



# **The Foundations of Mindfulness Practice**

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## **Attitudes for Mindfulness Practices**

The attitude that we bring to the practice of mindfulness will to a large extent determine its long-term value to us. Your intentions set the stage for what is possible. They remind you from moment to moment of why you are practicing in the first place. Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part of the training itself, a way of directing and channeling your energies so that they can be most effectively brought to bear in the work of growing and healing. This is why consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be very helpful in getting the most out of the process of meditation.

### Be an active participant

To cultivate the healing power of mindfulness requires much more than mechanically following a recipe or a set of instructions. No real process of learning is like that. It is only when the mind is open and receptive that learning and change can occur. In practicing mindfulness you will have to bring your whole being to the process. You can't just assume a meditative posture and think something will happen or play a recording and think that the recording is going to do something for you. Mindfulness is an inside job and it requires your concentration, commitment and attention.

### Non-judging

Mindfulness is cultivated by assuming the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience. To do this requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are all normally caught up in, and learn to step back from it. When we begin practicing paying attention to the activity of our own mind, it is common to discover and to be surprised by the fact that we are constantly generating judgments about our experience. Almost everything we see is labeled and categorized by the mind. We react to everything we experience in terms of what we think its value is to us. Some things, people, and events are judged as "good" because they make us feel good for some reason. Others are equally quickly condemned as "bad" because they make us feel bad. The rest is categorized as "neutral" because we don't think it has much relevance. Neutral things, people, and events are almost completely turned out of our consciousness. We usually find them the most boring to give attention to. This habit of categorizing and judging our experience locks us into mechanical reactions that we are not even aware of and that often have no objective basis at all. These judgments tend to dominate our minds, making it difficult for us ever to find any peace within ourselves.

When practicing mindfulness, it is important to recognize this judging quality of mind when it appears and to intentionally assume the stance of an impartial witness by reminding yourself to just observe it, whether it's something within your environment or something within yourself. When you find the mind judging, you don't have to stop it from doing that. All that is required is to be aware of it happening. Once you are aware of it, just observe your judgments letting go of the

story you are telling yourself. After observing your thoughts and feeling their separateness from you the observer, shift your mind to something new, such as your breath or other sensations in your body.

For example, if you are meditating and you find your mind thinking, “This is boring,” or “This isn’t working,” or “I can’t do this.” These are judgments. When they come up in your mind, it is important to recognize them as judgmental thinking and remind yourself that the practice involves suspending judgment and just watching whatever comes up, including your own judging thoughts, without pursuing them, making a story out of them, or acting on them in any way. Then proceed with watching your breathing.

### Patience

Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. You can’t help a caterpillar turn into a butterfly. It can only emerge in its own time, that the process cannot be hurried. In the same way we cultivate patience toward our own minds and bodies when practicing mindfulness. We intentionally remind ourselves that there is no need to be impatient with ourselves because we find the mind judging all the time, or because we are tense or agitated or frightened, or because we have been practicing for some time and nothing positive seems to have happened. We give ourselves room to have these experiences. Why? Because we are having them anyway. When they come up, they are our reality; they are part of our life unfolding in this moment. So we treat ourselves as well as we would treat the butterfly. Why rush through some moments to get to other, better ones? After all, each one is your life in that moment.

When you practice being with yourself in this way, you are bound to find that your mind has a mind of its own, and make start thinking about something in the past or future. This habit of thinking exerts a strong pull on our awareness. Much of the time our thoughts overwhelm our perception of the present moment. They cause us to lose our connection to the present. Patience can be a particularly helpful quality to invoke when the mind is agitated. It can help us to accept this wandering tendency of the mind while reminding us that we don’t have to get caught up in its travels. Practicing patience reminds us that we don’t have to fill up our moments with activity and with more thinking in order for them to be rich. In fact it helps us to remember that quite the opposite is true. To be patient is simply to be completely open to each moment, accepting it in its fullness, knowing that, like the butterfly, things can only unfold in their own time.

