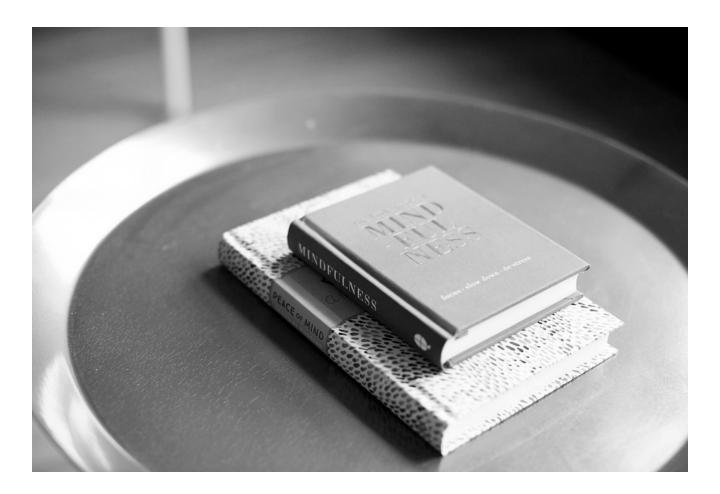


NEWS AND TOOLS FOR HAPPINESS, LOVE, AND WISDOM

THE MINDFULNESS MOVEMENT

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Whilst the historical background to the current popularity of mindfulness practices in their roots goes back to ancient Indian and predominantly Buddhist traditions of attentional practice, today, the practices are largely secular, removed from their philosophic and ethical history. The use of mindfulness in secular settings began with the desire of Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a physician working at Massachusetts General Hospital back in 1980s, to see if mindfulness practices, which he had himself experienced from Buddhist teachings, would be of help to those in his care suffering from chronic pain and stress. To make such practices acceptable in a medical and secular setting Kabat-Zinn had to delink them from any specific or general 'religious' background and so he developed an eight-week course known as Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." It came to public notice with his 1990 book Full Catastrophe Living and a Bill Moyers documentary on PBS, Healing From Within in 1993. Later Zindel Segal, John Teasdale and Mark Williams, who were developing a cognitive behavioural therapy approach to the prevention of relapse in depressive illness, trained with Kabat-Zinn and over some years developed Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), a form of psychotherapy that brings together Western concern with the mind's contents and Eastern focus on its process. MBCT has been shown in clinical trials to be effective for preventing relapse in recurring depression. Such was the benefit both experiential and evidential from these practices that their use became widespread in many different arenas, schools, businesses and other organizations.



The rest of the story is now well known. Success breeds success. Today mindfulness manuals, and even mindfulness colouring books, lead bestseller lists and phone apps promise one-minute mindfulness. There is hardly a self-respecting large company that has not offered its employees mindfulness training. Indeed such trainings are now available for almost any sector of the population - Mindfulness is taught for bankers, for students, for the depressed, for the military, not only after engagement for the relief of post-traumatic stress disorder, but also prior to engagement to enable them to be more focused soldiers. It has come to the point where reference is made to "Mindfulness Lite" or "McMindfulnesss," fast mindfood for everyone. This has led to some serious concerns from the side of the Buddhist community concerning a watering down and weakening of the Dharma; a worry that mindfulness arises from a tradition wherein practice is inseparable from philosophy and an ethical stance, and that any mindfulness divorced from these is not true mindfulness. Much contemporary mindfulness training is presented as "Me Time" in sharp contradiction to its original intention as an opening to "Not Me."

Thus there is a concern that attention must be paid to the *intention* of the practice as well as the actual practice of attention itself, and that merely being concerned with what occurs within the brain is not a sufficient criterion for evaluation. Evan Thompson points out that while mindfulness depends on the brain, it is not

"inside the brain. Certain neural networks may be necessary for mindfulness, but mindfulness itself consists in a whole host of integrated mind-body skills in ethically directed action in the world. It's not a neural network but how you live your life in the world."²

On the scientific side there is an anxiety that the mindfulness bandwagon is rolling onwards supported by insufficient and shallow scientific research, and that popular press reports are ungrounded, which can only result in a subsequent backlash of opinion that could kill useful research and practice. There is also concern that mindfulness might be a way of stealthily promoting Buddhism. Yet, there is no doubt at all, that mindfulness works, that it does help many people, including those who would be deterred from the practices if they thought they bore traces of some "religion."

