

# **THE PORTABLE PORTLAND MINDFULNESS**



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**WITH**

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# What is Mindfulness?

You may have heard the terms ‘mindful’ or ‘mindfulness’ somewhere in recent years. Maybe your yoga teacher or therapist used them, maybe even your guitar instructor or sports coach. You might have a vague sense that mindfulness has something to do with meditation. But what is mindfulness, really?

Mindfulness is a particular way of directing one’s attention. It means to pay attention to what is happening for you right now, in this moment. It also means to deliberately suspend judgment, noticing thoughts but choosing not to get involved with them.

So, in this moment, you could notice what your feet feel like, right NOW. You probably have feet (if you don’t, use hands or any other part of the body—extremities like hands and feet are obvious and so are a good start). So just notice what your feet feel like, any sensations at all such as tingling or pressure or warmth or cold. Let your mind linger briefly on these sensations without judging them. Notice the mind’s tendency to label, judge and create a narrative.

”Oh, my feet are cold. This office is poorly heated!”

Why do this?

Because 99.9% of the busy day we are caught up in our thoughts. This is not a bad thing. Thinking is not ‘bad’ or ‘good’, it just is. Sometimes thinking is useful, sometimes it isn’t. To be effective in the world, it is helpful to get some flexibility in terms of when we want to be “thinky” and when we just want to be present to what is happening.

If you like what happened when you paid attention to your feet, or you are curious to see what more can come of this, practice for a few moments a day, perhaps a few times per day. You may also want to try 5 minutes of mindful breathing, just allowing your breath to be as it is, and paying attention to the sensations of breathing, non-judgmentally, noticing thoughts as thoughts.

I could tell you what the benefits of mindfulness are, and probably will here soon. But maybe you have an intuitive sense of what promise this kind of practice can hold? If you choose to, explore for yourself what mindfulness is and can be for you.

## Mindfulness Meditation is Simple!

People think that meditation is “hard” but it isn’t, it’s very simple. Mindfulness meditation takes advantage of 2 basic neurological facts:

*Fact One, you can almost always bring your physical body to stillness.* The same is not true of the mind and emotions. So we start by bringing the body to near-perfect stillness, sitting in an erect, dignified, supple and symmetrical posture. Just this physical stillness has an impact, as you will notice if you keep yourself very still for a few moments. It might not have the impact you think it “should” have, but it has an impact on your experience.

*Fact Two, although the nature of the mind is to constantly wander, at any given moment you can shift your attention where you want it to go.* Try it! Can you pay attention to your feet right now, to the physical sensations coming from your feet? Sure you can. There are some sensations coming from your feet that tell you that they exist. Mindfulness meditation involves placing your

attention somewhere, usually on the breathing sensations in the chest or belly, and then returning it to that same region of the body whenever you notice your mind has wandered. As Jon Kabat-Zinn says, “If your mind wanders 1,000 times, just gently bring it back to the breath 1,000 times.” Set a timer for 5, 10, 15, 20 minutes or more, and just practice. When the timer goes off, you’re done. Hold lightly any judgmental thoughts your mind dishes out to you about whether the session was “good” or not. Go on with your day and practice again tomorrow.

That’s it! It’s simple. Our minds make it tricky by having expectations, like that it should make you feel good, or that your mind should become clear and quiet. This is just the mind making something complicated out of something simple. When we practice simply, we get the desired result: the neurotic mind has less control over our behavior, and we can act more freely according to our values, principles, and passions.

This separating from the mind takes practice, just like learning a sport or musical instrument. We return the attention to the breath thousands and thousands of times, and eventually we see that we are not our thoughts, that our thoughts don’t have to boss us around and define our world for us. Life becomes more vibrant, slowly and inevitably, through weeks, months and years of daily practice. It’s that simple!

## So You Think You Can’t Meditate?

**A client we’ll call “Jim” came to me interested in reducing his level of stress and anxiety.**

“I’ve tried meditation,” he said. “It doesn’t work for me. I can’t do it. I think too much and I can’t clear my mind.”

I wish I had a dime for every time I have heard a similar speech from a client. At least, I’d be able to have quite a night out on the town from the proceeds!