### Keep an open mind

If you come to the meditation practice thinking to yourself, “This won’t work but I’ll do it anyway,” the chances are it will not be very helpful. The first time you feel any pain or discomfort, you will be able to say to yourself, “See, I knew my pain wouldn’t go away,” or “I knew I wouldn’t be able to concentrate,” and that will confirm your suspicion that it wasn’t going to work and you will drop it. If you come as a “true believer,” certain that this is the right path for you, that meditation is “the answer,” the chances are you will soon become disappointed too. As soon as you find that you are the same person you always were and that this work requires effort and consistency and not just a romantic belief in the value of meditation or relaxation, you may find yourself with considerably less enthusiasm than before you started. Usually an open, but slightly skeptical attitude is best. You can think to yourself, “I don’t know if this will work, but I’m going to give it my best effort and see what happens.”

The richness of present-moment experience is the richness of life itself. Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we know prevent us from seeing things as they really are. We tend to take the ordinary for granted and fail to grasp the extraordinariness of the ordinary. To see the richness of the present moment, we need to cultivate what had been called “beginner’s mind,” a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time. We should bring our beginner’s mind with us each time we practice so that we can be free of our expectations based on our past experiences. An open, “beginner’s” mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise, which often thinks it knows more than it does. No moment is the same as any other. Each is unique and contains unique possibilities. Beginner’s mind reminds us of the simple truth.

### Activity:

Try to cultivate your own beginner’s mind in your daily life with the following activity. The next time you see somebody who is familiar to you, ask yourself if you are seeing this person with fresh eyes, as he or she really is, or if you are only seeing the reflection of your own thoughts about this person and your past interactions with the person. Try it with your children, your parents, your spouse, your friends and co-workers, even with your dog or cat if you have one; anyone who you feel you know well. Are you able to really see these people as they are in the moment? Try it with a friend or family member who you may have difficulty communicating with. Can you see them for who they are in the moment, rather than who they may have been in the past? It can make for a better relationship to deal with the person who is in front of you in the present moment, rather than make assumptions about how they will respond based on your past interactions.

Next, cultivate a beginner’s mind with places that you know well, such as your local grocery store, your workplace, or even your home. Are you able to really see these

people and places as they are right now with a clear and uncluttered mind? Or are you actually only seeing them through the veil of your own thoughts and opinions based on past experience?

Write down any observations you have with this activity:

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### Trust Yourself

Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation training. It is far better to trust in your intuition and your own authority, even if you make some mistakes along the way, than always to look outside of yourself for guidance. If at any time something doesn't feel right to you, why not honor your feelings? Why should you discount them or write them off as invalid because some authority or some group of people think or say differently? This attitude of trusting yourself and your own basic wisdom and goodness is very important in all aspects of the meditation practice.

Trusting yourself is an important aspect of yoga practice, as well. When practicing yoga, you will have to honor your own feelings when your body tells you to stop or to back off in a particular stretch. If you don't listen, you might injure yourself. Sometimes when people practice yoga or meditation, they get so caught up in the reputation and authority of their teachers that they don't honor their own feelings and intuition. They believe that their teacher must be a much wiser and more advanced person, so they think they should imitate him or her and do what he or she says without question. Always encourage your students in meditation and yoga practice to follow their own inner guidance. You can give them clues and suggestions through your instruction, but they must decide what works for them as an individual. Encourage them to understand what it means to be themselves.

Teachers and books can only be guides. It is important to be open and receptive to what you can learn from other sources, but ultimately you still have to live your own life, every moment of it. In practicing mindfulness, you are practicing taking responsibility for being yourself and learning to listen and trust your own being. The more you cultivate this trust in your own being, the easier you will find it will be to trust other people more and to see their basic goodness as well.

### Don't force anything to happen

If you are trying to force yourself to feel relaxed and demand of yourself that something happen, nothing will grow at all and you will quickly conclude that meditation doesn't work. To cultivate meditative awareness requires an entirely new way of looking at the process of learning. Since thinking that we know what we

need and where we want to get are so ingrained in our minds, we can easily get caught up in trying to control things to make them turn out our way, the way we want them to. But this attitude opposes the work of awareness and healing. Awareness requires only that we pay attention and see things as they are. It doesn't require that we change anything. And healing requires receptivity and acceptance, a tuning to connectedness and wholeness. None of this can be forced, just as you cannot force yourself to go to sleep. You have to create the right conditions for falling asleep and then you have to let go. The same is true for mindfulness and relaxation. It can't be achieved through force of will. That kind of effort will only produce tension and frustration.