The concern that the scientifically validated benefits of mindfulness are being overhyped by the popular media, where they're often "supported" by overpositive and unrealistic claims, is one shared by many seasoned mindfulness practitioners. A popular article citing some 20 benefits of meditation, from "reducing loneliness" to increasing grey matter and helping sleep" inspired Catherine Kerr, a neuroscientist and meditation researcher on Brown University's Contemplative Initiative, to post in 2014 on her Facebook page her worries that such unbalanced coverage could only inspire a negative backlash when inevitably such claims come to be seen as overblown. Her comments evoked an enormous response and the resultant research discussion group -Mindfulness and Skillful Action - has become an important rallying point for over 400 prominent academic, scientific and clinical meditation researchers as well as some Buddhists. In an interview with Tricycle magazine, Kerr suggested that the over-positive and uncritical embrace of mindfulness, coupled with the resistance of both scientists and laypeople to acknowledge reports that have advised caution or suggested that many research

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findings are false or questionable, may arise from our ever-present desire for certainty and our aversion to indeterminacy. "Yet," she writes, "somebody who has a clear scientific understanding knows that the evidence base is always mixed." It is ironic and rather intriguing in the light of the Buddhist concern with emptiness and impermanence as opposed to certainty, that the very practice of mindfulness undertaken initially to expose the contingency of our experience, is falling foul of the overwhelming desire for certainty of the human mind.

Kerr suggests that when promoters of mindfulness only focus on its effects on brain mechanism they miss a big part of the story, just as Buddhist critics of mindfulness also miss something important when they attack secularized mindfulness as a violation of Dharma. What they are missing, she suggests, is the experiential dimension of what it is like for those in pain to take MBSR course. The process is not so much about taking away your pain, as about learning how to accept your problem in a new way, about learning to tolerate the uncertainty that is our existential problem. MBSR and its variants help people with this: an answer that should be of comfort to those with a Buddhist outlook. Thus, she concludes that our "tendency to parse the world into competing abstractions – scientific reductionist on the one hand or Dharma purism on the other – may cause us to miss this hard-to-see qualitative shift that may be the true source of the power of mindfulness."

Andrew Olenzki a Buddhist scholar and writer, in an article published in the same magazine, makes a similar point. He is equally grounded in the experiential, though coming from the dharmic



as opposed to the scientific camp. Whilst questioning the intention of mindfulness training in the corporate world to hone a competitive edge, or in the military sphere to make a better combatant, Olenzki suggests that in this age "attention is a rare and precious commodity, even as it is spread around so promiscuously" and that "training in attention skills is an understandably popular program." However he says that the crux of mindfulness training is to be found in the repeated chorus from the Satipatthana Sutta, the locus of meditation training where it states: "One abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world." Such disengagement, he says, is incompatible with corporate or military and many other applications of mindfulness in the contemporary world. "Attending with an unattached attitude that allows us to understand the impermanent, interdependent, and selfless nature of it all is what cuts the attachment and is truly transformative." It is, at the very least, a disengagement from pain and stress and an ability to live with uncertainty that Kerr mentioned. It seems that common ground may be found if we stick to the experiential. A similar point is made in another thoughtful paper by Mindfulness Based Psychology teacher and MBCT therapist Jenny Wilks: "The key question is what is the impact on participants?".7 The gap between the scientific and Buddhist, and the popular and scientific concerns might be overcome if we remain grounded in the embodied experience rather than spinning out into theoretical claims. Indeed the interplay of attention and intention is continuous, arising constantly in all aspects of daily experience.

