

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation

Transcript

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I have recorded two practice sessions of mindfulness meditation for you. The first is a 20-minute practice period. The second is a five-minute practice period. I hope that you find these useful.

Mindfulness practice is bringing attention to experience itself — the sensations and feelings that are occurring every moment — and not getting swept away in associations or judgments. Eventually, we can even become mindful of our thoughts. They become like passing clouds in an open sky. We learn to let our body and mind relax into the open sky, letting it become our home. Sometimes there are many clouds; sometimes there are none. We gradually learn to abide in the open sky whether there are many clouds or few. We learn to trust the safe harbor of awareness that mindfulness practice brings.

An example of mindfulness is being on a hike and suddenly you hear the cry of an eagle — immediately, you stop and look up with full attention towards the sky. Another example of mindfulness is seeing the joy of a child happily playing — you are fully absorbed in the experience of witnessing the child's joy. Your mind and body are full with the actual felt experience without any “inner commentary.” In these examples, full awareness of the present moment seems to have occurred spontaneously and naturally. In fact, full awareness of the present moment is the state of being that sages across

many traditions and centuries have described in a variety of ways as our natural way of being. Usually, we are caught up in associations and conditioned thinking — judging ourselves or others, or wishing that things were different. There is nothing wrong or bad about thinking — we all do it; it's just that when we are caught up in thinking, mindfulness of the present moment is less accessible to us.

A good way to begin learning about mindfulness meditation is to sit in a chair, close your eyes, and then bring your attention to the contact of your body with the seat of the chair. Notice the feelings that arise simply because there is contact of body with the seat of the chair. Now, describe those sensations to yourself. For example, words that come to mind might be “warm,” “firm,” “soft,” “pressure”... etc. Notice that the words do not fully encompass the totality of the experience itself, any more than words fully encompass the taste of chocolate. You can also practice mindfulness by bringing attention to your hands resting on your legs; the arms of the chair or touching one another. Mindfulness practice is learning to gently rest your attention on the moment-to-moment changing sensations that we call “sensate experience” rather than the words that come to mind that we call “thinking.”