

Dancing with life

Today is the ninth in a series of articles on mindfulness. To review, mindfulness is a form of stress reduction. In the simplest terms, mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It focuses our attention on the only moment in which we are alive, which is right now. Paying attention in this way can reduce stress, depression, anxiety and even potentially bring about healing. Today I will explore some of the important qualities of mindfulness. When understood, these qualities can deepen our experience and resolve frustration.

One of the most rewarding qualities of mindfulness is that it gives you the opportunity to step out of ordinary time. Mindfulness allows us to experience timelessness. We step out of time to be present here and now. I would say this particular quality contains the greatest potential to resolve stress, anxiety and upset. To illustrate what it is I am referring to I would share what my wife has told me about working in her garden. Gardening, by the way, can be a wonderful form of mindfulness. When my wife is in her garden she will say that time stands still. She becomes so engaged in her gardening that hours pass by as if they were only minutes. Time becomes a continuous present moment. She also says that her thinking quiets down. Only a rose in its perfect state can capture her attention. If you could become this engaged in your favorite activity, do you think you would be stressed or anxious? I trust that your answer will inspire you. When you step out of time, there is no stress.

Another quality of mindfulness that I have mentioned in prior articles, but it deserves repeating, is resistance. Mindfulness has an uncanny way of revealing to us what we resist. When resistance to life arises, we can notice it mindfully and be present with it. We allow life to be just as it is without trying to change it. Paradoxically, it is only when we notice frustration that we are in a position to resolve it. You can't let go of resistance or frustration unless you notice it first. In this context, mindfulness is a way to dance with your life, for better or worse. You may or may not like the partner you are dancing with, but at least you are aware of what is happening. On resistance, my meditation teacher once said, "The only way out, is through."

Some people will ask, "Why would I want to embrace frustrations? Isn't the inner work of mindfulness supposed to feel good?" The point of mindfulness is to work with all of the elements of life: the good, and the not so good. Without this understanding you will just try to manipulate life in your favor. You won't likely be successful with this approach. Wisdom is accepting life as it unfolds.

The positive outcome to this inner work is that it brings attention to our reactions. You can't change a habitual negative reaction until you are willing to notice and accept that you have them. For instance, we all get impatient and angry, but this can only be resolved if we are willing to view it without resistance. Reassure yourself that you do not need to feel guilty about any anger because anger is not personal. Reactions such as anger, impatience or frustration are human reactions. When we practice mindfulness, these reactions come into our view and are less likely to overwhelm us. We become more stress

hardy and are less likely to be thrown off track. Mindfulness is not a passive process, but an active awareness. It is a gift because it cultivates coping skills.

In my own life recently, my son exposed an upset he was having that helped me resolve a negative aspect of myself. My son became my teacher. He became upset one day about losing a soccer game and when I approached him about this he said, "I need a break from you." What a shock. My beloved seven year old son had never expressed rejection of my company. We sat down and I mindfully listened to his upset. He said that I raise my voice all too often and this causes him fear. What my son was telling me was that I trigger him. Listening was hard because I don't intend to hurt my son. What I discovered is that I use my voice and tone of expression to control his behavior and this upsets him. This blew me away. Without the willingness to listen and accept my own downside as expressed by my son, I would never be in a position to change it. Since his disclosure, I have begun the process of stopping myself before these counter productive reactions occur. I don't need to feel guilty, every father has these moments. I am merely illustrating how I need to be present and accepting of my faults in order to change them.

When you own the normal downside characteristics of being human, they lose their power over you. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can hurt you without your consent." If you are willing to dance with your life, you will soon laugh at it instead of becoming upset. What a relief that will be.

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