We must not however, overlook a further concern with the explosion in the popularity of mindfulness, namely how it is taught, and who teaches the teachers. Whilst John Kabat-Zinn was fully aware of the benefits and the difficulties of traditional practices, and those like Jenny Wilks are steeped in traditional as well as contemporary knowledge, this is not always the case. Some trainings are being taught by those without any knowledge of the traditions of mindfulness, without the understanding that these are strong practices that presuppose a level of mental and physical wellbeing. Meditation is without doubt, contraindicated for many. Someone who has experienced the results and the wrecks of this is Dr. Willoughby Britton. Dr. Britton's lab researches the effects of contemplative practices on cognitive, emotional, and physiological aspects of affective disturbances. In what she has termed "the Dark Knight Project," Britton has attempted to document, analyze and publicize some of the oft-overlooked dangers of meditation. She points out that whilst there is a lot of positive data on meditation, no one has been asking whether there are any potential difficulties or adverse effects, and whether some practices may be better or worse suited for some people rather than others. She states that: "Ironically the main delivery system for Buddhist meditation in America is actually medicine and science, not Buddhism." As a result, many people think of meditation only from the perspective of reducing stress and enhancing executive skills such as emotion regulation, attention, and so on.

According to Britton, the widespread popular assumption that meditation exists only for stress reduction and labor productivity, "because that's what Americans value," narrows the scope of scientific research. The only acceptable and fundable research questions become those that promise to deliver the answers we want to hear, such as "Does it promote good relationships? Does it reduce cortisol? Does it help me work harder?" Because studies have shown that meditation does satisfy such interests, the results, she says, are vigorously reported to the public. What are less reported are the cases of those who have in fact experienced negative outcomes from such practices. One has only to read the religious literature regarding the "dark night of the soul," such as its original description by St. John of the Cross or the sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins



O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there.

to know that stages of the journey entail dangers. In the religious quest however, there is an overall aim or intention that transcends any stages, and there are guides to what may be encountered. When encountering a method that is expected to produce nothing but happiness and enhanced productivity, such dangers, not on the brochure, are neither expected nor supported. Dr. Willoughby is bravely addressing this gap, not only in her research but also in practical support for those who have fallen by the wayside. Another excellent interview with her, addressing all the questions discussed above, appeared on the Tricycle website. Her plea is for collaboration

between those who follow the dharma and scientific research, free from contamination of belief or expectation on either side. She states:

"If Buddhists want to have any say, they better stop criticizing and start collaborating, working with instead of just against. Otherwise, they might get left in the dust of the "McMindfulness" movement."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gay Watson gained her PhD in Religious Studies from SOAS, University of London. She also trained as a psychotherapist with the Karuna Institute of Core Process Psychotherapy. She is the author of The Resonance of Emptiness (1998), Beyond Happiness, (2008), A Philosophy of Emptiness (2014) and Attention: Beyond Mindfulness (2017). She lives in Devon, UK, and Marin County, CA. For more information, visit her website at www.gaywatson.com.

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The Gospel of Arrival

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Arrival, arrival, arrival,

The sea discovers the shore.

What more

Could you possibly want from this day?

A ferryboat gently docks,

Your car pulls in my driveway,

The plane locks

Into the jetway

Like an overdue embrace.

Tell your vigilant Aunt Amygdala

To take the afternoon off,

And rent a cabana from the concessionaire.

You receive an arrival.

Smooth and soothe are the same word.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Obermeyer is a grant writer, poet and essayist who lives in Durham, NC. He lived in San Francisco from 2013-2016 and participated in mindfulness programs at Dominican College and Spirit Rock. A stroke survivor, he found writing poetry and establishing a mindfulness practice as essential to recovery. He has three books available on Amazon, including "The LowWire" Meditations on Creative Restoration.





INTIMACY AND MINDFULNESS

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Love yourself. Then forget it.
Then, love the world.

- Mary Oliver

Intimacy is the ability to be in touch with inner experiences — both ours and others'. It is the capacity to directly experience our thoughts and emotions, and to hold these in a space of mindful, loving presence. The origin of the word intimacy is the Latin *intimus*, which means 'innermost' and 'close friend', and most modern definitions refer to a sense of closeness and familiarity. Intimacy, then, begins with developing the capacity to sense into what is happening for us. It is about making friends with ourselves, with what is most true in the depths of our being, and holding this in a loving, gentle way. Following the metaphor of ripples on a pond, once we become intimate with our own inner experience, we can start to sense into the inner experiences of others, and to remain present and unconditionally friendly toward whatever is happening within them.

In The Dance of Intimacy, Harriet Lerner describes intimacy as being able to:

"...talk openly about things that are important to us, that we take a clear position on where we stand on important emotional issues, and that we clarify the limits of what is acceptable and tolerable to us in a relationship. Allowing the other person to do the same means that we can stay emotionally connected to that other party who thinks, feels and believes differently, without needing to change, convince or fix the other."

