

Skillful Living Series

Mindfulness Basics



Venerable Tenzin Tharpa

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Mindfulness Basics
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Dear reader,

Thank you for your interest in this text series. I hope it brings to you the clarity and insight that you seek. In my writing, I endeavor to make the Buddha's teachings available to a wide audience, while also striving to convey to the reader the positive, life-affirming joy that permeates the Buddha's teachings, yet is often lost or overlooked in dry translations. For when understood properly, every aspect of the Buddha's teachings pertains to freedom and liberation: freedom from our daily self-imposed suffering, and liberation from mundane and unsatisfactory existence.

Tenzin Tharpa

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Skillful Living Series: Mindfulness Basics

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Mindfulness Basics

Note: This text assumes the reader has finished *Meditation Basics* from where this text continues. *Meditation Basics* is available for free download at: TenzinTharpa.com

Today, mindfulness is all the rage, being prescribed by doctors, therapists, business gurus, self-help experts, media celebrities, sports coaches, and schoolteachers. Mindfulness has gained great popularity being widely accepted as a straightforward and practical technique for working with the mind and emotions. Research suggests the benefits of mindfulness as like those of meditation, discussed previously,

- Health benefits include *reducing*: stress, high blood pressure, depression, ADHD, and age-related cognitive decline; while *enhancing*: the immune system and overall health.
- Emotional and wellbeing benefits include *reducing*: reactivity, feelings of loneliness and/or social isolation, anxiety and worry; while *enhancing*: empathy, compassion, general happiness, and regulation of mood and psychological well-being.
- Personal productivity benefits include *reducing*: stress and anxiety; while *enhancing*: learning, cognitive skills, clarity, attention, resilience, memory, perspective, decision making, information processing, and creativity.
- Social and community benefits include *reducing*: selfishness, narcissism, aggression, contention, greed, and antisocial behavior; while *enhancing*: contentment, altruism, friendliness, personal responsibility, goodwill, and healthy social interaction.

Additionally, because mindfulness works within our everyday environment, it also can enhance daily activity, skills, and attaining goals, whatever those goals may be.

What is mindfulness

Mindfulness, like meditation, is a method of mental cultivation with the purpose of developing and gaining control over the mind and its processes. A practice that develops insight, concentration, focus, and mental/emotional stability; while reducing mind-wandering and mental/emotional distraction. Mindfulness is the cultivation of *intentional uninterrupted focus*, a particular type of mental attention in which we purposefully focus the mind in order to become more aware and centered within the present moment or activity. Through the cultivation of mindfulness, we can gain understanding and clarity about ourselves, others, and our environment, allowing us to make wiser choices, leading to more content and prosperous lives.

The aim of mindfulness

Ultimately, the aim of mindfulness is to become mentally and emotionally healthy and whole. To be more *present* and consciously engaged in the activities and experiences that make up our lives. Mindfulness is a cultivation of *awakening* from mundane, habitual, and/or unproductive states of mind. To become more skillful within our daily interactions and environment by bringing

clarity and precision to our intentions, behaviors, actions, and reactions. Mindfulness also serves as a link helping to bridge formal meditation practice to our everyday life.

What mindfulness is not

Some imagine mindfulness as abiding in a spacy, blissed-out mental state that is far removed from the sharp and productive mind we utilize in the workplace, classroom, and at play; this is a mistake. On the contrary, mindfulness is to dwell in a state of heightened calm awareness, that is clear, focused, and alert. A mind *properly* engaged in mindfulness practice is visually indistinguishable from the commonplace mindset, the only qualities noticeably missing is the absence of mental and emotional distraction and/or instability.

Like meditation, mindfulness is not about suppressing thought. Instead, it's aimed at gaining control over the thinking process. Mindfulness is also not about suppressing feelings or emotions, but to gain emotional stability, maturity, and control. To be more emotionally skillful and effective when engaging within our community and environment. To experience emotions in their appropriate and rational context, free of over-reactivity.

Stillness/presence/emptiness

One resultant and experiential aspect of mindfulness and meditation is the discovery/realization of *stillness*. Stillness, also termed presence, emptiness, or '*the now*', can be understood as, the underlying peace, contentment, and wellbeing that is present within every moment. Stillness is a shift in perception that recognizes the inherent space that underlies our daily reality. It's reality prior to interpretation and judgment; the acceptance of the present moment just as it is. Stillness is the calm that is always present beneath your anxieties; the spaciousness that is always present beneath your busyness; the equanimity that is always present beneath your contention. To abide in stillness is to abide as the *observing witness* to the unfolding of the present moment, without wishing it to be any different; shifting your awareness from the *doing* mind to the *observing* mind.