Almost everything we do, we do for a purpose, to get something or somewhere. But in meditation this attitude can be a real obstacle. Although meditation takes a lot of work and energy of a certain kind, ultimately meditation is non-doing. It has no goal other than for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are. Meditation just points you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less and being more. This comes from intentionally cultivating the attitude of non-striving. For example, if you sit down and meditate and you think, "I am going to get relaxed, or get enlightened, or control my pain, or become a better person," then you have introduced an idea into your mind of where you should be, and along with it comes the notion that you are not okay right now. "If I were only more calm, or more intelligent, or a harder worker, or more this or more that, if only my heart were healthier or my knee were better, then I would be okay. But right now, I am not okay." This attitude undermines the cultivation of mindfulness, which involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening. If you are tense, then just pay attention to the tension. If you are in pain, then be with the pain as best you can. If you are criticizing yourself, then observe the activity of the judging mind. Just watch. Remember, we are simply allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is.

In the meditative domain, the best way to achieve your own goals is to back off from striving for results and instead to start focusing carefully on seeing and accepting things as they are, moment by moment. With patience and regular practice, movement toward your goals will take place by itself. This movement becomes an unfolding that you are inviting to happen within you.

### Acceptance

Acceptance means seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a headache, accept that you have a headache. If you are overweight, why not accept it as a description of your body at this time? Sooner or later we have to come to terms with things as they are and accept them, whether it is a diagnosis of cancer or learning of someone's death. Often acceptance is only reached after we have gone through very emotion-filled periods of denial and then anger. These stages are a natural progression in the process of coming to terms with what is. They are all part of the healing process. However, putting aside for the moment the major calamities that usually take a great deal of time to heal from, in the course of our daily lives we

often waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is already fact. When we do that, we are basically trying to force situations to be the way we would like them to be, which only makes for more tension. This actually prevents positive change from occurring. We may be so busy denying and forcing and struggling that we have little energy left for healing and growing. Remember, now is the only time you have for anything. You have to accept yourself as you are before you can really change. When you start thinking this way, the change you want to make becomes less important. It also becomes a lot easier. By intentionally cultivating acceptance, you are creating the space for change for healing.

Acceptance does not mean that you have to like everything or that you have to take a passive attitude toward everything and abandon your principles and values. It does not mean that you are satisfied with things as they are or that you are resigned to tolerating things. It does not mean that you should stop trying to break free of your own self-destructive habits or to give up on your desire to change and grow, or that you should tolerate injustice, for instance, or avoid getting involved in changing the world around you because it is the way it is and therefore hopeless. Acceptance simply means that you have come around to a willingness to see things as they are. Then, you are much more likely to know what to do and have the inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening than when your vision is clouded by your mind's self-serving judgments and desires or its fears and prejudices. In the meditation practice, we cultivate acceptance by taking each moment as it comes and being with it fully, as it is. We try not to impose our ideas about what we should be experiencing, but just remind ourselves to be receptive and open to whatever is and to accept it because it is here right now. If we keep our attention focused on the present, we can be sure of one thing, namely that whatever we are attending to in this moment will change, giving us the opportunity to practice accepting whatever it is that will emerge in the next moment. Clearly there is wisdom in cultivating acceptance.

Activity:

Is there something, such as a situation or a personal characteristic, that you're having difficulty accepting at this time? Write it down, writing the truth of the situation. Can you accept the situation for what it is just for this moment?

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Resistance

Resistance, in the context of mindfulness practice, is a wakeup call. In bringing awareness to those aspects of our daily life that we habitually resist, we begin the work of transforming them.

Activity:

Take a couple of moments to consider your own habitual resistances. Is there some situation, or task, some person, or event you commonly find yourself faced with, but which you really don't like and that you wish was different? It can be as mundane as taking out the trash... The main things we're looking for is that quality of aversion,, and the repetition, that is, it's something that you find yourself faced with again and again. Now take a few moments and let's consider it mindfully. Begin with the body. As you hold the image of your resistance, explore the feeling in the body. Try to describe it to yourself as precisely as possible (heaviness, shallow breathing, contraction...)