The majority of people who learn to meditate experience frustration doing so. You wouldn’t bother with learning to meditate if you weren’t looking to get something out of it. You want to be calmer, to have a more relaxed, less stressful life, perhaps experience less anger, worry, or depression, and experience more joy, peacefulness, and motivation.

So like Jim, you go to a class and learn the basics of mindfulness meditation, let’s say: Sit in a dignified posture, bring your attention to your breath, return the attention to the breath every time it wanders to your thoughts or other “distractions.”

If you’re anything like me, or Jim, or most of us in this culture, you will experience your mind wandering frequently—maybe even constantly. Perhaps you decide to increase your efforts, and “try really hard” to “clear your mind.” Very likely, you do so hoping that this effort will pay off, in terms of a quieter mind, a more relaxed body, a happier mood, inner peace.

Soon, however, you are disappointed: none of these sought-after states of mind are coming. Instead, you find yourself growing more and more frustrated by the “difficulty” of having constantly distracting thoughts. Thoughts that stubbornly won’t cooperate with your agenda of having a peaceful meditative experience.

Maybe you try a few more times. “If I find a quieter place to meditate, with less noise, I’ll be able to do it better,” you think, and you carve out the ideal time and place, when you will not be disturbed by the phone, kids, or the loud jackhammers at the construction site across the street.

Still, you soon discover that you are up against the very same obstacle: a mind that just **will not** slow down, will not shut up, will not leave you alone no matter how hard you try. Soon you give up, saying “this meditation stuff just isn’t for me.”

If this story describes your experience, rest assured you are not alone. Not only do most people who learn to meditate go through a stage of believing they can’t do it “well,” if at all, most people who become lifelong meditators and reap the many benefits of a daily meditation practice also have had just that sort of experience in their early weeks, months, or even years of meditation practice.

The problem you are facing is that you have—or, better put, your mind has—preconceived notions about what the experience of meditation should be like. “Calm,” “Peaceful,” “Tranquil,” “Zen-like,” and so forth.

In fact, meditation can be all these things, but it can also be just about any other state of mind that is possible for the human mind to enter, including “rageful,” “agitated,” “depressed,” “frightened” and “utterly frustrated!”

Meditation is not about achieving **any** particular state. Rather, it is about learning to be more present to one’s experience—whether one’s experience is pleasant or unpleasant. Meditation is about learning to be less picky and rigid about one’s experience, more flexible and able to be psychologically present in any circumstances.

So, if you, or Jim, or anyone else experiencing meditation as a frustrating slog through annoying thoughts and feelings, were to continue meditation practice despite that slog, you would begin to learn some very interesting things. First, you would begin to discover that no matter how harshly you judge (i.e., your mind judges) your meditation, no matter how convinced you are that you “failed” or “did badly” at meditating, the benefits of meditation would inevitably follow periods of concerted, diligent practice. You would not necessarily gain all the “good stuff” that you were hoping for, just as someone who visits a gym a few times would probably not suddenly develop the svelt body of a swimmer. However, you would find that you were more and more able to be psychologically present to your life, just the way it is. You would become more able to pay attention to what other people are saying, spending a little less time thinking about your own response while the other is talking. You would likely learn in time to take your own thinking mind less seriously, and not to let negative thinking stand in the way of doing the things that matter to you. You might, over time, have fewer thoughts while meditating, or you might not. I usually have millions of thoughts while meditating! That fact has not reduced by one iota the value of my meditation practice, the impact that it has had on my life, in terms of my ability to be present, live passionately, feel satisfied with my life, and occasionally experience something like peace.