Being intimate in this way is relatively easy when what we are experiencing is pleasant and when the people around us are being agreeable. But when we are feeling vulnerable or there is conflict, the default tendency is to try to avoid or try to control these experiences. Most people find it hard to remain present and loving when vulnerable or faced with unpleasant experiences.



There are countless ways that we cut off from these experiences. The most common is numbing out with drugs and alcohol. Others distract themselves with food, exercise, pornography, the internet and television. Some people busy themselves with work or projects. Still others attempt to control their internal experiences with positive thinking or intellectualising. And some use blame and anger as ways of directing their attention outward, away from what is hard to be with inside, focusing instead on trying to coerce others, or simply being angry at them.

For the most part, these 'strategies' are neither good nor bad, in the sense that eating, exercise and moderate alcohol consumption can be quite positive things. But when done to excess, they cause problems. Especially when they are done in service of numbing out from, or otherwise avoiding, our vulnerability. When we fall into extremes of feeding or fighting our thoughts and emotions, we set ourselves up for trouble. That is, when we feed the reaction by buying into the story and ruminating, or when we fight against the experience by trying to suppress it, talk ourselves out of it, or negate it in some other way, we create problems for ourselves. What we resist persists, as psychoanalyst C.G. Jung said. Resisting our experiences — or the experiences of those around us — can cause great harm.

The core issue with many of the clients we see in our clinical practices is exactly this. There is some core wound or vulnerability that they don't want to – or don't know how to – be with, and they are caught up in avoidance patterns. These avoidance patterns – whether they be addiction, overwork and burnout, the anxiety that comes with trying to control and predict everything, or some other strategy – become the presenting issue that brings them to therapy in the first place. Indeed, symptoms are generally attempted solutions to other problems. In relationship counselling, we see the same thing: people cut off from their own internal world, lacking intimacy with themselves and therefore incapable of having intimacy with someone else. If we are unaware of what is happening inside us, or unable to remain present and loving when we are, how can we possibly hope to be aware of, and loving toward, what is happening in our partner? It's just not possible.

The path of healing is to sense our way back into what is being avoided, first in ourselves and then in our relationships. Embodiment is the key to intimacy. If we stay in our heads, we can never truly develop intimacy with ourselves or others. We need to find ways of experiencing our own and our partner's wounds and vulnerabilities directly and fully, yet without being overwhelmed. And we need to bring an attitude of unconditional friendliness (self-

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compassion) to our innermost wounds and vulnerabilities. When we are able to do this, our symptoms and relationship issues – which, remember, are caused by the very attempt to avoid our vulnerability – tend to resolve by themselves.

Loving Presence

To do this, we must develop a container of loving presence that is able to hold whatever is experienced without being overwhelmed. Indeed, the fear of being overwhelmed by emotion and somehow annihilated or becoming unable to function, is the reason we develop avoidance strategies in the first place. Getting in touch with something bigger is critical to the healing process. Mindfulness teacher Thich Nhat Hanh says that it is not enough to just suffer — we must also get in touch with something that can contain that suffering. Mindfulness helps us to contact and relax into a sense of something larger, which brings peace. Therefore, another way to think about mindfulness is holding whatever is true in a space of loving presence. A useful metaphor here is to think of the vulnerability or emotion as a drop of ink. If we put it in a shot glass of water, the ink will completely colour the water. But if we put the ink in a lake or ocean, it will be a very different experience. Mindfulness creates this space, which can hold any experience without being changed



by it. And when we start to hold vulnerable parts of ourselves in this space, it becomes important that the water is clean and warm. This is the basis of loving presence.

To illustrate this process, let's meet Jane and Michael. Jane and Michael, both in their twenties, presented for couples counselling, with Jane complaining that Michael worked too much (he was a junior lawyer in a major firm) and was hardly ever home. She felt isolated staying at home every day with their 2-year old

son Jack, and she complained that even when Michael was home, he was emotionally unavailable and absent. Michael complained that Jane was needy and that he didn't understand what she meant by 'unavailable'. He said he recognised that she felt isolated and made a significant effort to spend time with her when he was home on the weekend. He listed a range of activities they did together, such as going out for meals, taking Jack to the park and watching movies together after he had gone to sleep.