The feeling in the body: \_\_\_\_\_

Next, consider any collateral effects in the mind: negative thoughts or fears: watch these and the train of emotions that arise as you explore this resistance. What is your usual reaction? (Do it grudgingly, try to distract myself, shut down as I do it.) Now as you hold your awareness within this personal resistance, see if you can allow that awareness to equalize your aversion, or soften the resistance. Don't strain, but just enter into whatever it is you find yourself resisting in this moment – observe it. If judgments or additional resistances come up, notice them. If nothing shifts or changes that's all right too. Just notice whatever happens. Finally, before abandoning this exploration, mentally bow to whatever resistance you've been exploring. Return to the breath.

Non-attachment

They say that in India there is a particularly clever way of catching monkeys. As the story goes, hunters will cut a hole in a coconut that is just big enough for a monkey to put its hand through. Then they will drill two smaller holes in the other end, pass a wire through, and secure the coconut to the base of a tree. Then they put a banana inside the coconut and hide. The monkey comes down, puts his hand in and takes hold of the banana. The hole is crafted so that the open hand can go in but the fist cannot get out. All the monkey has to do to be free is to let go of the banana. But it seems most monkeys don't let go. Often our minds get us caught in very much the same way in spite of all our intelligence. For this reason, cultivating the attitude of letting go, or non-attachment, is fundamental to the practice of mindfulness.

When we start paying attention to our inner experiences, we rapidly discover that there are certain thoughts and feelings related to past situations and people that the mind seems to want to hold on to. They may be pleasant experiences that we replay over and over, wishing to have that experience again. Or it may be our friends and family that we cling to and worry about them or their future. Or it may be an

unpleasant experience that we replay in our minds, wallowing in the emotional hurt it caused, or constantly refreshing old grievances with people we feel wronged us in the past. In the meditation practice we intentionally put aside the tendency to elevate some aspects of our experience and to reject others. Instead we just let our experience be what it is and practice observing it from moment to moment.

Activity:

Make a list of a few experiences, people, things that you have a tendency to hold on to or cling to either because you're afraid of losing them, or losing the story around them, or unable to let go of a grievance related to that experience or person.

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Once you have your list, think of each one, send love to that person or experience and let it go to the universe, knowing that the universe will handle it and you don't need to hold onto it so tightly.

Non-attachment is a way of letting things be and of accepting things as they are. When we observe our own mind grasping and pushing away, we remind ourselves to let go of those impulses on purpose, just to see what will happen if we do. When we find ourselves judging our own experience, we let go of those judging thoughts. We recognize them and we just don't pursue them any further. We let them be, and in doing so we let them go. Similarly when thoughts of the past or of the future come up, we let go of them. We just watch. If we find it particularly difficult to let go of something because it has such a strong hold over our mind, we can direct our attention to what "holding on" feels like. Holding on is the opposite of letting go and it often feels tight or tense. We can become an expert on our own attachments, whatever they may be and their consequences in our lives, as well as how it feels in those moments when we finally do let go and what the consequences of that are.

## **Making the Most of Your Mindfulness Practices**

### **Commitment**

Mindfulness doesn't just come about by itself because you have decided that it is a good idea to be more aware of things. A strong commitment to meditation practice and enough self-discipline to persevere in the process are essential to developing more mindfulness. Similar to an athlete who trains every day, rain or shine, whether the goal seems worth it or not, mindfulness training takes daily commitment. Just like exercising, you can't expect to do it only a few times a year to feel and maintain the benefits.

A good idea is to schedule specific times for meditation each day. Start with maybe 20 minutes of daily formal meditation time, and 2-3 times during the day for five minutes at a time when you are completely focused on simply observing your surroundings and the people around you; simply observing without any labels or judgment. At the beginning, don't worry if it's working for you or not, just do it. After six to eight weeks of committed practice, then you can assess if it's been beneficial to you.

Our lives are so complex and our minds so busy and agitated most of the time that it is necessary, especially at the beginning, to protect and support your meditation practice by making a special time for it and, if possible, by making a special place in your home where you will feel particularly comfortable while practicing. This needs to be protected from interruptions and from other commitments so that you can just be yourself without having to do or respond to anything. This is not always possible, but it is helpful if you can manage to set things up in this way. One measure of your commitment is whether you can bring yourself to shut off your telephone for the time you will be practicing or to let someone else answer it and take messages. It is a great letting go in and of itself only to be home for yourself at those times, and great peace can follow from this alone. Once you make the commitment to yourself to practice in this way, the self-discipline comes in carrying it out. Keeping to the path you have chosen when you run into obstacles and may not see results right away is the real measure of your commitment. Make the commitment to practice whether you feel like it or not on a particular day, whether it is convenient or not, with the determination of an athlete.