Here is all you need to know to have a successful meditation practice:

1. Whatever thoughts you have about your ability to meditate are baloney, only unlike baloney, they serve no purpose whatsoever. **Don't believe your mind when it tells you how good or bad your meditation is. Ever.**
2. Scale back your meditation practice to a schedule that is realistic for you. I usually suggest my clients begin with 5 minutes a day. On days that your mind is convinced that you don't have 5 minutes, do 1 minute, or just 3 mindful breaths! But no matter how long or short, **practice every day.**
3. As you begin your meditation session, notice what your mind is saying to you about meditating. Is your mind saying it's going to be hard, or unpleasant? **Be aware of your thoughts about the meditation and put them aside, knowing they will often arise whether you want them or not.**
4. **Cultivate a sense of self-compassion** while meditating. Remember that you are a human being, and the nature of the human mind is to wander from topic to topic. If there were no wandering mind, there would be little or no point to mindfulness meditation!
5. **Consider each time you return attention to the breath to be like a “rep” in the gym.** Each time you return your attention to the present moment, you are practicing perfect meditation. Each time you return your attention to the breath, you are making contact once again with reality, with what is happening in the present moment, rather than what you are thinking. This is meditation.
6. **Make a long-term commitment** to keep meditating daily for a span of time before judging whether it's worth continuing. I would suggest a year, but even a month or a week will do. As with exercise, it's basically impossible to gauge the impact of the meditation on your life without putting in enough time on the cushion to give it a chance to have an impact.
7. **Check your expectations of what meditation should do—are they realistic?** Many people have meditated daily for a decade or more, and even completed numerous day-long, weekend-long or week-long intensive retreats, and failed to achieve the kind of grandiose outcomes our minds like to envision. Actually, being calm all the time isn't even a worthwhile goal, and neither is being happy all the time. The goal of meditation is to be more present to our lives, more intimate with and accepting toward our experiences; when we are more present to our lives, we do experience some greater degree of peace, some greater degree of satisfaction with life.

## GOT 3 MINUTES?

One of the many practices from Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is called “**The Breathing Space.**” [Research](#) has shown that the program of MBCT is effective for reducing relapses in recurrent depression. Many of these mindfulness tools and practices can also be helpful to anyone who simply wants to increase their experience of life in the present moment.

The Breathing Space is a three-part exercise, or “minimeditation” that can be done in as little as three minutes. It is designed to help bring the awareness of a more formal meditation practice into daily life. It is best to place any expectations aside, inviting curiosity about what you find when you practice The Breathing Space.

The first part is **AWARENESS**: Bringing the body into an upright and dignified posture, allowing the eyes to close if that is comfortable, and asking, “What is my experience right now? In *thoughts*, in *feelings*, and in *body sensations*?” Then simply acknowledging whatever is here, even if it is not pleasant or wanted.

The second part is **GATHERING**: Bringing attention to the breath. Just noticing and following each in breath and each out breath in its entirety. The breath is happening in the present moment. Focusing on each breath can invite a sense of fully inhabiting this very moment.

The third part is **EXPANDING**: Again, enlarging awareness around your breathing, including and breathing with a sense of the whole body, the posture, and even facial expression.

You might think about these three parts as making the shape of an hourglass, with an enlarged sense of awareness on either side of a more pointed focus on the breath in the middle. And you are welcome to practice The Breathing Space for longer than three minutes!

LM

## Mindfulness is Stick-to-it-ive-ness

Most of us are good at starting things — exercise, projects, books, relationships. How many of us can stick to them through them after the novelty wears off, and once things get hard? What is it about the human mind that just tells us “Quit” when we run into obstacles? When the activity is no longer pleasurable?

Behavioral and evolutionary psychologists have some answers to why we stop our efforts when we encounter adversity.

The basic problem is that if a behavior doesn’t result in pleasure, it tends to stop — all the more so if it results in pain!

Pleasure and pain of course are related to survival mechanisms. Food, warmth, sex all obviously contribute to survival of an organism or passing on its genes to the next generation. So traits that support survival tend to get passed on, and ones that don’t tend to get selected out of the gene pool. And over millions of years of evolution, immediate rewards, like finding food or mating, were what was worth pursuing, survival-wise.

The trouble is that in the modern world, so many of our activities don’t necessarily produce immediate pleasure while we’re doing them. Avoidance of pain, though, is another powerful motivator. How many of us work, not because we like what we do so much, but because we do not want to run out of money? We have some capacity to stick to things if there’s a punishment looming in the background, threatening us if we were to stop the activity. To a lesser degree, we can find some motivation in a distant reward, like a luxurious retirement, or a successfully-raised family.