Note: Emptiness, although sometimes synonymous with stillness, is a more complex concept. A more comprehensive presentation of emptiness is shared later in this text series.

Objective distance

Another experiential aspect of mindfulness is the discovery/realization of *objective distance*—the recognition of the space between the observer and the observed, the doer and the activity, and the feeling and the experience; a space that allows for wisdom, reason, and skill to flourish. (Traditionally, within Buddhism, this is known by the often-problematic term *nonattachment*). Objective distance is the transcendence of our compulsive grasping at ideas, views, and narcissistic identity; to abide in a less subjective/interpretive reality. Objective distance is not *detachment*—which is the avoidance of emotional or social engagement; instead, it's to cultivate space in the present moment for our intrinsic goodness, joy, and compassion to shine through. To become more emotionally mature, and effective. To cultivate mental and emotional stability that benefits ourselves, our loved ones, as well as our community.

Doctors have long known of the benefits of keeping a professional distance between themselves and their patients, allowing them a greater level of objectivity and effectiveness. However, this professional distance isn't just for doctors. We also can cultivate it, in order to become more effective and functional within our lives.

The problem is that most of us live our lives with our faces mashed up against the window-glass of reality, abiding in a state of intense immediacy with an unquenchable thirst for more. The answer to this problem is the cultivation of an objective distance, which, serves as an antidote to our hungers and desires, as well as our over-emotional reactivity and relentless thinking and worrying. This objective distance is the Buddha's prescription for engaging properly with the world, or in his own words, "*To be in the world, but not of the world.*"

Experiences: While mindfulness and meditation differ only in their level of depth, with meditation offering a deeper experience. These experiences share the felt sensation of stillness, presence, and objective distance, experienced as a slight backing away from the world. Time seems to slow, and feelings of stability/maturity increase. There is a shift to a more balanced perception, feeling one's inner-world and outer-world in a more proper balance. There's a calming and felt reduction in one's mental/physical speed. While the intense immediacy that normally plagues us is replaced by spaciousness. At its deepest levels, this is one of the most pleasant, restorative, and therapeutic mental states that can be experienced. A state of mind that is available to everyone, in every moment.

The three forms of mindfulness

Although our awareness is indivisible, it can be utilized differently within various practices. The thing that differentiates its applications is the chosen object of focus. Here I share three practices of mindfulness which consist of both contemplation and meditation techniques. Meaning, mindfulness can be practiced within daily activities or in formal seated meditation.

1. **Present Moment Mindfulness** - A practice of open or bare awareness, commonly termed, *Present Moment Awareness*—a specific type of focused attention that is accepting and non-judgmental; to simply abide as the observing witness of the present moment or present activity.
2. **Reflective Mindfulness** - To be present with, to recall, remember, or keep in mind—concepts, practices, and/or instructions pertaining to your path of improvement. For example, to keep in mind your ethical and practice commitments, vows, precepts, intentions, and aspirations; or to abide within an active contemplation—like reflecting on objective distance while engaging with others; paradoxically, it can also be simply remembering to stay engaged in the practice of mindfulness itself.
3. **Mindful Meditation** - A form of Calm Abiding Meditation in which the object of meditation is the mind itself. This includes watching the thought process, intentions, emotions, mental sensations, habits, etc. This can be practiced within any of the four meditation positions (sitting, standing, lying, walking).

Mindfulness Techniques

Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere—at any time, within any activity or non-activity. All forms of mindfulness follow the same basic method, the only difference being the chosen object of contemplation. A chosen object of contemplation can be the breath, physical sensations, emotions, behaviors, current actions, the present moment, or aspects/topics pertaining to your practice. The simplest of all mindfulness practices is simply watching the breath during activities.

