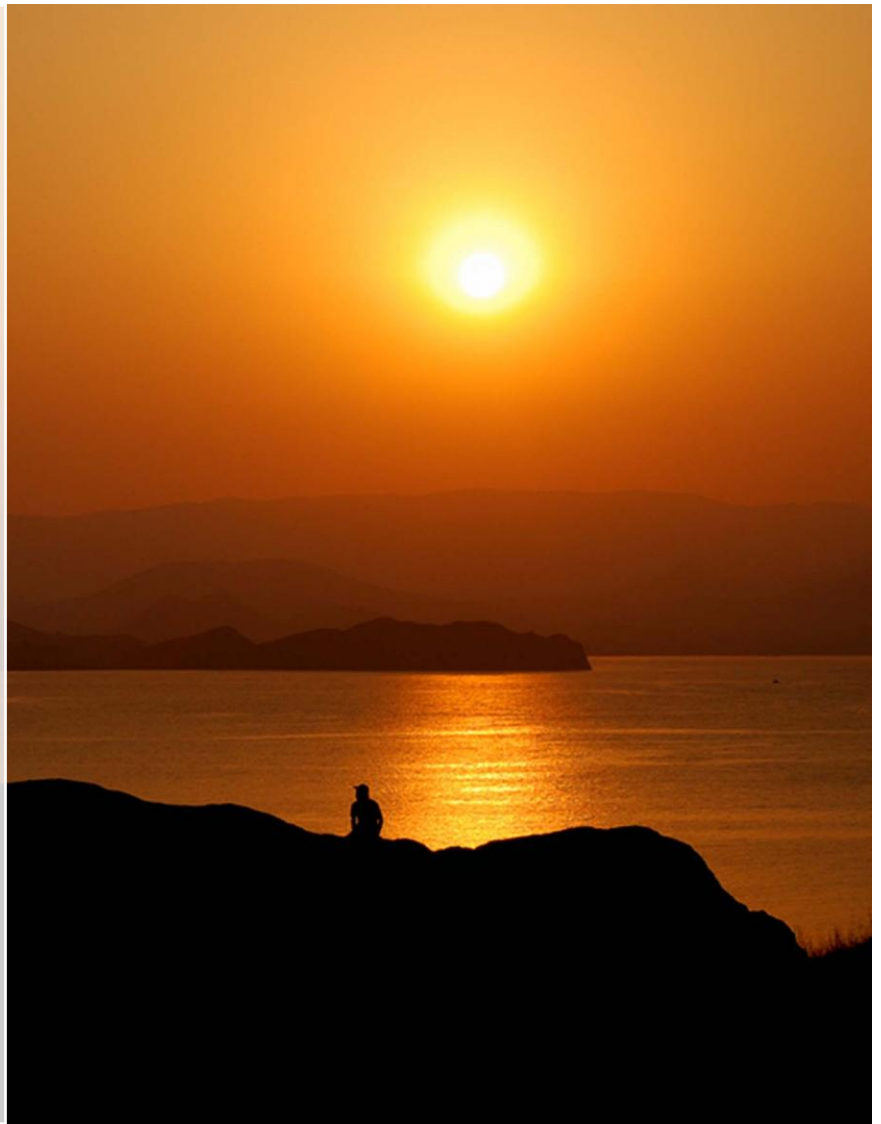


Why Bother Practising Mindfulness?

And What Is “Mindfulness”, Anyway?

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Discover what mindfulness is, why it's so important and simple steps you can take to make it part of everyday life, to transform your experience and help you feel calmer, happier and less stressed.

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What On Earth Is “Mindfulness”?

Being mindful is about a state of being – a particular way of choosing to experience life, in the present moment - rather than letting our mind run riot over past mistakes and future worries, whilst sleep-walking through what’s actually going on around us.

Being “mindful”: we’re normally too busy doing “mind-full” to be mindful.

Why Bother Practising Mindfulness?

Because we are usually far too busy running around *doing* stuff to actually notice what we’re experiencing.

We’re part of a constant, fast-flowing stream of cause and effect – buffeted by the proverbial tides, reacting, reacting, reacting.

Often we don’t even notice that we’re stuck in this cycle, running in circles like an overenthusiastic gerbil in a plastic wheel.



