

EXTREME ESTEEM

Mindfulness

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If past to future is on a horizontal line, then the present moment is not in time,
but a vertical movement transcending time.

~ *Osho* – Author and Teacher of Enlightenment

Mindfulness – I’m hearing the word increasingly in self-esteem and empowerment circles. Mindfulness is often used in the sense of “living in the moment.” When being mindful, you are not judging, reflecting, or thinking. You are simply observing the moment in which you find yourself. Mindfulness is not an attempt to make the moment pleasant or pain free (though that might be a side benefit). The moment may be enjoyable, arousing, empty, awkward, upsetting, or stressful, but it is – in its most basic form – an experience. We suffer as the result of labeling that experience or by judging it.

Much of the time, our experience lacks a quality of awareness or mindfulness. Often, we travel through life on cruise control, automatically living out habitual patterns of behavior. Without awareness, habitual tendencies can take over and run our lives. As we begin to develop our personal level of mindfulness, it can be shocking to discover just how habitual our lives have become and how runaway thinking has led to our suffering.

When we’re on cruise control, we’re not mindfully aware of what’s going on. We may know on some level that we’re troubled but never investigate those feelings fully or acknowledge our responsibility for resolving them. We fantasize without any discernment of whether what we’re thinking about is making us happy or distressed.

When we are not being mindful in the moment, we often lose ourselves – brooding about some past hurt or fantasizing about a future in which we have won the lottery, are living in paradise, or matched with the perfect loving partner. Seldom are these fantasized pasts and futures reality based, but rather imaginings of how things might be, could be, or ought to be in our reckoning. And as with all unmindful activity, we have no awareness that this fantasizing is pointless. All that it does is add force to disruptive emotional tendencies that can never truly enrich our lives.

There are, of course, ways of mindfully thinking about the past or future. We can reflect on the past and think about how our experience has provided us with knowledge, insights, and wisdom that we can put into positive practice in the now. We can think about the future, but rather than it being idle daydreaming, we're thinking about the consequences of our actions today and reflecting on where we want to be tomorrow. When we think about the past or future while being in the moment – while being mindful – we are conscious of our reflecting or projecting and never lost in thought. We don't confuse fantasy with reality. We don't stray from the moment, but instead bring to bear the full force of our knowledge and wisdom in the moment to actively create a future filled with power, intention, and focus. Our thinking is grounded, well considered, and purposeful. Think about it: the only way to change the past is to change the now, the moment.

Being mindful takes practice. As a wise Zen Master said, “Stop seeking the truth; seek [instead] to let go of your opinions.” Or, as Sergeant Joe Friday said on the *Dragnet* TV series: “Just the facts, ma'am.” We only get to live our lives moment by moment; either we are here for them, or we're not. If we're not, life will simply slip away.