Does this situation sound familiar? Perhaps you have experienced it in one of your relationships? Or seen it in someone else? What became immediately apparent, even just watching the way Jane and Michael interacted in the therapy room, was how cut off they actually were from each other. This was obvious even in the subtleties of their body language. Michael thought just spending time with Jane was being intimate, but they were cut off from each other's emotions. This led them to feeling isolated and resentful. And what became obvious throughout therapy was how cut off they were from themselves.

The path to healing their relationship began with healing themselves. Once they were able to acknowledge how afraid they were of being vulnerable, they were able to start letting go of some of their defences. They learned to soften into deeper, more authentic parts of themselves - what Buddhist teacher Pema Chödron calls our "tender soft spot" - and to hold these parts of themselves in a space of loving presence. As they did this, they calmed down and became able to see themselves more clearly. Emotions that had been stuck began to move again. They each recognised their fears and unmet needs and found words to express these directly. And as they saw themselves more clearly, they started to see each other more clearly. Both became aware, for the first time in their relationship, that their partner was a unique being, with their own vulnerabilities and insecurities. They sensed each other's tenderness and innocence, rather than getting caught up in projections and defensiveness. And as a result, the way they related to each other changed fundamentally. Jane recognised Michael's need for space to unwind after a stressful day at work. She started giving him time after he got home so he could relax, rather than placing further demands on him. This required that she soothe her own feelings of loneliness and reactive sense of rejection when Michael wasn't immediately available for her upon walking in the door. In return, Michael found that he started to want to spend time with her and Jack. As he got more in touch with his own tenderness – and less afraid of it – he found he enjoyed the feeling of closeness he experienced with his wife and son. The activities they did together took on a new flavour for both of them, as both genuinely connected with each other.



EXERCISE

Contacting Loving Presence

You will notice from the title of this exercise that it is more about *contacting* loving presence than cultivating it. Take a moment right now to pause and get present. Centre yourself in your body and become aware of your breathing.

Now drop into that space of presence a simple question: "Is it not true that loving presence is already here, right now, in this moment?" Allow yourself to get in touch with the part of you that can allow everything to be as it is. Relax into this experience and allow yourself to enjoy it.

If you have trouble sensing it, this is just a sign that you are not used to touching it. Many of us are so busy trying to predict and control everything in our lives that we never take time to sense the part of us that can allow everything to simply be as it is.

If this is the case for you, try the following. Bring to mind someone whom you feel loving toward, and/or feel loved by. Most relationships are complex and you may have mixed feelings, but focus on the love and the sense of being supported. Really sense this person being in front of you. Picture their face. Sense your heart area and allow any warm, pleasant feelings to expand. Allow this sense of goodwill and love to radiate out to this person. And allow it to radiate back from them, right back into your heart. You may like to place your hand on your heart and sense into this loving presence.

Gradually allow this sense of loving presence to expand and infuse your whole being. Breathe with it and let yourself enjoy it fully. After a while, let go of needing to sense the person in front of you and just rest with the feeling of loving presence. You may like to place your hands over your

heart and feel the warmth and sense of presence that this brings. And it may help to repeat kind wishes to yourself such as "May I be happy", "May I be free from suffering" or "May all beings be happy / free from suffering".

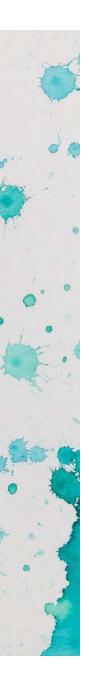
After you have enjoyed this for a while, let go of any words or images. In fact, let go of any intention at all. Simply rest in loving presence.

Notice what it is like to rest in your natural state.

Learning to Love Ourselves

We have deliberately been using the term "ourselves" throughout the book so far. While technically grammatically incorrect, the word speaks to a very important point. Our personalities are comprised of multiple parts. At its most basic, we might recognise in ourselves a part that wants to be active and healthy, and another that would quite happily stay on the couch eating ice cream. Anyone who has quit smoking will know what it is like to have one part that genuinely wants to stop and another that doesn't. In fact, we all have many parts — some loud and expressive and others quiet and receptive. Recognising this simple truth can immediately help us make sense of how our personalities can seem to change over time, depending on how we feel, where we are and who we are with. It also sheds light on how we can at times experience a very real sense of internal conflict, with two parts pulling us in different directions.