We want to be in control of things, so we develop stress-based behaviours to get things back under control, but that rarely works because we’re still too busy reacting. We try harder and harder, but life still seems to be a like a game of skipping through treacle.

We change our experience by changing the way we see the world.

Being mindful means dragging ourselves back into the present moment – away from the “to do” list, the housework, Auntie Bettie’s birthday card and everything else that normally fills our mind to bursting point.

By getting back into the “now”, we can start to reconnect with the part of us that makes the unconscious choices about how to think, feel and act, in every single moment.

We might think that being present to the moment will mean that the “to do” list will get forgotten and the shopping won’t get done. But, in fact, it’s the other way round.

By focussing our experience right now, rather than dwelling on past issues or worrying about the future, we can develop a clarity that somehow creates more time in our day, meaning the “to do” list finally gets shorter.

We also get our thoughts, feelings and actions back under conscious control, breaking long-held habits of automatic responses to what psychologists call “stimuli”, but the rest of us call “difficult people”.

The Four Principles Of Mindfulness

There are four steps to how this works:

1. **There's always a gap between the other person's "stimulus" and our response**

It's a chemical, biological fact that there is a time gap between our brain receiving a "stimulus" and us responding.

It might be very short, but by being mindful – aware – more of the time, we can jump into that gap and....

2. **... When we can get in the gap, we can choose**

Although some habits run deep, we always have a choice about how we respond.

Though most of us believe that others can *make* us happy or angry, all they can do is provide the stimulus for us to choose that emotion as our response.

In fact, the only place we *can* choose is in the gap. The past is gone and the future hasn't been created yet. All our power is right here, right now.

3. **Our choices have a big impact**

You can't change the other person, but you can always choose how you respond.

And if you have jumped into the gap and made a more resourceful, conscious choice, then you can break the cycle – the cause & effect dance – and provide a more constructive stimulus to which the other person can then respond.

We can only make a choice if we have awareness

If we're on auto-pilot and are bobbing around on an ocean full of emotions and habits like an inflatable dinghy in a storm, then we're unlikely to spot what's really going on.

We're probably enjoying our own projection of the "facts", telling the story "our way" in our head. The fact is that, if we're wandering around half-asleep and unaware, we're not going to be able to make a conscious choice about how to respond.

Unfortunately we are usually half-asleep or stuck in our "story heads", most of the time.

That's why we can be in a beautiful location, but almost not notice it, because we're too busy wondering whether an urgent email has arrived or stressing about how last week's presentation went.



That's why it's so useful to have specific mindfulness exercises to practise, to help us retrain ourselves to live more often in the here and now.

How Do We Get Back Into The Present Moment?

By getting out of our heads and back into our senses.

That's the only way we can experience the present. Anything else – like a thought, feeling, word or action, is a reaction to the physical, sensory experience. And, by virtue of the way our brain chemistry functions, by the time we respond to a stimulus, the stimulus is already in the past.

By practising mindfulness, we'll get to a stage where any activity, be it walking, housework, giving a presentation or even picking the kids up from school, can be done with a level of awareness that means we are truly experiencing life and always have a choice.

By allowing the constant drone of "to do" lists and life analysis to fade into the background, it's much easier to feel calmer, less stressed, happier and more in flow with a vibrant experience of being alive.

It's about that split-second choice to come back into the here and now.



Here are some really quick ways you can do this:

- When you talk to someone, make eye contact. Actually look them in the eye and allow that connection to take place, just for a moment. It brings you back into the "now" and can transform the outcome of tricky conversations.
- Stop whatever you're doing and take a deep breath in, breathing out with an "ahh" sound. That's got you back into your body, instantly.
- Stop doing three things at once and choose to just do one – and really focus on it.
- At any moment, ask yourself: "What can I see / hear / smell / taste / feel, right at this moment?"

There are many specially designed exercises you can play with, to increase your awareness and become more mindful, in the present moment.

With regular practise, this can easily become a way of experiencing life, that you do automatically. But it does take practice and an ongoing commitment to choosing to be aware and present.

If you'd like to find out more, please ask your coach or meditation teacher to recommend some exercises that would be ideal for you, personally.