Noting

We first learned to utilize *noting* during meditation, but within mindfulness, we use it to a much greater extent. The practice of noting refers to making mental notes or labeling of experiences, sensation, mental and physical activities, behaviors, emotions, reactions, etc. Simply put, anything you can experience, internally or externally, can be noted. Noting is a wonderful and reliable technique for helping to keep the mind focused and in the present moment. It's also one of the best tools for identifying and working with patterns and habits. Noting works to reduce mind-wandering, over-reactivity, and unconscious habitual behavior. The application of noting is easy: wherever your awareness goes, and/or whatever your mind focuses on, you simply note it; this note then becomes your object of focus.

The way noting works in creating presence is by ushering the mind into uninterrupted focused awareness. This technique relies on one unique aspect of the mind. Although the mind can experience its various senses simultaneously (seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling), the mind does not have the ability to hold multiple thoughts or concepts at the same time; the mind can only think of one thing at a time (although it can shift back and forth rapidly). This means, when we note an active experience, being done in the present moment, the mind is forced into presence and cannot be anywhere else. All past anguish, future worry, or current anxiety is suspended.

You can note:

- Sense experiences: noting sights as *seeing*, sounds as *hearing*, scents as *smelling*, etc.
- Feelings and sensations: noting sleepy, anxious, itchy, achy, hungry, etc.
- Emotions/moods: noting content, happy, sad, grateful, depressed, etc.
- Internal activities: noting thinking, daydreaming, meditating, breathing, sulking, etc.
- External activities: noting working, reading, driving, listening, sitting, washing, etc.
- Nonactivities: noting resting, relaxing, experiencing, enjoying, observing, etc.
- Behaviors: noting habits, tendencies, instinct, appropriate/inappropriate behavior, etc.
- Intentions: noting altruistic, selfish, greedy, prideful, wholesome, productive, etc.
- Attitudes: noting confident, narcissistic, arrogant, cocky, shy, nervous, etc.
- Views: noting Buddhist, Christian, Western/Eastern, Marxist, Capitalist,
- Assessment: noting proper/improper, like/dislike/impartial, enjoyable, healthy, etc.
- Revelations: noting the present moment, impermanent, stillness, truth, etc.

Note: There is no point in noting physical phenomena. Noting ‘*automobile*’ won’t help us to become present. However, noting the sense perception of the phenomena will: *seeing* an automobile, *feeling* rain, *enjoying* the movie, *exploring* the park.

Using noting to understand others

Noting can also be used to note other people’s behaviors, emotions, character, activities, intentions, etc. This practice (usually done silently) brings a focused awareness to understanding others. This is a wonderful technique for training us to remain more objective in our daily interactions, while also working as an antidote to over-reactivity. In the initial time it takes to make a note, a space is created between the experience and the reaction allowing for awareness, wisdom, and skill to be applied.

Instructions for Present Moment Mindfulness

This form of mindfulness is aimed at cultivating *present moment awareness* when not on the cushion. It can be practiced during everyday activities and interactions, as well as in leisure time. The practice of Present Moment Mindfulness is simple, you try to stay present within the activity at hand. When washing the dishes, you are *only* washing the dishes, trying to keep your mind from wandering off. There is an old Zen saying, ‘*Mindfulness is merely doing one thing at a time.*’ Meaning, being singularly and continually focused on one task at a time. This is accomplished by repeatedly noting the activity, in this case saying or thinking ‘*washing dishes*’. Between noting, place your attention on the inflow and outflow of the breath. If the mind starts to wander, repeat the note ‘*washing dishes*’. This is done over and over again. The practice of noting can slowly be reduced or abandoned once you have mastered staying present.

Some Present Moment Mindfulness practices

Mindful walking

Begin walking with a comfortable *strolling* speed, the destination or length of the walk is unimportant, what is important is keeping your mind present within the activity. While walking, you have a choice of where to place your focus. *One*, on the motion of the body; *two*, on the feeling of your feet making contact with the ground; or *three*, focus on the inflow and outflow of the breath. As you walk, note the activity, ‘*walking*’, then focus on your chosen object of mindfulness. I recommend starting by noting every other step, saying, ‘*walking*’.