But there are so many activities in which this mechanism of anticipating distant reward seems to fail. Diet and exercise come to mind as projects that people more typically fail at than succeed. But for many people, other long-term rewards also fail to motivate behavior. Think of the deferral of gratification needed to build a career from scratch, or to work on a difficult relationship.

Mindfulness offers answers to the problem of persistence, of “stick-to-it-ive-ness”. When we practice mindfulness meditation, we return over and over to the sensations of breathing, for perhaps 20 or 30 minutes at a time, every day.

Every day we learn to return again and again to our goal: keeping the attention on the breath, keeping the awareness in the body and in the present moment. It’s often very difficult, especially if we are upset or agitated, but we stick with the practice and do the best we can with it. This is basic training in persistence!

When we practice persistence in this stripped-down, pure form, we learn it on a deep level, on an automatic, neurological level. Its effects generalize, especially when we make the conscious effort to apply in our lives what we are learning in meditation. We learn to do “damage control,” to return to a project even when it seems to have gone sour, rather than giving up. We learn to respond to boredom with determination, rather than “letting it slide” in favor of something more exciting. We learn that discomfort passes: we watch itches and aches arise, last awhile, and disappear, and remain in our meditation posture throughout.

Mindfulness practice can cure us of our disease of impersistence, of wobbliness. When we practice it with devotion, we learn to be devoted to what is important to us, through thick and thin, pain and pleasure.

## Mindfulness and Therapy

If you’ve ever built something, fixed something, or solved a problem, you know this basic fact: use the right tool for the job. Don’t use a wrench when you need a hammer. We all know and live by this common sense approach to using tools.

In a sense, our mind is our most basic problem solving tool. Without a mind that is in good working order, using hammers or other tools become more difficult. For example, when we are distracted, overwhelmed by emotions, or “stuck in our heads,” we are more likely to drop the hammer or miss the nail. When our minds are stable and steady, curious, and attentive, we can truly put the hammer to good use.

Mindfulness is the practice of training the mind, to learn how to properly and effectively use this indispensable tool. Combining mindfulness with therapy is a natural fit. As your mindfulness skills develop, there is a shift in how you relate to your emotions, your friends and family, your work, your problems, and your enjoyments.

You learn to apply your skills of being present, open, and kind to the tasks of therapy. This might include relating to anger with mindfulness, which is quite different from becoming mindless and reactive to anger. Or relating to a partner with mindfulness, becoming more aware of patterns of communication and feelings that need to be shared. Another example is becoming mindful of reactions, learning to make thoughtful choices instead of getting carried away by habit or emotion.

When you relate with anything in your life, be it a thought, a person, or a situation, you start with your own mind. A cranky mind is likely to be cranky with thoughts. A distracted mind is likely to be distracted when dealing with people. An overwhelmed mind is likely to experience situations as overwhelming. When you start with a mind of mindfulness, you learn to see thoughts, people, and situations more accurately, more clearly, and with a sense of confidence and openness. You start with a mind that is present and strong. Try it out sometime!

DR

## Mindfulness and Gentleness

The other day I was rushing around, distracted and in a hurry to leave my house, and I very quickly and somewhat mindlessly grabbed at my keys. Whap! Ouch! While my fingers were stinging from the collision, the keys knocked halfway across the table, I began to appreciate how mindfulness is the art of being gentle.

It's very tempting to try to speed things up in order to “get more done,” but it seems that this approach often leaves us with hurt fingers and keys further from reach, both literally and metaphorically. This is where the art of being gentle comes in. Being gentle is noticing when you are rushing and choosing to slow down a bit, to “pick up the keys” with patience and precision. It is an attitude of feeling grounded and friendly, willing to experience life rather than trying to force or control your life. Where rushing creates a sense of panic or claustrophobia, gentleness is like a relaxing breath of fresh air.

Gentleness includes being aware of your environment: noticing things as they are. For example, paying attention to the details of picking up your keys. Where are the keys? Where is my hand? How fast am I moving? How fast do I need to move? When you are mindful of your environment, you are less likely to bump into things, drop things, or make a mess. You are also less likely to be harsh or critical towards yourself when mistakes do happen. You can be gentle with everything in your environment, including your keys, your body, your time, and your own state of mind. When you treat yourself and the world with gentleness, you are practicing mindfulness.

