present. Spiritual life does not happen by accident,” he said, “but only by giving our wholehearted effort to it.” The master replied, “You're right.”

The second student was upset and said, “But master, isn't the true spiritual path one of letting go, of surrender, of allowing the Tao, the divine to show itself?” He continued, “It is not through our effort that we progress, our effort is only based on our grasping and ego. The essence of the true spiritual path is to live from the phrase, ‘Not my will but thine.’ Is this not the way?” Again, the master replied, “You're right.”

A third student listening said, “But master, they can't both be right.” The master smiled and said, “And you're right too.”



...There are many ways up the mountain and each of us must choose a practice that feels true to our heart.

Source: Kornfield, Jack. *A Path with Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

Mindful Seeing

The Sky Gazing Meditation

Donald Altman

The *Sky Gazing Meditation* is a way of connecting ...with nature. ...This meditation will help you get centered and refreshed, quieting your busy mind. Follow these five steps for ...5 minutes.



1. First, go outside and find a location that ideally includes a view of a large tree and the sky above or beyond—so that you can easily transition your gaze from the sky to the tree while standing in place. If you can, stand within arm's length of this tree [or] ...close enough to see the details of its bark and leaves. ...

2. To begin, slowly raise your head and cast your gaze out as far as you can into the sky. Visualize releasing or letting go of whatever troubles and worries you have into the expansiveness above you. ...Release all of that into the sky.... ...

3. Place your hands on the tree as you shift your gaze from the sky down to where you connect with the tree. Imagine that your feet are rooted solidly into the earth like the tree. ...Feel your connection with the great cathedral of trees that protect our ecosystem.... ...

4. Now, starting at the bottom of the tree, slowly turn your gaze upward. Pay attention to the smallest details.... Continue to broaden your focus until your gaze reaches the highest branches at the top of the tree.

5. Rest the weary mind as you sense your unity with nature and the wisdom it holds. Appreciate the lessons of the natural world and of the seasons.... Allow yourself to open to these teachings in the ...days ahead. Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/practices/view/27625/the-sky-gazing-meditation>

Our True Home

The Seven Miracles of Mindfulness

Thích Nhất Hạnh

If we bring mindfulness into every aspect of our life, we cannot help but experience life's miracles.

- ♦ **The First Miracle** is to be present and able to touch deeply the miracles of life, like the blue sky, a flower, the smile of a child.
- ♦ **The Second Miracle** is to make the other — the sky, a flower, a child — present also. Then we have the opportunity to see each other deeply.
- ♦ **The Third Miracle** is to nourish the object of your attention with full awareness and appropriate attention.
- ♦ **The Fourth Miracle** is to relieve the suffering of others.
- ♦ **The Fifth Miracle** is looking deeply into the nature of self and others.
- ♦ **The Sixth Miracle** is understanding. If we are mindful of the present moment, we can see deeply and things become clear. With understanding, the desire to relieve suffering and give love will awaken within us.
- ♦ **The Seventh Miracle** is transformation. By practicing Right Mindfulness, we touch the healing and refreshing aspects of life and begin to transform the suffering in ourselves and in the world.



Our true home is the present moment. ...Real life can only be found and touched in the here and now. ...The past is over and the future has not yet arrived. Since the present moment is the only real moment for us, we can always return here to get in touch with the wonders of life.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/18234>

Mindful Healing

Being Broken, Wanting Wholeness

Vidyamala Buch

In modern medicine, the emphasis on finding a cure for whatever is affecting your health is wonderful if your condition can be cured, but it's less well equipped to deal with incurable conditions that bring chronic pain and illness [and disability.]

... [Those who] passively wait... for a cure meant that their lives were, in fact, more diminished than they would have been had they learned to make the best of the situation by adapting to an active life in a wheelchair [or other adaptive aids].

Those of us with chronic conditions ... need strategies to help us live well in the here and now, and many people in medicine and psychology who work in pain management recognize the importance of acceptance in learning to live with pain. Mindfulness can play a vital role in this process. While it might not cure your condition, it can be part of a profound process of healing.

Mindfulness and healing are both concerned with becoming more integrated and whole. Even if you can't be whole physically because of damage, surgery, or disease, you can still experience a healthy and whole relationship between your body and your mind, between yourself and the world. These connections can even be sacred: the words *healing*, *health*, *holy*, and *wholeness* all come from the same etymological root. Wholeness in this sense is the real key to happiness and inner peace.

Integration is another word connected with wholeness and comes from the Latin *integratio*, which means "renewal" or "restoration to wholeness." In my experience, moments of mindful wholeness feel like a homecoming, in which something that I intuitively recognize as healthy and true is restored. ... Mindfulness practice is a journey to wholeness.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/19670>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Mindfulness

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “Feelings, whether of compassion or irritation, should be welcomed, recognized, and treated on an absolutely equal basis; because both are ourselves. The tangerine I am eating is me. The mustard greens I am planting are me. I plant with all my heart and mind. I clean this teapot with the kind of attention I would have were I giving the baby Buddha or Jesus a bath. Nothing should be treated more carefully than anything else. In mindfulness, compassion, irritation, mustard green plant, and teapot are all sacred.” *Thích Nhất Hạnh*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “Common humanity recognizes that suffering and feelings of personal inadequacy are part of the shared human experience—something we all go through

rather than something that happens to ‘me’ alone. Mindfulness: Taking a balanced approach to negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. Mindfulness requires that we not ‘over-identify’ with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negativity.” *Brené Brown*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What does mindfulness mean to you?
2. How do you cultivate it in your life?
3. In contemporary society, what are the challenges to pursuing mindfulness?
4. As you focus on mindfulness, what do you experience in terms of the nature of time and your senses?
5. Do you struggle to live with more mindfulness? Why or Why not?
6. How can you help your mind to turn off the background noise that pulls you into the past or the future and focus on the present?
7. Why would you recommend mindfulness to someone else? Why?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison)

May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.



Scheduled Worrying

Office Hours for Mindfulness

Arnie Kozak

University professors post office hours. ...Faculty do not make themselves available all of the time; often the door is closed so that other work may get done.

When it comes to your mind ...do you give thoughts 24/7 access? Do you worry all throughout the day and even in the middle of the night? Are you constantly on call to your mind?

A benefit of mindfulness practice is developing cognitive boundaries akin to office hours. ...

One tool that I teach people is *scheduled worrying*. Like office hours, a dedicated time is given to worry and kvetching. During this time, you mindfully allow yourself to project into the future, mull over the past, write things down, problem-solve, and dwell on fears and worry about outcomes. And then, when thoughts present themselves with urgency outside of this dedicated time, you can remind them with gentle firmness that office hours are at 3 pm and they'll be dealt with then. Mindfulness practice develops the skills required to set up “inner office hours.” Source:

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/18965>

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