Mindful eating

Mindful eating is usually done in silence. That means no TV, surfing the net, music, reading, or conversation. Begin by examining the food, turning the plate—inspecting it from all sides. Smell the food and take in its aroma. Take a moment to generate appreciation for the food, the care

and love in its preparation, the difficulties in its cultivation, and its magical ability to nourish and prolong sentient life. Put a small spoonful of the food in your mouth and then set your spoon down. Chew slowly and chew completely before swallowing while noting the activity, *'eating'*. Bring your full awareness to the task, become one with the activity by immersing yourself in all the sensations, smells, and tastes. Within the mouth: taste every bite fully; feel the food moving around your mouth; become aware of the intricate skill of the tongue; feel your saliva combining with and moistening the food; discern the abundance of flavors. When not at the table, observe your digestive process, of feeling full, watch the cycle of your appetite, bring awareness to feelings of an empty stomach, or the desire to eat although you're not hungry, discern the difference between the hungry mind from the hungry stomach.

Mindful listening

Begin within a conversation; bring your full attention to the speaker, relax and take in the sound. Notice the words, emotions, meter, pitch, inflection, and nuance; move past the words to see the underlying emotional sharing that is the true communication happening. Truly listen, don't just wait to speak. Let the speaker have and enjoy the conversation. Control the urge to inject yourself into it by sharing your own experience, understanding, or view. Let the conversation stay focused on the speaker. This selfless offering of the space within the moment becomes a profound act of generosity.

Mindful Showering

When showering, just shower. Begin by noting the activity, *'washing'*. Then keep your focus on the breath as you wash. When the mind begins to wander, you repeat the note, *'washing'*. Try to find the pleasure and joy in the activity. Try to find the stillness in the present moment.

Mindful interaction

One of the most advantageous practices of mindfulness is to be mindful of your thoughts, speech, and reactions when interacting with others. Focusing on appropriate and/or productive behavior, including, being present, caring, calm, friendly, open, generous, while being a generous listener. Proper behavior further includes putting others' interests and importance before our own, not sharing strong views, not being contentious, not overreacting, and staying equanimous no matter what challenges may arise.

Advice on Present Moment Mindfulness

- Try to use positive and/or more productive noting. E.g., instead of using the note *'waiting'*, it's more productive to replace it with a more positive note like *'resting'*.

Obstacles to Present Moment Mindfulness

- Getting caught up in mundane activities and forgetting to practice – This is a common obstacle that we all are challenged with. The solution is to be creative. Set alerts on your phone; tape notes up around the house; draw a symbol on your hand; or combine mindfulness with other activities, like eating, showering, driving, etc.

- Focusing too strongly – Sometimes, when applying mindfulness too strongly–too soon, you may feel it somewhat disorientating or unbalancing. Remember that the practice of mindfulness should be approached gradually and naturally.

Instructions for Reflective Mindfulness

This form of mindfulness is aimed at cultivating *reflective awareness* when not on the cushion. It can be practiced during everyday activities and interactions, as well as in leisure time. The practice of Reflective Mindfulness is easy, it's simply keeping your spiritual practice (including instruction, advice, and application) front and center in your daily awareness. This can include keeping in mind qualities and characteristics you are working towards; remaining present within a currently active practice or contemplation; not forgetting ethical and practice commitments (vows, precepts, intentions, and aspirations). One example is reflecting on the Buddhist tenets throughout the day, e.g., remembering to be generous, kind, honest, compassionate, and ethical.

Another good example is my practice of the *Four Gifts*. The Four Gifts are four qualities that are cultivated when engaged with the world (stability, calm, care, and happiness.) This practice requires the practitioner to cultivate and hold a focused awareness of these qualities within the present moment. This is accomplished by repeatedly noting the qualities by reciting the mantra, '*stable, calm, caring, happy*', which helps holds the mind in the present moment. Between recitations of the mantra, focus on the breath, and repeating the mantra when necessary.

Advice on Reflective Mindfulness

- Repeatedly note, throughout the day, qualities you are aspiring to developed (maturity, confidence, patience, kindness, openness, etc.)
- The *Four Gifts* (download from TenzinTharpa.com) is a good practice to begin with.

Obstacles to Reflective Mindfulness

- Getting caught up in mundane activities and forgetting to practice – This is a common obstacle that we all are challenged by. The solution is to be creative. Set alerts on your phone; tape notes up around the house; draw a symbol on your hand.
- Focusing too strongly – Sometimes, when applying mindfulness too strongly–too soon, you may feel it somewhat disorientating or unbalancing. Remember that the practice of mindfulness should be approached gradually and naturally.