Regular practice is not as hard as you might think once you make up your mind to do it and pick an appropriate time. Most people are inwardly disciplined already to an extent. Getting up in the morning and going to work requires discipline. Brushing your teeth everyday takes discipline. And taking time for yourself certainly does too. You are not going to be paid for it, and chances are you may not be enrolled in mindfulness group, which would provide some social pressure to keep up your end of things. You will have to do it for better reasons than those. Perhaps the ability to function more effectively under pressure or to be healthier and to feel better, or to be more relaxed and self-confident and happy will suffice. Ultimately you have to decide for yourself why you are making such a commitment.

Practicing meditation and yoga in the early morning often has a positive influence on the rest of the day. If you're not sure what time would be best for you, try to schedule your formal meditation time and your personal yoga practice for early in the morning. Later in the day it's easy to let other things get in the way. When I start off the day dwelling in stillness, being mindful, nourishing the domain of being, and cultivating calmness and concentration, I seem to be more mindful and relaxed the rest of the day and better able to recognize stress and handle it effectively. When I tune into my body and work it to stretch my joints and feel my muscles, my body feels more alive. Of course, you may prefer another time of the day, but do your best to make it consistent, so it becomes a habit.

Activity:

What time of day will you meditate each day?

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Whatever time you decide to practice, do what is necessary to wake up. Your meditation practice will only be as powerful as your motivation to dispel the fog of your own lack of awareness. When you are in this fog, it is hard to remember the importance of practicing mindfulness. Confusion, fatigue, depression, and anxiety are powerful mental states that can undermine your best intentions to practice regularly. You can easily get caught up and then stuck in them and not even know it. That is when your commitment to practice is of greatest value. It keeps you engaged in the process. The momentum of regular practice helps to maintain a certain mental stability and resilience even as you go through states of turmoil, confusion, lack of clarity, and procrastination. To achieve peace of mind, people you have to have a vision of what you really want for yourself and keep that vision alive in the face of inner and outer hardship, obstacles, and setbacks.

Perhaps it could be a vision of what or who you might be if you were to let go of the limitations you place on your own mind and body. This image will help carry you through the inevitable periods of low motivation and give continuity to your practice. For some that vision might be one of vibrancy and health, for others it might be one of relaxations or kindness or peacefulness or harmony or wisdom. Your vision should be what is most important to you, what you believe is most fundamental to your ability to be your best self, to be at peace with yourself, to be whole.

**Mindfulness Practices**

The following are some different mindfulness activities to try.

### **Informal Mindfulness Practices**

Informal Mindfulness Practice is designed to allow you to refocus during the day. They are brief activities that take only a moment to do, but give you a needed check-in when things are becoming overly stressful or mundane. Do them whenever you are able.

To practice informal mindfulness, try the following:

- Tune into your breathing 4 or 5 times during the day, and be mindful of one or two full cycles of the breath.
- Eat one meal mindfully this week.
- Choose a routine activity usually done on automatic pilot - brushing teeth, showering, washing the dishes, taking out the trash, etc. - and do it mindfully this week.
- Pay attention to what you put in your body; how much; where it comes from; why; reactions and effects. Not just food, but also what we take in through the eyes, ears and nose; TV, newspapers and magazines, books, music, the air we breathe, etc.
- Do a couple of practice activities or readings every day.

#### Activity:

Write down the informal mindfulness activities that you practice over the next couple of days and any things you notice from those practices.

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### **Internal Attention**

To increase your mindfulness in daily life, always keep a small part of your attention focused within. When you're talking with someone, also notice your breath and your body, and notice your physical reactions to your interactions and experiences. By always bringing your awareness back within, you begin to understand how your individual inner guidance works. You learn to become more in tune with your intuition and rely more on your self-guidance.

## **The Mountain Meditation**

When it comes to meditation, mountains have a lot to teach, having archetypal significance in all cultures. Mountains are sacred places. People have always sought spiritual guidance and renewal in and among them. Rising above everything else on our planet, they beckon and overwhelm with their presence. Mountains are the place, where you can touch the panoramic scale of the natural world.

