

The Bloom of the Present Moment

Today I will begin a series of articles on the practice of mindfulness. This topic has been covered before, but there are significant benefits when it comes to stress reduction and that is why I feel it is worthy of detailed analysis. How many articles will it take to cover the topic? Time will tell, and that's what makes it interesting. If you save these postings over the next couple of months, I promise you will have a wealth of knowledge on how to handle any stressful situation.

What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It is a simple process, but it is not easy. One way to describe it is: "The art of conscious living." One key feature is to pay attention to what is going on in your mind. As you examine your thinking, you try as best as you can not to place a judgment on what is happening. You try not to label your experience as good or bad.

The inner wisdom of mindfulness is in noticing the process of habitual judgment. Many people will begin a mindfulness practice expecting a good result or a high experience. If it makes me feel better it is desirable, if it does not work, it is undesirable. If I become enlightened that is good, if I get upset, that is bad. These are all examples of judgments.

While being mindful we spend time by ourselves and we observe the present moment without trying to change it. We pay attention to what Henry David Thoreau called in Walden, "The bloom of the present moment." I like to think of mindfulness as a pot of stew where I place my thoughts and let them cook together, for better, or for worse. Some days are relaxing, and I notice that. Some days are chaotic and I notice that too. Over time the rewards are life changing.

I can promise you, dear reader, that although this may sound abstract, it is a gift of being human. I call it the miracle of mindfulness. With application you will become aware of how much of life you can miss. One realizes that we only get to live here and now. The only moment we ever get to experience is now. Without attention, it can be easily missed; and with it, most of our life.

The good news is that the bloom of the present moment is infinitely available to us at all times. The not so good news is that the ignorance of the present moment can have detrimental effects. The consequences of living life on "auto pilot" are vast and ultimately unhealthy.

We all intuitively know what living on "auto pilot" is like. What may surprise you is that it can have negative effects both physically and emotionally. To clarify this I would include a short poem from the book, "The Heart Aroused", by David White. The book includes some poems written by executives in corporate America who describe the stress of life at the top of a major corporation. One woman wrote the following short poem: "Ten years ago I turned my face for a moment, and it became my life."

So that is the risk. If we don't take the time to pay attention now, when will we? If your not careful ten years can go by and you look around and say, "How did I get here? What happened?" In practicing mindfulness, this is what we work with. We take a stand today and be present right here and right now.

To begin mindfulness, try this exercise. Sit upright in a chair and place your hand below your navel. Take a deep breath in pulling air down below the rib cage and into the belly. Feel your hand move in and out as you inhale and exhale. Do this for three minutes. Nothing needs to happen. Just notice your breath move in and out. If you think it is stupid, that's ok, just notice you had a judgment. No big deal. Try to avoid the label of good or bad. Congratulations, you have just taken the first step to the discovery of inner peace. Please share this article with a friend.

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