Instructions for Mindfulness Meditation

This form of mindfulness is aimed at cultivating very deep insight into the workings of the mind. Whereas the other forms of mindfulness are utilized within your daily activities, this practice brings mindfulness to the cushion or chair (or any of the four prescribed meditation positions). What makes this practice unique is its object of meditation; the mind itself. Begin this practice

with Calm Abiding Meditation, using any of the techniques from our meditation toolbox to get started. When you have attained a calm and stable mind, rooted in stillness, turn your attention to your mind. This is a practice of *open awareness*, meaning, there isn't one particular aspect or quality of the mind you're focusing on. Instead, while anchoring yourself in stillness, sit and watch the mind with a broad peripheral awareness, noticing what the mind does, where it goes, and what arises from it.

Advice on Mindfulness Meditation

- Keep your awareness as open and expansive as possible, deeply rooted in stillness

Obstacles to Mindfulness Meditation

- The same obstacles as Calm Abiding Meditation – sleepiness, anxiety, mind-wandering

The Spectrum of Mindfulness Practice

Previously in the text, we talked about the *doing mind* and also the *observing mind*. These aspects of awareness represent a spectrum that practitioners harness and learn to navigate. Wisdom and experience are used to determine where on the spectrum is most productive at any given time. For each unique situation we find ourselves in, at any particular moment, requires an equally unique awareness or mindset.



The doing mind

There are appropriate times and situations to be less openly aware (especially for the novice). Times where the precision of the doing mind is utilized for what it does best, planning, work tasks, study, or problem-solving; suitable times to let our cognitive habits or *mental automation* take the stage. This is most true in times of emergencies or pressing life concerns, where the intense immediacy and fast reaction time of the doing mind is useful.

The observing mind

The observing mind is generally unknown to most people. Although, everyone experiences it at various times, when watching movies or sports, engaging in intense activities like rock climbing, skydiving, playing sports, experiences that are so rich or dangerous they force the mind into the present moment and into uninterrupted focus. However, for most of us, we are not consciously

aware of our experience of the observing mind. Generally, we only inhabit the doing mind in our daily lives.

The union of doing and observing awareness

Through mastering mindfulness, proficient practitioners become able to engage with both the doing awareness and observing awareness simultaneously and continuously. This becomes possible when the practitioner has become so accustomed to the experience of stillness, it no longer requires an object of focus to engage in. Stillness becomes a felt sensation that is easily accessible, taking very little effort to engage in. Meaning, our focus can be fully utilized by the doing mind. Here, both aspects of mindfulness operate seamlessly and in harmony, complimenting each other while producing a remarkably content and productive state of mind.

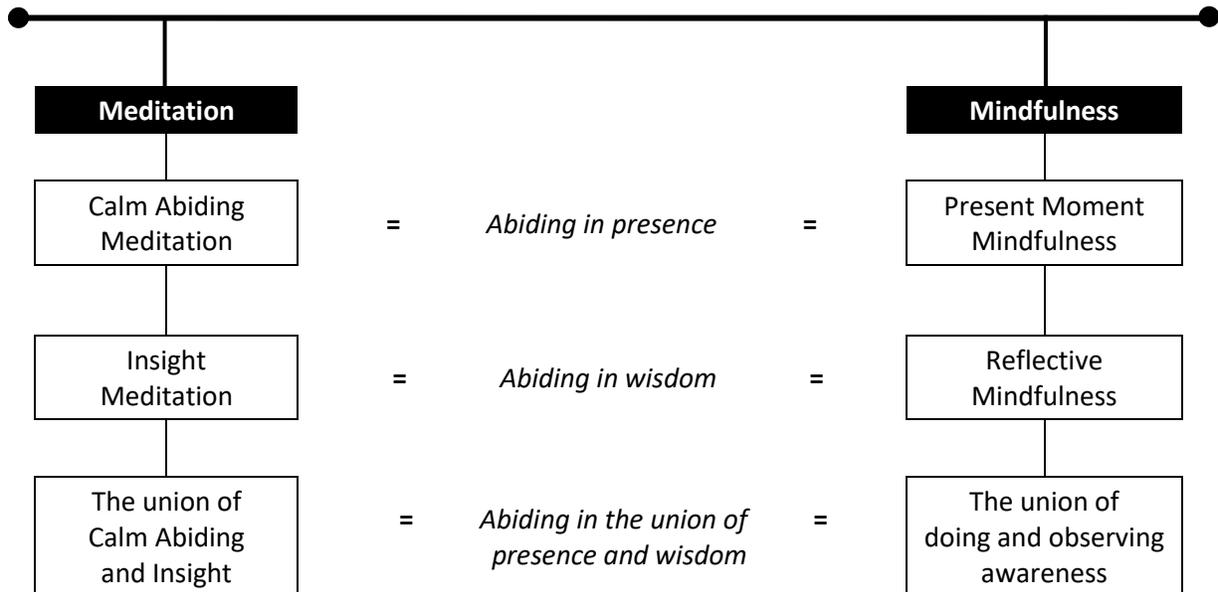
Mindfulness Seen as an Extension of Meditation

