

The life changing review

Today is the 18th 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. Human beings learn by repetition and practice, so today I will review some of the stress reduction techniques we have learned so far in this series.

Before I begin, it is wise to explore why it is important to reduce stress. Stress has been shown to contribute to a variety of health problems. Among the health problems associated with too much stress are high blood pressure, migraine headaches, insomnia, depression, chronic pain, heart disease, and stomach ulcers.

The first remedy for stress is deep abdominal breathing. Deep abdominal breathing can reduce your stress level in any circumstance in just a few minutes. Deep abdominal breathing is the foundation for what medical science calls, “the relaxation response.” Simply stated, research has proven that deep abdominal breathing makes you relax. The emotional benefits of deep abdominal breathing are a sense of calmness and well being. For your body, deep abdominal breathing reduces blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, relieves muscle tension and reduces the levels of stress hormones.

The process is simple. First, relax your shoulders and let your arms hang freely. Next, place your right hand under your naval. Imagine your belly is a balloon you are going to inflate. Take a deep breath in through your nose with your mouth closed. Bring the air below your chest and expand your belly. Pay attention to your hand moving in and out on the belly with the inhale and the exhale. Close your eyes and use your imagination to picture your abdomen as an inflating and deflating balloon. Spend five minutes doing this.

The second exercise to review is an extension of the first exercise. Early tomorrow morning try this mindfulness exercise. Sit next to an open window and begin deep abdominal breathing. Close your eyes and listen to what is happening outside of your window. There will be a symphony of bird song. There may be other sounds as well. All of the sounds are ok just as they are. Feel your breath and listen to the sounds for five minutes. If your mind wanders, no problem, just bring it back to your breath. If you think this is stupid, that is also ok, just notice you had a judgment. My guess is after this exercise you will say, “Wow, I have never heard bird song before.”

Our third exercise to review is designed to quiet down the mind. Begin with the deep abdominal breathing process we have learned. As you are breathing repeat the following question to yourself silently, “I wonder what my next thought is going to be?” Repeat this sentence slowly over and over to yourself for five minutes. “I wonder what my next thought is going to be?” As you repeat this question, watch what happens. Chances are your mind will quite down for the first time in your life.

The fourth exercise that can change your life is formal meditation. The style I will review with you today is called, "Bypassing the mind." This style is a simple and effective way to reduce stress in your life. Try this exercise for twenty minutes.

Focus again on deep abdominal breathing with your eyes closed. Next begin to witness the visual field behind your closed eyes. Focus on what is witnessed. Notice that with your eyes closed there is darkness, but also notices that within the darkness there are numerous tiny bits of light dancing around.

These small dancing light phenomena are called, "Phosgenes." In this style of meditation all you need to do is watch the phosgenes and breathe. Nothing else needs to happen. In focusing on the tiny specks of light you are bypassing thinking. If your mind wanders away into distracting thoughts, merely return your attention to watching the phosgenes. Imagine you are at one with the light and relaxation will follow. Breathe in and breathe out while watching the light, it is that simple.

To illustrate this process with a practical example, consider driving on a country road. When you are driving on a country road, you are paying attention to the driving and not on the passing scenery. Most of the passing scenery goes by unnoticed. Only what is valued is recorded by your awareness, most of the country road is ignored.

Now with this example in mind, consider your meditation the same. You can focus on the light of the phosgenes like paying attention to the road you are driving on. You don't have to notice the passing thoughts which are like the roadside scenery. You can let the thoughts pass by just like all of the scenery you miss while driving. As we watch the light, emotions such as fear, stress and anxiety fall away.

The peace of meditation can be found right under your nose as you breathe and right behind your eyelids as you watch the light. A wonderful quotation about fear is, "Fear knocked at the door, love answered, and no one was there." When you are at one with the light of your best self, fear is impossible. Sit quietly and close your eyes to see the light of who you are.

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