In meditation practice, it can be helpful sometimes to borrow some of the qualities of mountains and use them to bolster our resolve to hold the moment with purity and simplicity. The mountain image held in the mind's eye and in the body can refresh our memory of why we are sitting in the first place, and of what it truly means, each time we take our seat, to dwell in the realm of non-doing. Mountains are quintessentially emblematic of abiding presence and stillness.

The mountain meditation can be practiced in the following way, or modified to resonate with your personal vision of the mountain and its meaning. It can be done in any posture, but I find it most powerful when I am sitting cross-legged on the floor or lifting my hips by sitting on a bolster or folded blanket, so that my body looks and feels most mountain-like.

### Activity:

Try the following mountain meditation.

### Mountain Meditation Script:

Picture the most beautiful mountain you know or know of or can imagine one whose form speaks personally to you. As you focus on the image or the feeling of the mountain in your mind's eye, notice its overall shape, the lofty peak, the base rooted in the rock of the earth's crust, the steep or gently sloping sides. Note as well how massive it is, how unmoving, how beautiful whether seen from far away or up close up. It's beauty emanating from its unique signature of shape and form, and at the same time embodying universal qualities of "mountainness" transcending particular shape and form. Perhaps your mountain has snow at the top and trees on the lower slopes. Perhaps it has one prominent peak, perhaps a series of peaks or a high plateau. However it appears, just sit and breathe with the image of this mountain, observing it, noting its qualities. When you feel ready, see if you can bring the mountain into your own body so that your body sitting here and the mountain of the mind's eye become one. Your head becomes the lofty peak; your shoulders and arms the sides of the mountain; your bottom and legs the solid base rooted to your cushion on the floor or to your chair. Experience in your body the sense of uplift, the elevated quality of the mountain deep in your own spine. Invite yourself to become a breathing mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are-beyond words and thought, a centered, rooted, and unmoving presence.

Now, as you know, throughout the day as the sun travels the sky, the mountain just sits. Light and shadow and colors are changing virtually moment to moment in the mountain's stillness. Even the untrained eye can see changes by the hour. As the

light changes, as night follows day and day night, the mountain just sits, simply being itself. It remains still as the seasons flow into one another and as the weather changes moment by moment and day by day. Calmness abiding all change.

In summer, there is no snow on the mountain, except perhaps for the very top or in crevices shielded from direct sunlight. In the fall, the mountain may display a coat of brilliant fire colors as leaves change; in winter, a blanket of snow and ice; and in spring you may see fields of flowers and blooming trees in the foothills at the base of the mountain. In any season, the mountain may at times find itself enshrouded in clouds or fog, or pelted by freezing rain. The tourists who come to visit may be disappointed if they can't see the mountain clearly, but it's all the same to the mountain—seen or unseen, in sun or clouds, broiling or frigid, it just sits, being itself. At times visited by violent storms, buffeted by snow and rain and winds of unthinkable magnitude, through it all, the mountain sits. Spring comes; the birds sing in the trees once again, leaves return to the trees, flowers bloom in the high meadows and on the slopes, streams overflow with waters of melting snow. Through it all, the mountain continues to sit, unmoved by the weather, by what happens on the surface, by the world of appearances.

As you sit holding this image in your mind, feel yourself embodying the same unwavering stillness and rootedness in the face of everything that changes in your own life over seconds, hours, and years. In your meditation and in your life, notice how you experience the changing nature of mind and body and of the outer world. Your mind and your body both change over time. You may experience periods of light and dark, or of excitement or stillness. You may experience storms of varying intensity in the outside world or in your own mind.

But just like the inner foundation of the mountain, there may be a small part of us deep within that is unmoved by the changes; a small part of our energy or essence that can simply observe these changes in peace.

By becoming the mountain in our meditation, we can link up with its strength and stability, and adopt them for our own. Imagine that you are that mountain and use its energies to encounter each moment with mindfulness, equanimity, and clarity. See the things that happen in your life, your emotional storms and crises, like the weather on the mountain. The weather of our own lives is not to be ignored or denied. It is to be encountered, honored, felt, known for what it is, and held in high awareness. In holding it in this way, we come to know a deeper silence and stillness and wisdom than we may have thought possible, right within the storms.