Although very similar, the differences between mindfulness and meditation may simply be the internal/external balance and the depth of engagement. Meaning, where meditation is an inward-focused and deeper practice; mindfulness is a lighter practice focused on both the internal and external. A good example of this is the difference between *walking meditation* and *mindful walking*. During walking meditation, although a small amount of attention must be given to the act of walking, the aim is primarily inward, to enter a state of reduced conceptualization (calm abiding); whereas in mindful walking, the aim is to become *present*, and one with, the activity.

Meditation and mindfulness seen as a single spectrum of practice

The practices of meditation and mindfulness are interrelated, with mindfulness being merely an extension of meditation practice (*Present Moment Mindfulness* as the natural extension of *Calm Abiding Meditation*; and *Reflective Mindfulness* as the natural extension of *Insight Meditation*). Meaning, these practices exist on a spectrum of engaged awareness, and depending on our current state of mind and inner and outer environments, we can move between the two practices, engaging at any point within the spectrum we see fit. The aim, at any place on the spectrum, is to remain abiding in presence.

The Spectrum of Meditation and Mindfulness Practices



Signs of success in your mindfulness practice

The signs of success in mindfulness are basically the same as in Meditation:

1. The attainment of *the mind of renunciation* (the resolute wish for liberation/freedom)
2. The development of deep inspiration, faith, and appetite for practice
3. Realizing the futility of mundane goals and self-occupied interests
4. Becoming less reactionary while recovering more quickly from negative mental states
5. Becoming more mentally and emotionally stable (more mature)
6. Seeing your negative emotions being transformed into their positive counterparts
7. Seeing that you are beginning to experience bliss and equanimity, even when not engaged in practice.

Note: According to Buddhism, meditation, mindfulness, stillness, and/or present moment awareness, are not complete paths. Meaning, full awakening is not possible through them alone. Instead, meditation and mindfulness are seen as tools used for cultivating insight and wisdom, which become the actual cause for awakening. For Buddhists, this insight and wisdom is specific, pertaining to the direct experiential realization of the Buddha's teachings and/or the true nature of oneself and reality.

Q and A

Questions, answers, and comments by practitioners

- Q:** *When practicing mindfulness, I often feel a bit uncoordinated or clumsy. This includes times when I am walking, playing sports, or performing intricate activities. Am I doing something wrong?*
- A:** A common issue for those new to mindfulness is practicing too deeply, too quickly. Don't engage too deeply at the beginning, be gentle, give yourself time to adjust to this new practice. Always remember the practice of mindfulness is a spectrum. You need to use your own wisdom and experience to evaluate where you need to be on the spectrum at any given time (how deeply you're engaged). *Conversely*, experienced practitioners claim just the opposite; that mindfulness practice enhances their abilities, increasing their mental focus, balance, agility, and productivity.
- Q:** *When engaging others, I worry that the distance created by my mindfulness practice will make me seem disconnected and not emotionally engaged with them.*
- A:** Adopting a new mindset can be challenging. For most of us, when engaging with others, we strive to be at our best, which means sticking to our *A game*, our tried and proven set of communication skills. This translates as the doing mind skillfully manipulating the experience in order to create and/or sustain the right mental image of ourselves in the minds of others. But does this sound like genuine or honest interaction? Is connecting with others an identity game that needs to be survived, or won? The distance you feel is generosity, maturity, and stability. It's the transcendence of childish self-centered interaction, while learning to be genuinely present with others; to be honestly concerned for their wellbeing and becoming an authentic listener and a stable friend. However, cultivating this new mindset takes time to get used to. Take it slow and gentle.
- Q:** *When practicing mindfulness at business or social functions, I feel apart from the group. How does this benefit me?*
- A:** Once again this is the feeling of objective distance. In my own experience, I find that although I feel this distance, others don't necessarily feel it from me. Yes, they may detect something different about me, but usually, they interpret it as calmness. This distance makes us better friends, spouses, parents, and coworkers. We don't fight over space in conversation or go into opinionated or contentious rants. We rarely offend others, while being more accepting of the challenges within our daily experiences. Don't confuse objective distance for detachment—to avoid social or emotional involvement. Within objective distance, we are free to interact at will. So, ask questions, smile, laugh, find the proper and comfortable distance in each situation. Remember, objective distance gives you the *choice* of just how much you want to