DR

## Appreciating THIS Moment

The practice of mindfulness is: Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. As we move into the holiday season, how can we bring our mindfulness practice with us to *whatever* we find in the present moment? How can we include and even appreciate the “special” moments, the ordinary moments, and even the stressful moments?

This is a time of year when there may be a sense of pressure to feel something in particular — a feeling that *weshould* be grateful, like we *should* clean our plates, or we *should* be thankful that we are not suffering like some other people.

Practicing non-judgmentally means letting go of the mind of comparison. True gratitude emerges freely, from a simple appreciation of what is.

And there are more active ways to cultivate genuine gratitude. This can be done by making a gratitude list, reaching out to others, perhaps making a contribution to the community, spending time with friends and family, savoring a special meal. Mindfulness practice can allow us to be present in these moments; experiencing them fully, appreciating them as unique and precious, even when they (inevitably) don't go according to plan. We can let go of the plan or our idea of what it was supposed to be, and instead, inhabit our lives as they are.

Another practice starts with carving out just a few moments to turn off the phone, the radio, the computer, the TV, letting the body be still, and sitting quietly, observing the sensations in the body, the feelings of the breath. Then at some point,

you may turn the mind toward a phrase like, ***“This is what is being given to me now.”*** Or ***“This is what is being received right now.”*** You can repeat this phrase to yourself on each out breath, like a mantra. This is a practice that can be used formally, in a regular sitting practice, or informally, when we are in a mode of doing.

We might notice that in every moment we are receiving the breath of life, and all that entails. Or we might at first think, “Oh great, a traffic jam! This? This is what is being given to me?” Then continuing to sit with the phrase, the thoughts may soften and change. We may become aware of the car’s heater warming our feet, the simple luxury of being protected from the elements, the functionality of our senses, and the ability to travel freely, albeit more slowly than we might prefer. As we practice appreciation for the ordinary moments of life — just by slowing down enough to actually notice them— these moments can open up, and present us with the whole world.

LM

# Feeling Sad Is Not Bad

When we are sad, we often try our best not to feel what we are feeling.

We are hard-wired to try our best to avoid anything painful.

This tendency is so deeply encoded into our nervous systems, that if we touch a hot stove, we don't even need our brains to cause our hands to move quickly back: the spinal cord takes care of that reflex!

We treat our feelings the same way. The moment we start having a "Bad" feeling, we tend to begin fighting against it.

Popular psychology VERY frequently advises us to do various things to "Improve Your Mood!" Our biology makes us try to avoid painful feelings if possible, whatever their source, and our culture sends us the message, again and again: only "Losers" feel bad or sad.

It reminds me of a song from the album *The Wall* by Pink Floyd in which the protagonist is brought to trial, with the charge of being "Caught red-handed showing feelings, showing feelings of an almost human nature!"

The facts are that most human emotions are unpleasant. Of the six emotions that anthropologists have found to be universal across cultures, the majority are negative (They are: Surprise, Fear, Happiness, Sadness, Anger and Disgust). So feeling unpleasant feelings is not abnormal; in fact, it is arguable that to feel pleasant feelings most of the time would be unusual for a human being.

There is nothing wrong with doing things to "cheer oneself up" when sad. Usually, such efforts involve activities we would normally want to do anyway, activities that express our values such as time with friends, listening to or playing music, writing, exercising, and so forth.

It turns out, though, that to the extent to which we organize our lives around avoiding "Bad" feelings, to the extent to which our choice of activities is driven more by the desire to "Feel Good" than by the desire to do the specific activities for intrinsic reasons, that is exactly the extent to which our lives feel empty and meaningless.

Yes, I know, that was a difficult sentence to understand. Please consider reading it a few times.

More simply put: Would you rather spend life running from "Bad" feelings, as if you were constantly being pursued by an enemy, or would you rather live your life doing things that you care about, regardless of how you feel at the moment?

We do not make that choice a single time. We make it again and again, noticing how our mind wants us to behave, noticing our tendency to avoid anything the least bit emotionally uncomfortable, and choosing again and again to do what we truly want to do.