To end this war, we need to make friends with, and find a place for, all parts of ourselves. First, we need to be able to recognise the different parts when they show up. All of us identify with certain parts of our personality — for instance parts that are intelligent, charismatic, productive, witty, etc. And we reject other parts — particularly parts that we see as 'negative', such as angry, sad, insecure, vulnerable parts. The family we were raised in and the culture we live in, as well as our own predisposition and life experiences, influence which parts we see as acceptable and which ones we disown or project onto others. To recognise different parts when they show up, it helps to be able to *feel* them. Different parts tend to feel different in our body. Reflect, for instance, on how you feel when you are being productive and energetic and how you feel when you are feeling vulnerable or afraid. As we explored in Chapter 2, being embodied and aware of our physical sensations helps us notice reactivity early, before it takes hold of us. Being aware of our physical sensations also lets us know which part (or parts) of our personality are present. This prevents any one part from running the show unconsciously, which is what causes problems. For instance,



Perspectives on Self-Care

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this *Bulletin*), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

if we have a part that likes recognition and is therefore very high achieving, this can be used skillfully for great benefit. But if it runs the show and we don't realise this is happening, we can burn out.

Being able to know which parts are around, and relating to each with an attitude of genuine acceptance and loving presence, means that we cease the internal battle. We make space for all parts of ourselves and start to feel integrated and whole.

And when we sense different parts of our personality without judgement or reaction, we come to know them fully. We start to see that all parts want something good for us, even if they go about trying to get it in ways that don't work or cause us problems. For instance, many of us contain parts that are fearful of getting hurt. These parts might avoid relationships and can sabotage things or make us run if we start getting too close to someone. But when we really hang out with these parts, we can see they are trying to protect us from pain. As we acknowledge this and give those parts a place, they settle down. They will still alert us when we are getting close to someone — or conversely, when some issue in the relationship has caused a loss of intimacy — but we can then soothe the fearful part with lovingkindness. We can also take note of the wisdom it is offering.

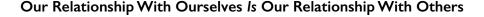
This last point is important. As we have explored, the default setting for most people is to be afraid of their vulnerability and unpleasant emotions, and to deny, hide or try to get rid of them. But this causes a loss of intimacy, an internal battle and we also lose the opportunity to recognise what the emotion is telling us. Take anger, for instance. Many people are afraid of anger and judge it as "bad." They try to hide it and reject this part of themselves when it shows up (which, ironically, is getting angry at the angry part, if we look deeply). But anger has incredible wisdom. Of course, we need to differentiate it from aggression, which except in rare instances like protecting ourselves or others from genuine physical harm, tends to cause problems. But the *emotion* of anger is very wise. It shows us that certain needs aren't being met or boundaries are being violated. And when we are able to sit with it and welcome it as a wise part of ourselves, we have an opportunity to actually inquire into what these needs and boundaries are.

We can do this with all emotions and all parts of our personality. Sensing deeply into ourselves and holding all parts in loving presence is an ongoing practice, but one that is profoundly healing.

In fact, the word "healing" shares the same linguistic roots as "holistic" and "wholeness." So healing, in the true sense of the word, means to be whole. This requires being intimate with all parts of ourselves, on the deepest level. This is what makes mindfulness such a profoundly healing process. Eventually, we become able to hold our partner's parts in a space of loving presence, and experience the joys of true intimacy with another.

Rumi sums this process up perfectly in his poem The Guest House:

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice. meet them at the door laughing and invite them in. Be grateful for whatever comes. because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.



The way we relate to ourselves is the way we relate to others. As you will now hopefully grasp, if we are cut off from or rejecting of certain parts of ourself, we tend to do this to others also. Often we don't even realise we are doing this to ourselves, let alone our loved ones. Just like Jane and Michael, we only experience the result – the lack of intimacy and the conflict that goes with it. Once we realise this truth, we can start to heal our relationship with ourselves. Intimacy is about becoming more ourselves, rather than trying to change ourselves fundamentally in any way. Our true nature, the loving presence that we can contact through mindfulness, is perfect as it is. We

just need to identify with this instead of our default mode reactivity. Mindfulness, lovingkindness and self-compassion all help immensely. So too does a genuine desire to welcome all parts of ourself in loving presence. When we can do this with ourselves, it naturally starts extending out to others in ever-expanding ripples.