participate. Chill out and enjoy listening; or tell a great story. The only boundaries are the limits of your own imagination.

Q: *Doesn't objective distance, distance yourself from love, compassion, and empathy?*

A: It only distances us from the intense immediacy of neurotic, irrational, and/or clinging love. Real love is spacious, undemanding, and inclusive. Objective distance helps us to break down the personal circle differentiating who we consider a loved one/friend and who we consider enemy/stranger: the troublesome discernment of 'us and them'. But there is a tradeoff. For as we spread out our compassion, distinctions between the inner and outer of our circle are diminished. Meaning, the strong clinging love of the inner circle is brought down to healthier levels; and the weak outer circle is strengthened and brought up to healthier levels.

Q: *When I'm with my children, mindfulness makes me feel a bit distant from them. I worry that it is creating a barrier between us, of not being able to show my full love.*

A: Actually, every effective parent is already acquainted with the benefits of objective distance. All parents know that parenting requires the application of distance so that children can learn to be self-reliant—to think and do for themselves. Equally, all parents know they can't simply smother their child in love and kisses, there must be some level of distance for healthy emotional development to occur. This is equally true in all relationships (friends, spouses, coworkers, etc.), an aspect that benefits all interaction. The fact is, distance is a tool we use daily but are usually unaware of, e.g., some people we are closer with (those we trust); while others we are skillfully distant with (those we don't know). So, mindfulness becomes a way of being more aware and skillful with this familiar tool, using presence and objective distance to cultivate more effective and rewarding relationships.

Q: *My work is so fast paced it seems impossible for me to practice mindfulness.*

A: Don't try to engage so deeply. Apply the practice very gently, just a taste; give yourself time to slowly adjust to this new practice and figure out how best it works for you. Always remember that the practice is a spectrum. Use your wisdom and experience to evaluate where you need to be. Once experienced, you will find that mindfulness practice enhances your abilities, increasing mental focus, balance, agility, and productivity.

Q: *I can never remember to practice mindfulness. Any tips?*

A: Where there is a will there is a way. Paradoxically, the first practice of mindfulness is remembering to practice mindfulness. Begin by accepting it, 'yes, I'm forgetful' (no big deal) and then get creative. Set alerts on your phone; tape notes up around the house.

Associate with a community or friends who also embrace mindfulness and can be a means of inspirations and support.

Q: *Is the point of mindfulness to be constantly mindful?*

A: Yes and no. The initial aim is to gain the ability of choice, of when you wish to be mindful. For the opposite of mindfulness—mind-wandering, does have its benefits, especially in creativity and problem-solving. The learned skill of mindfulness gives the holder the power of a choice they never had before, of where on the spectrum of doing and observing they wish to operate from at any given time. The choice of favoring the doing mind, with its unique talents (planning, meeting deadlines, etc.) or of favoring the observing mind, with its own talents (wisdom, contentment, rejuvenation, etc.). Those who don't know mindfulness, remain trapped in the doing mind and know no other choice. However, with that said, ultimately, the aim of mindfulness is the union of the observing mind and the doing mind, where both are continuously present and functional at all times, delivering an amazingly agile and productive state of mind.

----- Important Notes -----

- If difficulties in your practice persist, it's always a good idea to seek additional one-on-one advice from a qualified teacher.
- Meditation, mindfulness, and Buddhism were not intended as medical therapy. For those who suffer from mental, social, and/or emotional disorders, it's always best to work with a therapist or specialized teacher in the field. Currently, there are a growing number of therapists and specialized teachers that can instruct patients in meditation, mindfulness, and Buddhist practices.
- Lastly, if for any reason you feel vulnerable, unstable, or just a bit down, reach out to others. Be it family, friends, or professional caregivers, there are so many wonderful people in this world who wish to help others.