If we are free to be sad, angry, frightened, happy, surprised or disgusted, if we are free to feel however we feel in this very moment, then we are free indeed. We may pursue whatever is meaningful to us.

JR

## Transform Depression into Wisdom through Mindfulness

"How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this world!" – Shakespeare, Hamlet

Depression is a universal human experience. Most people will have at least minor episodes of depression in their lives. 30% will seriously consider suicide for 2 weeks or more. No matter where you stand on whether depression is an "illness", the fact is, depressive symptoms are so common as to amount to an expectable, normal part of life. We will grieve losses, and sometimes we will grieve, lose motivation, or "go numb" for no obvious reason.

Whatever the cause, being depressed can be a gateway to greater wisdom and compassion. When we choose to accept any and all feelings and thoughts, when we practice being present and conscious of our bodies and minds, no matter how much they hurt, we can deepen wisdom.

What do I mean by "deepening wisdom?"

I mean we can deepen our compassion and understanding of others. We can see that we are not the only ones who suffer, that millions, perhaps billions of others, suffer acutely, often for no obvious reason.

I also mean that when depressed, we can use our painful feelings as a cue to re-examine our priorities and values, and see whether we are truly "walking the walk." We can take stock of our lives and see if we are truly striving to go in the direction we most want to go. We can take actions to turn our lives around, in the direction we want most to go.

Practicing mindfulness, self-compassion, and self-acceptance is not a cure for depression. To the extent that depression is severe and involves medical signs like loss of energy, sleep disturbance, and suicidal thinking, it may need treatment with psychotherapy, behavior therapy, medications, or some combination of the three.

However, regardless of how we “treat” depression, in being depressed, we always have an opportunity to transform this universal, if horrifically painful, human experience into a source of wisdom.

Do I hurt? So do millions, billions of others on the planet.

Am I disappointed in myself? So are millions, billions of others, disappointed in themselves.

Am I vulnerable, self-critical, despondent without reason? So have been millions, billions of others, throughout history. If we have the energy to do so, we could go back and read classic literature. Hamlet was severely depressed!

By using depression to cultivate self-acceptance and compassion for others, compassion for all who suffer on this planet, we can transform pain into wisdom. It helps to have a therapist or meditation teacher guide us in that process.

You can do it, even if you think you cannot.

JR

## Mindfulness and Cravings

Experiencing cravings are a normal part of recovering from any form of addiction – to alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex ... or even television. They’re uncomfortable and complain at us like a nagging child, and we quite naturally want them to end. The quickest way to end a craving is by giving in to it. The problem however is that by giving in to it, we reinforce the addiction.

Think of this like the five year old child begging for a cookie. If we say, “No... no ... no ...” and then, frustrated with the complaining and wanting it to stop, we give in and say, “All right, have the cookie!” we’ve just taught the five year old a very bad lesson: enough complaining and you’ll get what you want.

We even have to be careful of our thoughts. Thoughts such as “I’ll die if I don’t get it” or “This isn’t going to end” or “I’d love nothing more than to have a drink (or whatever your addiction might be),” only increase the craving. The thoughts may express what we’re feeling, but the trap is when we believe their true and start entertaining them, then we start imagining what it would be like to give in to the craving, and then we’ve only increase our suffering many times over.

We don’t want to teach our addictions that if they complain loud enough, they’ll will.

So what to do.

There are many things. We can distract, seek support, revisit our values, pray to a higher power, turn our attention to helping others or buckle down and white-knuckle it. All of these are useful and necessary tools in the struggle with addiction.

Another useful tool is mindfulness. With an absolute commitment not to give in to the craving, we can settle ourselves down, calm the mind and investigate exactly what the feeling of craving is all about. This investigation requires that we don’t judge the craving and we don’t feed it with thoughts about using. We simply notice the body sensations, the emotions, and let whatever thoughts arise, rise up and drift away.

We take a skeptical stance about what this craving is really saying to us, maintain doubt that feeding it is going to make our life easier, and then, by mindfully letting the craving flow through our body and mind without attachment, we learn that it loses its force. In fact, research shows that a craving will last less than a minute if we do not feed it with thoughts or actions. We then soon begin to learn that cravings are like after-shocks. They rumble for a little while, but if we don’t attach meaning to them, they’ll soon subside.