EXERCISE

Loving Our Selves And Others

This is an extension of the Contacting Loving Presence exercise above. Take a few moments to relax into (or cultivate, if need be) a sense of loving presence. See if you can get in touch with a part of yourself that is not in opposition to any part of reality. Notice what it is like to simply allow everything to be as it is.

Now, notice how your body is feeling. Simply notice any sensations and allow them to be there. If you notice any tension, just allow that to be there too. Go in a bit deeper and sense any emotions that are around, and again simply notice whatever is there.

Then, sense into what part or parts of you are present right now. Do you notice an energetic, enthusiastic part filled with a desire to go out and do things? Or a tired part that needs some rest and nurturing? Do you feel afraid or vulnerable? Ashamed? Irritated or angry? You may like to place your hand on your heart in a gesture of loving presence, and simply be with whatever is there.

Simply sense into whatever parts are present right now. Allow space for each of them to be there, just as they are. Welcome all parts of yourself. Notice the feeling of wholeness and healing that emerges when you do this.

If you can't clearly sense any parts at all, that's fine. Just rest in loving presence and gently invite any parts that are present to show themselves. In every moment one or more of our parts are present, but if we have neglected to listen to them they can be hard to notice.

Now, bring to mind someone you are close to. Allow this sense of loving presence to radiate out toward them. Hold them in a space of genuine acceptance and love. Notice what that feels like. If you get caught up in anything else, just come back to loving presence.

And then start to sense what part(s) may be present right now for this person. Even if they aren't nearby, you may find that you can start picking up on them and get a sense of what is present in them. Again, if you can't sense this, just rest in a space of loving presence for them and yourself.

You may like to practise this exercise often during the day, until you get familiar with it. It can also be a wonderful exercise to do with your partner or other loved ones, perhaps sitting across from them as you sense into them. You can even open your eyes and gaze into theirs, which tends to deepen the experience even more.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margie Ulbrick is a Relationship Counsellor, Communication Coach and Collaborative Family Lawyer who makes extensive use of Mindfulness skills in her own life and in her practice with clients. She assists people to build happier relationships and when a separation is chosen, to separate well so as to enhance the well being of the entire family and reduce conflict and acrimony. She has published a book *Mindful Relationships* creating genuine connection with ourselves and others, together with Dr Richard Chambers which seeks to enhance connection to self and others and discusses families, parenting, couples and the

workplace. The book starts with our relationship with ourselves and then with others and then eventually fans out to includes our communities and finishes with building a mindful society.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Richard Chambers is a clinical psychologist and mindfulness consultant. He leads a university-wide mindfulness approach at Monash University, teaching students and staff mindfulness to enhance wellbeing and performance. He is also helping a growing number of businesses use mindfulness to enhance wellbeing, productivity and leadership.

Dr. Chambers co-created the free Mindfulness For Wellbeing And Peak Performance online course, which has had over 200,000 users so far, and he helped to develop Smiling Mind, a free smartphone and web app with over 2 million downloads. He is the author of *The Art Of Mindful Origami*, and co-author of *Mindful Learning*, published by Exisle (Australia) and Shambhala (US), and *Mindful Relationships* (Exisle).

Dr. Chambers is actively involved in mindfulness research at Monash University, The University of Melbourne, Orygen Youth Health, La Trobe University, UNSW, The University of Sydney and Charles Darwin University. For more information, see http://www.drrichardchambers.com/.

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SKILLFUL MEANS

Your Skillful Means, sponsored by the Wellspring Institute, is designed to be a comprehensive resource for people interested in personal growth, overcoming inner obstacles, being helpful to others, and expanding consciousness. It includes instructions in everything from common psychological tools for dealing with negative self talk, to physical exercises for opening the body and clearing the mind, to meditation techniques for clarifying inner experience and connecting to deeper aspects of awareness, and much more.