While the mountain image can help us become more stable, human beings are far more interesting and complex than mountains. We are breathing, moving, and dancing mountains. You have a vast range of potential at your disposal. You can see and feel. You can know and understand. You can learn; you can grow; you can heal; especially if you learn to listen to the inner harmony of things and realize that you are more powerful than a mountain.



## Loving Kindness Meditation

The loving kindness meditation is a good way to become more accepting of yourself and others, and in the process reduce your levels of stress and anxiety.

### Activity:

Try the following loving kindness meditation

Sitting comfortably, allow the attention to come, gradually to the breath. The breath coming and going all by itself deep within the body. Take a few moments to allow your attention to gather within the even rhythm of the breath. Turning, gently within begin to direct, toward yourself, care for your own wellbeing. Begin to look on yourself as though you are your only child. Have mercy on you. Silently in the heart say, "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Just feel the breath breathing into the heart space as you relate to yourself with kindness and care. Allow the heart, silently, to whisper the words of mercy that heal, that open. "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Allow yourself to be healed. Whispering to yourself, send wishes for your own well-being: "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Repeat, gently with each in-breath, "May I be free from suffering." With the following out-breath, "May I be at peace." Repeat these words slowly and, gently with each in-breath, with each out-breath. Not as a prayer but as the extending of a loving care to yourself. Notice whatever limits this love, this mercy, this willingness to be whole, to be healed. "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Let the breath continue naturally, as mercy for yourself, your only child, for this being within. Though at first these may only feel like words echoing from the mind, gently continue. There can be no force here. Force closes the heart. Let the heart receive the mind in a new tenderness and mercy. "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Each breath deepening the nurturing warmth of relating to oneself with loving kindness and compassion. Each exhalation deepening in peace, expanding into the spaciousness of being, developing the deep patience that does not wait for things to be otherwise but relates with loving kindness to things as they are. "May I be free from suffering. May I be at peace." Allow the healing in with each breath. Allow your true spacious nature. Continue for a few breaths more this drawing in, opening to, loving kindness. Relating to yourself with great tenderness, sending well-being into your mind and body, embrace yourself with these gentle words of healing.

Now gently bring to mind someone for whom you have a feeling of warmth and kindness. Perhaps a loved one or teacher or friend. Picture this loved one in your heart. With each in-breath whisper to him or her, "May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace." With each breath draw that loved one into your heart, "May you be free from suffering." With each out-breath filling them with your loving kindness, "May you

be at peace." Continue to breathe the loved one into your heart whispering silently to yourself, to them, "May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace." Continue the gentle breath of connection, the gentle wish for their happiness and wholeness.

Let the breath be breathed naturally, softly, lovingly into the heart, coordinated with your words, with your concentrated feelings of loving kindness and care.

"May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace." Send them your love, your compassion, your care. Breathing them in and through your heart. "May you be free from suffering. May you know your deepest joy, your greatest peace."

And as you sense them in your heart, sense this whole world that wishes so to be healed, to know its true nature, to be at peace.

Note to yourself, "Just as I wish to be happy so do all sentient beings."

And in your heart with each in-breath, with each out-breath, whisper, "May all beings be free of suffering. May all beings be at peace."

Let your loving kindness reach out to all beings as it did to your loved one, sensing all beings in need of healing, in need of the peace of their true nature.

"May all beings be at peace. May they be free of suffering."

"May all sentient beings, to the most recently born, be free of fear, free of pain. May all beings heal into their true nature. May all beings know the absolute joy of absolute being." "May all beings everywhere be at peace. May all beings be free of suffering."

Think of the whole planet like a bubble floating in the ocean of your heart.

Each breath drawing in the love that heals the world that deepens the peace we all seek. Each breath feeding the world with the mercy and compassion, the warmth and patience that quiets the mind and opens the heart.

"May all beings be free from suffering. May all beings be at peace."

Let the breath come softly. Let the breath go gently. Wishes of well-being and mercy, of care and loving kindness, extended to this world we all share.

"May all beings be free of suffering. May all beings dwell in the heart of healing. May all beings be at peace."

Take a few more deep breaths, feeling the peace you bring to the world. When you are ready slowly open your eyes and sit quietly for a moment.

