

In this article I want to give you a view of mindfulness meditation that hopefully will be an invitation for practice and/or support and encouragement for your journey. At the end of the article I will give simple instructions for how to meditate. As I've heard many teachers say, "It's a simple practice, it's just not always easy". With that in mind, let's begin.

"What we live with we learn, what we learn we practice, what we practice we become". As many of you probably know, this wise adage comes from the recovery community. Over the years I've recalled it in connection with assisting others in understanding their current lives in reference to their former lives. I think it also has application for establishing healthy habits in our present lives and feeling confident that they will be of great benefit. To apply it to beginning a meditation practice it may help to think of it in a circle. When we allow ourselves time every day to pay attention, to notice ourselves and the world around us without judgment, we learn to calm the riled waters within, and over time we begin to live in greater calmness overall. As we live with greater calmness, we practice being calm and at ease. As we practice being calm and at ease, we become easeful beings engaging in the world easily and in peaceful ways. This kind of engagement is synonymous with true happiness. And happiness is what we all seek.

What is mindfulness meditation? Why is it an important practice for living? Why would you want to make space to practice in your busy life? Let me first discuss mindfulness as a perspective. **Mindfulness** is the ability to be with **what is, just as it is**, in the present moment. It is the ability to **bring non-judgmental attention** to whatever is in the present. It is a willingness to **stop, pause, look and see** within and outside with new eyes. **Meditation** is the simple practice of **focusing one's attention for the sole purpose of paying attention**. Putting mindfulness and meditation together becomes **a practice of focusing one's attention non-judgmentally in the present moment on what is**. This is beneficial as we need to create and sustain an inner haven and guidance system so that we always have a home base no matter what is pulling at our lives. This happens when we **STOP, PAUSE, LOOK, AND SEE**. Let's look at each of these actions briefly.

Stopping may sound simple, but in our fast paced world, it's not always easy. It can feel like the sudden jolt when you put the brakes on a fast moving car. However, if we're generally moving at a fast pace, the world has its' ways of halting us, often unpleasantly. We can take charge of this so that we lessen the frequency of "jolt" experiences of our lives. We do it by simply asking ourselves to stop what we're doing and pause. **Pausing** we connect with our breath, giving ourselves more oxygen, the most vital nutrient for sustaining our life. We release built up tension in our whole bodymind. As we release tension, we **look** at what is and **see** more clearly. We often see things differently and give ourselves new

choices for response....choices like understanding and love. For example, all of us have moments of feeling scared thinking of something awful happening to ourselves or loved ones. Sometimes these thoughts take over like a thick enveloping fog. We feel confused or paralyzed. With the practice described above, we gently call ourselves to stop. We might picture a red light up ahead and gently apply our brakes so that we come to a halt and then pause to consciously breath deeper. Then we look at what is happening in our bodymind and see what is fueling our turmoil. We might see that our fear is based in old perceptions rather than present reality (which is often the case). Whatever the reality of the situation, bringing the choice for understanding and love to yourself and others opens up a new path for problem solving and action. Cultivating this practice also prepares you to be present in a new way for the really big moments of life. I experienced this profoundly when my mother died. I was able to be with her without trying to fix or change anything, just be fully present. Being with her in this way was one of the best gifts my mom ever gave me and one of the greatest benefits of mindfulness.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a popular meditation teacher and author says that to meditate is to treat yourself as if you really matter, just like you would a friend. Focusing non-judgmentally within is one of the best ways to make friends with your body, your feelings, your thoughts, your whole being. This act of friendship ends the war against ourselves and opens us up to acceptance of self, others and life. True happiness follows. Practicing mindfulness meditation is about putting your “meat in the seat” day in and day out. Some days it may be because you know it’s a good idea, other days because it’s the only place you feel safe and still other days it’s the banquet you’ve been hungry for all your lives. Whatever the experience....May you find true joy and happiness.

The Practice

Sitting Meditation

1. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
2. Sit comfortably on a cushion or a chair, spine straight, body relaxed.
3. Have a passive attitude as in, “there is nothing better for me to do right now”.
4. Have a focus. In mindfulness meditation, the breath is the primary focus.
5. Begin by taking a few natural deep breaths. Do not force anything.
6. When you notice your attention straying from your breath, just bring it back.
7. There are no good or bad meditation sessions. All assist in inner freedom.

Living Mindfulness

1. The calmness and alertness gained in sitting practice spills over into the whole of life when we allow ourselves to be aware.
2. Washing our face, brushing our teeth, doing the dishes, all can become moments of mindfulness in which we realize how full life is.
3. Use daily signals as mindfulness bells. For example, when the phone rings, take 3 conscious breaths before answering it.

Resources for Mindfulness Meditation

The Miracle of Mindfulness and Peace is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh

Wherever You Go There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindful Recovery: A Spiritual Path to Healing From Addiction by Thomas Bien

Suzanne Kilkus, PhD, LMFT is a psychotherapist, teacher and meditator. Her website is www.heartspacecoaching.com.