Concentration

Purpose/Effects

One of the hallmarks of modern life is the proliferation of distractions. As media become more pervasive, and media connections more ubiquitous, time away from distractions becomes ever harder to find. Previously, people were content to sit in restaurants, or stand in line, without a television screen to stare at. Now these have become standard. The result of all this, and many other causes, is that people find it increasingly difficult to focus their minds.

Concentration is a necessary human skill. It makes proper thinking possible, increases intelligence, and allows a person to calm down and achieve their goals more effectively. A concentrated mind is like a laser beam, able to use all its powers in a single direction to great effect.

Concentration is critical to many human endeavors. Being able to listen to another person, for example, in a compassionate and connected manner requires being able to shut out distractions. The experience of making love can be greatly enhanced when one is not, for example, thinking about other things.

Concentration allows a person to stop being a "reaction machine" or "robot," simply responding to stimuli, and instead to become more thoughtful, self-directed, and confident.

Method

Summary

Think about one thing. Every time you get distracted, return to that one thing.

Long Version

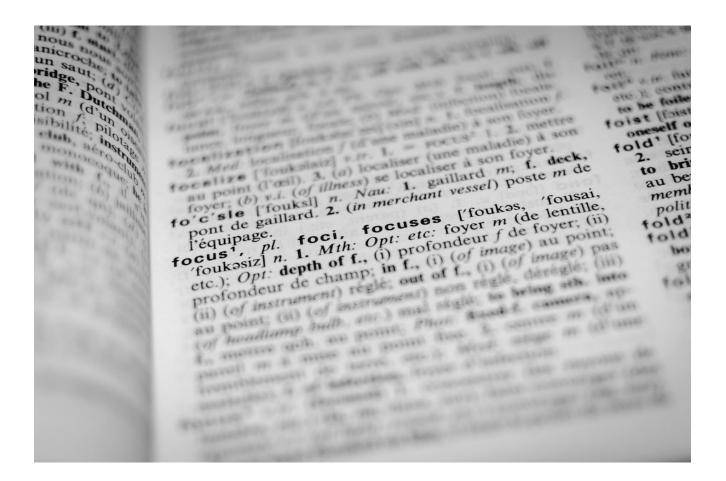
- 1. Find an object on which to concentrate. This can be a physical object, like a pebble or a feather.

 Or it can be a mental object like a particular idea. It could even be, say, your homework.
- Cut off any sources of distraction. These include, but are not limited to, telephones, emails, computers, music, television, and so forth. Turn all of these off during your concentration practice.
- 3. Begin your period of concentration by mentally reminding yourself what you are concentrating on.
- 4. Now begin to concentrate. If your concentration object is an external object, this may mean looking at it. If it is a mental object, then think about it. If it is your homework, then do it now.
- 5. Each time your mind (or eyes) wander from your concentration object, bring it back to the object. It is important to do this very gently and without judgment.
- 6. Repeat this process of coming back to the concentration object for as long as you wish, or until your homework is done.

History

Cultures worldwide have developed concentration practices for both spiritual and practical reasons.

Concentration is called dharana in Hinduism, and samadhi or shamatha in Buddhism. It is considered to be a key skill for meditation.



Cautions

Concentration can at first seem to trigger a lot of anxiety. This is, however, not the fault of the concentration practice. Rather, it happens because many people use distraction to avoid feeling emotions. Then when the distractions are removed, a tremendous amount of ambient, unprocessed emotions (i.e. emotions you are feeling but were unaware of feeling) are present. So it is not the practice of concentration that is causing anxiety, but instead it is the habit of distracting ourselves from our emotions. This may be the root cause of much inability to focus and concentrate. If that is the case, try meditating on emotions.

Notes

Concentration is an interesting thing. It is a very general ability. That means developing concentration in one area will help you concentrate in ALL areas. So, for example, if you learn to concentrate on a particular idea, it not only helps you think about that idea (which would be very limited)

but actually helps you to concentrate on anything, which is very generally useful for everything! It's like lifting weights. It doesn't just make you strong for lifting weights — it makes you strong for anything else you want to do!

Concentration and meditation are not the same thing, although they are related. Meditation (usually) requires concentration, but also requires relaxation or equanimity.

SEE ALSO

Trataka - Eye Gazing

EXTERNAL LINKS

- Hints for Concentration
- In psychology or neurology, concentration is usually referred to as "attention."

Fare Well

May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.