This is the true lesson our cravings need to learn, not that they won’t go away unless fed, but that discomfort arises and fades away and that this is part of our recovery from addiction.

MP

## Center of the Storm: Mindfulness and Resiliency

You’ve heard the saying that half of life is showing up. I think the other half is settling in to stay.

Being present means being where you are, unconditionally. It would be easier to have our own, more convenient version of being present, maybe something like, “I’ll be present, but only if I get what I want from it.” This is the version of mindfulness where the goal is to be present with good feelings or groovy experiences, and the existence of discomfort

means you are not being mindful enough. Joe once described this “California Mindfulness.” Its the attitude of “what a beautiful sunny day to be mindful. Let’s not look at those storm clouds.”

Real mindfulness, lets call it “50 state mindfulness,” is willing to be in contact with the moment regardless of external weather or internal mood. But why would anyone want to be present with the storm when they can avoid it? One answer is resilience.

Resilience, defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” When you are willing to be present with difficult experiences, to be still in the center of the storm, your train yourself in the skill of resiliency. *You don’t learn how to weather a storm by avoiding the storm.* Resilience is learned by showing up and being present with the sunshine and rain clouds of your life.

Being in the center of the storm does not mean allowing yourself to be overwhelmed or out of control. It is not about being macho or proving a point. It is about practicing the skill of being curious and kind while being present with discomfort.

This is the practice of showing up and staying in the center of the storm. If you want resiliency, your discomfort transforms into a priceless opportunity to be mindful. If you are willing to be in the storm with mindfulness, the skill of resiliency will begin to shine through.

DR

## What is Laziness?

We have all at some times explained our behavior as “lazy”. But what is laziness?

Could it be we say “lazy” when we mean “depressed,” “defeatist,” or “conflicted”?

Could we say “lazy” when we mean “scared,” “avoiding”?

Sometimes we just mean “tired,” and often legitimately tired.

Whatever “lazy” means, it’s usually worth looking at what’s under the word. We can use our mindful awareness to better understand what it is that’s happening that we’re calling “lazy”.

In my experience as a therapist, and as a human being, just calling our behavior “lazy” and leaving it at that is rarely helpful. Once we get to the root of why the behavior appears lazy, we have some choices of what we want to do about it.

What to examine:

- how does my body feel when I am saying “lazy”?
- what other “stories” are attached to the story of “I am lazy”? What’s the emotional tone of those stories?
- what happens to my laziness if I sit quietly and follow my breath for a few minutes?
- what happens to my laziness if I exercise vigorously for 5 minutes?
- what emotions come up for me when I imagine doing the tasks that I am avoiding by saying “lazy”?
- could I commit to doing some small piece of what I think I “should” be doing?
- what does it feel like to do that small piece?

With mindfulness, you don’t have to let “lazy” get in your way.

JR

## Procrastination and Mindfulness

Most of us feel we procrastinate too much. We lead extremely complicated lives compared to just about everyone born before 1900! It’s no wonder we don’t get around to it all. Can we forgive our selves for that?

At the same time, we sometimes avoid our feared tasks so much that our lives shrink and lose vitality. We “play it safe” and don’t get around to applying to that long-shot job, or developing that new, original idea. Or we live in a drab room when it could be so much more inviting to us, if we just took the time to do some minimal re-arranging and decorating. The good news is that we can become more aware of ourselves as we procrastinate. We can breathe and be aware of our physical sensations, aware of that surge of anxiety/energy that comes up when we think about the feared task. We can then ask ourselves:

“In a free world, where there was no fear, what would I be doing right now?”

“In what very small, decisive way can I take a step in the direction I want?”

“Would it be worth it to have a little fear, if it meant I got to take that step?”

There’s no telling what might happen next. If you choose not to wait to “feel comfortable” doing something, you are free to act. If you’re willing to feel fear, you’re free.

Are you willing?  
JR

## Beating Procrastination: “I Just Don’t Feel Like It!”

Like masturbation, procrastination is something we all do and don’t generally brag about (Louis CK may be an exception). Why do we put off for tomorrow what we ourselves believe we should do today?

