

## **Mindfulness: An Introduction (Part 1 of 2)**

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### **Are we living mindlessly?**

- Do you ever feel like you are missing your life? Driving in the car and you get from point A to point B and you missed it? Or you are with your children but you are not really with them. Our minds jump around like monkeys.
- Do you ever get emotionally flooded? Anxiety or fear or anger comes and swamps you. Maybe you try to problem-solve your way out of it. Why do I feel this way? How do I fix myself? Maybe it feels worse and worse. Or, have you ever been in a hard spot and you have just sat with yourself; completely accepted where you were in that moment. And maybe incredibly, almost miraculously, you felt better.

Mindfulness: Moment-to-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and our sensory engagement with the wider world.

### **Intersection with Christianity**

Emerges out of Eastern Philosophy, in particular Buddhism. Long ancient history. All kinds of intersections with our Christian life (we could take three weeks just to explore the Biblical and theological connections). Just a few connections that I find helpful:

- Jesus says we are to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. (Mark 12:30). Difficult to have a relationship with God through the worries over the past or the fantasies of the future. God, the Ground of All Being, is with us now, moment to moment. God is Reality, and we want to be immersed in Reality.
- Jesus says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). If we are going through our lives mindlessly, with no awareness of our thoughts and emotions, is it possible that we are doing damage to our neighbors and to ourselves? In contrast, can we imagine what it would be like to give your full presence to the people around you? In order to do this, we must learn to be mindful of our own thoughts/emotions/bodily reactions.
- In the Incarnation, God in Christ, assumes human experience. If God honors human experience so profoundly, why wouldn't we?
- Mindfulness engenders gratitude. St. Paul writes: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit." (I Thessalonians 5:16-19).

### **History in the US**

Popularized in the US by Jon Kabat Zinn. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) introduced to a pain clinic at the University of Massachusetts. Now there are 500 centers all over the country. Local connection - Richard Davidson at UW-Madison. I was given Jon Kabat Zinn's book by a Christian counselor in Madison.

### **Getting Started**

Sounds kind of exotic and esoteric. Incredibly simple. Paying attention to what is Real. You can start anywhere. - Raisin meditation

### **Informal and Formal Practice**

- 1) Mindfulness is paying attention in your daily life. "Raisin meditating" throughout the day. In a grocery store, walking, talking with children. Makes life richer. Gives one insight into all the ways we are constantly judging.

- 2) Formal practice is taking the time to build up the muscle of paying attention. Also reminds us, over and over and over again, how likely we are to get caught up in our own fantasies, our nostalgia, our worries. We are so apt to take those thoughts seriously. But they are so often just mental events, like a thunderstorm that gathers on the Texas plains and then dissipates.

### **Breathing Meditation as formal practice**

The Breath as an anchor for the present moment.

Connecting with our bodies.

Mindfulness of Body and Breath Meditation – Track 1

<http://rodalebooks.s3.amazonaws.com/mindfulness/index.html>

### **Next week:**

- Look more at the psychology behind our distracted, fearful minds and why so many of our best efforts are often so unhelpful.
- Walking Meditation and the Body Scan.

### **Homework:**

- 1) Try to have at least one snack during the week mindfully.
- 2) Try to do one activity mindfully (brushing your teeth, taking a shower).
- 3) Breathing meditation twice a day for the next 6 out of 7 days.

### **Resources**

Hanh, Thich Nhat . *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Beacon Press, 1975 (new edition 1987)  
Vietnamese Buddhist monk developed practices of mindfulness for fellow monks looking to create inner and outer harmony in war-torn Vietnam. Short book; beautiful, simple, meditative style.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living*. Bantam House, 1990 (new edition 2009).  
The classic book on mindfulness and in particular, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). First chapters provide some excellent “guiding principles” of mindfulness. Written for everyone who encounters daily stress; it is especially helpful for anyone dealing with chronic pain.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Coming to Our Senses*. Hyperion Press, 2005  
His largest, most comprehensive book. Philosophical and practical, Kabat-Zinn is especially intent on showing how mindfulness is not just about individual satisfaction, but how it could contribute to the healing of the world.

Siegel, Ronald. *The Mindfulness Solution*. Guilford Press, 2010  
Harvard psychologist has some great insights on the human psyche (e.g., our ancestors’ fear of tigers breeds daily fear in our own minds even though the tigers are long gone).

Williams, Mark and Danny Penman. *Mindfulness.: An Eight Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. Rodale Press, 2011

Williams is a professor of clinical psychology at Oxford. While the subtitle is a little too presumptuous for my liking, he takes the insights of Kabat-Zinn and some of the latest psychological research to provide an excellent conceptual framework and practical guide. Personally, I would start with this book.

