

Trust in Mindfulness

Last week I began the first in a series of articles on Mindfulness. If you missed that entry, you can find it on my web site at www.drmcquaid.com. Recent updates to my website have been made and now include the ten most recent articles that I have written. 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. Mindfulness gives you the opportunity to “smell the roses.”

Mindfulness is a powerful tool you can use to reduce stress in your life and promote health and well-being. Scientist and philosopher, Blaise Pascal once said, “All of man’s problems are due to the fact that is unable to sit quietly alone in a room, doing nothing.” Mindfulness helps us sit quietly alone and be with life as it unfolds. Since Pascal said this process can solve all of your problems, my challenge to you is to trust it.

Mindfulness does take time to cultivate, but if you are willing to try it, I guarantee your life will change. The reason I am certain is Mindfulness opens the door to a new way of living your life. It takes you out of living a life on “auto pilot.” One consequence of living on “auto pilot” is we become rigid and inflexible in how we see the world.

I can illustrate with a story. In ancient Greece, Plato wrote a book titled, *The Republic*. In *The Republic* there are people who live in a dark cave. They can only see shadows of the world outside on the cave walls. In their ignorance, they believe the moving shadows are the world. One of the cave people finds his way out of the cave and discovers the light and blessings of the real world. He returns to the cave to tell the others there is a completely different world to experience outside the cave. No one is willing to trust him. All of the cave people refuse to believe him.

The lesson of *The Republic* is that we can be limited in our view of life. On “auto pilot” we can become fixed in our perceptions that the world is a certain way. We can become stuck, without the consideration that there is a full range of options. Over a lifetime, the result of this can be unhappiness and poor health. Living on “auto pilot” can cut us off from ourselves and others. Mindfulness offers us the opportunity to become reacquainted with the world and our lives. Henry David Thoreau said in *Walden*, “Only that day dawns to which we are awake.”

Mindfulness invites us to wake up out of “auto pilot” and examine what is going on in the mind. One of the realizations you will discover is you are not your thoughts. If you can detach and observe your thoughts then your thinking is like a movie you are watching on a screen. You are not the screen the movie is projected on. You are the projector of the images, but you are not the images. Your thinking is not the real you.

Identifying with your thinking and making it personal is optional. Mindfulness allows you to see you’re not your mind. A radical concept, but true. You have a mind, but you are something greater. Claiming authorship to your thinking is your ego. The ego speaks

about my, me and mine. My emotions. My pain. My anguish. My thoughts. The “my” is extra, it is not necessary. It’s just thinking, and it is spontaneous. You are not the inventor of thinking. You are the observer and witness to thinking, not the thoughts themselves. This discovery can lead to profound self liberation.

The preceding statements may sound abstract, but what I am trying to do is similar to the story in *The Republic*. I am one who has traveled outside of the cave and I have come back to inform you of something beautiful. Are you willing to trust me?

The exercise for this week is an extension of the first exercise recommended in my last article. Early tomorrow morning try this five minute mindfulness exercise. Sit next to an open window and place your hand below your navel. Close your eyes and breath deeply pulling air below the chest and into the belly. Feel our belly expand on the inhale and contract on the exhale. Now 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 you 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.”

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