One answer from psychology research is that humans as well as other animals are hard-wired to respond most strongly to immediate rewards. So, although it would be potentially very helpful to complete that assignment, clean that floor, or write a chapter of that dissertation today, it FEELS much better right now to put it off til tomorrow (or later).

So, you “don’t feel like it.” OK. If feeling good is your main value, then you’re set. You can just not do whatever it is. Turns out though, that most of us want more out of life than just feeling good. Few of us would want “She Felt Good” as the epigram on our gravestone, or even one of the main bullet points in our obituary, or (to be a bit less morbid), in an article about us and our values.

My favorite advice about procrastination is that there is basically nothing you can do about it. As long as your goal is to FEEL good, you have little choice but to procrastinate. If on the other hand, you have other priorities that are important to you, *and you are willing to FEEL CRUMMY in order to serve those priorities*, then you have some options.

A little creativity can help, but it’s the willingness to feel crummy now so that you can travel in the direction you want to go, that makes the difference. And it just might be that the work your mind tells you will feel so horrible, doesn’t feel all that bad once you’re doing it.

JR

## Hurt Feelings, Anger and Mindfulness

An offhand comment, a few choice words, a hastily written email, or a major rejection — any of them could set us off, could leave us with hurt feelings and an impulse to go on the attack.

Rejection and criticism activate deep wounds. We can easily misconstrue words not intended to hurt as a direct attack on ourselves.

All the more do obviously hostile comments and overt rejections trigger us, activate a deep, “Bad Self” feeling.

We hate “Bad Self” feelings. These are feelings of hurt, shame, exclusion, rejection, inadequacy. The last thing we are generally interested in doing is allowing these kinds of feelings to exist. Allowing them to rise inside us and experiencing them fully? Not what we usually choose.

Usually we choose to take swift action to alleviate such unwanted, intense emotions. And how better than to turn the emotions around against the person who “caused” them (in our minds). How better than to go on the attack. Anger is empowering; it readily covers up the wounded feelings that prompted it.

So, we make a snotty retort. We “flame” someone online. We plan revenge in some form, we execute our planned retaliation.

When we do these things, we miss a major opportunity to grow. We also very likely cause waves of ill feelings and unskillful actions, propagating across people as the “bad vibes” get passed around.

Being willing to actually feel our “Bad Self” feelings offers us an alternative to attacking others. The first step is to begin to be aware of the hurt feelings before taking any action. We need to slow down long enough to feel our reaction to the other person’s words and actions. We need to defer “doing something” about it until we have had enough time to have some contact with the underlying hurt feelings.

IF you still think it’s a good idea later, you can always choose to go on the attack.

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## **Mindfulness at Work**

The place where we spend most of our day can be infused with mindfulness: Work. It is easy to lose ourselves and this moment in future-oriented thinking about work as simply a means to an end. The good news is that we can also *find* ourselves and the fullness of this moment at any point in our workday, wherever we are.

Here are some hints and suggestions for impacting work stress, adapted from the book, *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

- 1) Bring awareness to the full process of preparing for the day. While in the shower, ask yourself, “Am I in the shower?” Very often our minds are elsewhere — in a conference room for a future meeting, or rehearsing an important conversation. Instead, re-orient to the physical sensations of being in the shower as it is happening. This can apply to the activities of eating, dressing, and interacting with the people you live with. Just tuning in to the body from time to time can be a powerful practice.
- 2) When walking at work, take the edge off of it. It may be imperceptible to others, but slowing your walking pace just a little bit and being aware of the physical process of walking can have a noticeable effect on our state of mind. And if you must rush, just be aware that you are rushing.
- 3) Just pause for one minute every hour and become aware of your breathing. You may also use natural cues in the environment as reminders — moments between tasks, a ringing phone, or downtime at the computer. Use these mini-meditations to just be in the present moment.
- 4) Notice the transition times of leaving work, and returning home. Before you walk in the door, be aware of the process of “coming home.” Make eye contact with those you are greeting.

Work can be a place where we function on auto-pilot and end up feeling swept away in the momentum of our habits, the day's events, or reactivity. Practicing mindfulness in our daily work lives brings us back into the equation, fully inhabiting our lives and each moment, regardless of where it is.

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