



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.

Every Breath is Now

Meditation is the foundation of yoga, and a central feature of yoga/meditation/mindfulness is focusing our awareness on our breath. Focusing on the breath greatly empowers our ability to be the aware observer for three important reasons. Firstly, every breath we take is now, and this is where we need to center our awareness. Why is *Now* so important? Because we can only act now. Everything else is just thinking, but the mind, without awareness, often can't tell the difference. 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 worry and anxiety. Our mind is often having imaginary conversations, even arguments, with people who are not present with us. It often thinks that it knows things that it can't possibly know, such as what someone else is thinking. The mind gets lost in its memories and imagination. In other words, the mind is usually all over the place, and all too often getting confused and suffering as a result. In reality, with this type of thinking, the mind is achieving nothing but burning up energy. It's like the mind thinks it's running down the road, but it's really just running on a treadmill.

To be aware, we need to pull free of the mind and its confusions. For example, by focusing on the breath, I can be aware of my body and then be aware that my body is sitting safely in a chair in my office, and not

back in my bedroom as a young teenager being punched in the nose by my elder brother. Focusing our awareness in the now by focusing on our breath is like pulling ourselves out of a rushing river of confusion and onto the bank where we can observe the river without being so 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. I can recall being punched in the nose by my brother, remember the pain, the shock and the gushing blood, but know I am safe in my office now. By focusing our awareness on our breath, which is always now, it is then easier to observe what the confused mind is projecting onto our awareness – the movie screen – rather than getting so lost in the movie.

Controlling Your Body Frequency

My brother actually did punch me in the nose and broke it, as a part of him bullying me. However, even though he was bigger and older, I nevertheless was able to always rebel against him and retain an important level of my own power. As a result, not too much trauma was attached to individual incidents. It was more the overall experience of being bullied and controlled, and my parents not being able to adequately protect me from that. But what if circumstances were different and I carried a lot of trauma with that memory. I may be aware that I am sitting in my office, but the impact of that memory can still be strong and even overwhelming.

To add more power to our awareness, we can also control the rhythm of the breath in order to pull the body free of the 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 slow down and deepen our breath in this way, we take control of the body’s stress reactions that are caught up in the anxious mind that, in turn, adds to the momentum of the fear. In a real way, this is like being the calm and capable parent placing our reassuring hand on our inner-child’s shoulder while letting our child know that we are there and our child is safe in our presence. With this Mindful breathing, we are being calm, open Conscious-Awareness gently embracing our reacting body.

Now, with the power of our conscious, aware breath, we can prevent our awareness, as well as our body, from reacting so much with the mind, which further empowers our ability to observe the mind, and also disengages our primal fight-or-flight reactions more effectively. The mind’s reactions are more efficiently redirected into our accepting and compassionate Conscious-Awareness, rather than being seized by the blind, primal reactions of fight-or-flight where our fears and feelings of being out of control continue to be reinforced. 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.

Knowledge Empowers Awareness

The act of pausing and taking control of our breath, when we feel our minds reacting, becomes increasingly linked to, and empowered by, all the knowledge that we are learning about Mindfulness/self-awareness/self-acceptance/self-care. This is where Mindfulness really powers up.

With practice, persistence, and experience, our new conscious attempts at self-care and constructive action forge new habitual synaptic pathways in our brain. These new positive thinking pathways become linked to the old confused pathways that are triggering our trapped emotional reactions. So when we react in the old way, the new self-care conditioning is also triggered, prompting us to pause, breath, and observe which

also instantly connects our awareness to all the knowledge and experience that we are gaining through our self-care Mindfulness practice. With this new clarity, we can then identify the problematic thoughts with the knowing now of how the old thinking just causes us more problems. As part of our growing knowledge and experience, a new, more constructive way of dealing with the situation is now part of our awareness. In that instance of the reaction, we now have a new choice of how to act. In time, the new constructive choice becomes the new habit and we can see in that instance how the old way just does not make sense.

Self-acceptance/care adds the power of Love to our Conscious-Awareness/observing-self, which empowers our insight and ability to process the pain and confusion. We are increasingly observing the mind's reactions from the perspective of Unconditional Love, enabling us to compassionately see our mind's confusion for what it is – misbeliefs about us not being worthy of Love.

With my growing Conscious-Awareness, empowered by self-acceptance/Love, I came to identify how I needed to be cared for in that memory of my brother's bullying and how I became confused about my worth because of such incidences. I spent time processing and re-imagining the memory, becoming my own parent protecting and nurturing my inner-child. Such processing also helped me to be aware of what was happening for my brother at the time.

As we practice Mindfulness, we increasingly learn, as the aware, receptive observing-self, to differentiate our Conscious-Awareness from the habitual and irrational thoughts that are causing us to suffer by the way those thoughts feel in comparison to self-loving thoughts.

Even when our reactions get the better of our awareness, with self-acceptance, we can go back to that difficult moment later and review it in the same way. The insights that we gain from this process then become the knowledge and experience that further strengthens our ability to be the observer in the present moment, being able to hold steady while the mind is reacting. By not giving up, by persisting with the process of self-awareness/self-care, the strength of our awareness will simply keep growing. We will inevitably, step-by-step, gain mastery of our mind. Every moment that once seemed a problem becomes an opportunity to grow our awareness.