



FUNDAMENTALS OF MINDFULNESS

In order to observe our minds, we literally need to get out of our minds. The commitment to pay attention to our thoughts whilst accepting ourselves is a way to initiate the awakening of our awareness and begin the process of what is called “Mindfulness” – the non-projecting, non-judging, non-reacting observation of thoughts and emotions/feelings. Mindfulness was originally a Buddhist meditative practice designed to take our meditation with us throughout the day, and is now an important tool in mainstream psychology. Meditation is a part of yoga, and the central feature of yoga is working with the breath. Focusing on the breath is essential for three reasons.

Every Breath is Now

Firstly, every breath we take is now, and this is where we need to center our awareness. Our mind, with its habitual thoughts and associated emotions, however, is usually anywhere but now. Because of its fears and desires, and lack of awareness, the mind gets lost in trying to control the past, such as with regret and resentment, or it is trying to control the future, such as with anxiety and worry. It is often having imaginary conversations, even arguments, with people who we are not present with. It gets lost in its imagination, thinking that it knows things that it can't possibly know, such as what someone else is thinking. In other words, the mind is usually all over the place, and all too often getting confused and suffering as a result. To be aware, we need to pull free of the mind and its entanglements. Focusing our awareness in the now is like pulling ourselves out of a rushing river and onto the bank where we can observe the river without being swept away by it.

“You can’t see the forest for the trees,” is a common saying speaking of the same thing. To see the whole forest, we need to get above it, rather than be at the same level as the trees. As we practice Mindfulness, we learn, as the calm, receptive, observing awareness, to differentiate ourselves from the habitual and often irrational thoughts that are controlling the mind.

Controlling Your Body Frequency

We can also control the rhythm of the breath in order to pull the body free of fight-or-flight reactions. When we are in a state of fight-or-flight, such as with anxiety or anger, not only does our awareness and ability to reason become very limited, our breath tends to be shallow and quick and we feel tight/wound up. All manner of physiological reactions are being triggered due to the body being tied to the mind’s blind fight-or-flight reactions. When focussing our awareness in the now, via the breath, while observing the mind, we can also practice slowing our breath down and deepening it, which is how we tend to breathe when we are open, relaxed and in control of the moment. When we do this, we are taking control of the body’s reactions that are caught up in the anxious mind, and adding to the momentum of the fear. Energetically, this is like being the calm and capable parent placing our reassuring hand on our inner-child’s shoulder letting it know that we are here with our child and our child is safe in our presence. In other words, ourselves as the observing awareness (the parent) who is staying in touch with the reality of the present moment, is looking after our mind that is reacting from a vulnerability that is stuck in a past trauma memory (inner-child) that is not aware of the reality of the present moment.

Now we can prevent our awareness, as well as our body, from reacting with the mind, which empowers our ability to observe the mind, and also disengages our primal fight-or-flight reaction more efficiently. The mind’s reactions are more effectively redirected into our accepting and compassionate awareness, rather than being seized by Mr fight-or-flight and left unprocessed. By harnessing the breath in this way, we are pulling the body into the frequency of conscious-awareness, which is above the fear and confusion of the mind.

Now is the Portal of Wisdom

The act of pausing, taking hold of our breath and observing when we feel our mind reacting is also being pegged to all the knowledge that we are learning about Mindfulness/self-aware/self-care. This further empowers our ability to observe, and also empowers our ability to gain insight in the act of observing instead of reacting.

Even when we do react, with self-acceptance, we can go back to that difficult moment later and review it, which then becomes the knowledge that further strengthens our awareness and ability to be present in the moment. By not giving up, by persisting with the process of self-awareness, the strength of our awareness will simply keep growing, and will inevitably, step-by-step, gain mastery of the mind. Every moment that once seemed a problem becomes an opportunity to grow our awareness.