## **Mindful Eating**

Eating has a profound effect on your health. Every time you put food into your mouth, you have an opportunity to either enhance or diminish your life. Making good food choices is one of the most important ways you can care for your body. Many people have chronic health problems to which diet can contribute such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, gum disease, osteoporosis, and anxiety. Diets high in sugar, refined carbohydrates and high fructose corn syrup can lead to tooth decay and chronic high blood sugar or high insulin which increases the risk of developing diabetes. Diets high in saturated fats may increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Inadequate intake of calcium and other nutrients can suppress bone formation and increase the risk for osteoporosis. Processed foods, animal fats, sugar, and white flour all increase inflammation in the body, which may lead to a variety of chronic illnesses. We have already seen that stress affects other systems in the body and it has an impact on eating and nutrition. For example, stress inhibits digestion and absorption and may lead to deficiencies. Because stress causes an increased metabolic rate, there must be a corresponding increase in the intake of essential nutrients to prevent deficiencies. In order to counter the effects of stress and create a lifestyle that does not contribute to chronic disease, it is important to eat nutritious foods and drink 7-8 glasses of pure water daily. Nutritious foods are whole foods, that is, foods that have been minimally processed and are full of vitamins and minerals. Some examples of whole foods are: fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, and unprocessed fish (for non-vegetarians). Processed foods are often deficient in essential nutrients and are also often full of unwanted chemicals. You could say that processed foods have had the good things taken out of them only to be replaced with bad things we don't want.

Nutrition and eating is one area in which we can benefit by becoming aware of our patterns, our feelings, and our thoughts about food. Once you realize where you are with regard to your eating, you can set a new direction and make new choices in what and how you eat. Even small changes can have profound effects. As you increase your awareness, your food choices will change more and more easily. Because each of us is biochemically unique and no one diet is right for everyone, we need to discover which foods give us energy and which foods seem to cause problems. Experimentation is a very good way to start figuring this out.

### Activity: Mindful Eating Exercise

Mindful Meditative Eating means giving your full attention to your experience of food. No TV, reading, driving, arguing or walking down the street. Mindful eating is a reward in itself because for those few minutes you're living your life fully. It can also provide you with important information about which foods make you feel energetic and happy and which make you feel tired, anxious, depressed or uncomfortable. People eat for many different reasons. Though most animals eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full, human beings often eat to fulfill emotional needs and don't stop when their physical hunger is satisfied. This exercise involves eating slowly and meditatively. It is to help you become more fully aware of how, why and what you are choosing to eat and of what food actually smells and taste like. This

knowledge about yourself, along with an understanding of some basic nutritional principles, gives you the tools to make food central to nourishing yourself and your family with delicious, healthful, satisfying meals. Practicing meditative eating may change what and how you eat. For example: You may find that your taste buds change and you develop a new appreciation of healthful foods. You may find that junk food actually doesn't taste that good and that chemicals just can't compare with nature. You may find yourself feeling satisfied with smaller portions at meals because you notice when you feel full and stop eating. You may find that you crave a big bowl of vegetables sautéed in olive oil and garlic rather than a plate full of French fries.

Activity:

Get something small to eat. It could be a few grapes, strawberries or apple slices or a few nuts, or any other small, natural snack. Put the snack in front of you.

For the script below, we'll assume we are eating grapes.

Script for Eating Food Mindfully

Normally, most of us eat automatically or mechanically. Now, we are going to experiment with eating differently, paying full attention in a non-judgmental, open way, and staying in the present moment as much as possible. Pick up a grape (food object). Pick up only one, and see if you can entertain the notion that you are seeing and sensing this object for the very first time. What does it look like? What shape is it? What colors? How does it reflect light? Next, maybe investigate more closely how it feels. What is its temperature? Its surface texture? Its density? You might also bring it up to your nose. Do you smell anything? Are you salivating? How do you feel about putting this food into your body right now? How does your body feel anticipating eating in this moment? Now we are going to receive this food into our body. Be aware of your arm moving to your mouth. How is the grape (food object) taken into the mouth? Experience the food in your mouth. Chew slowly and focus your full attention on the food's taste and texture. Be aware of any desire you have to rush through this grape so that you can have another. Be aware of the intention to swallow before you actually swallow. Notice how far into your body you can still feel the grape. Know that your body is now exactly one grape heavier.... – What was your experience like eating the grape mindfully? – Were there particular thoughts, feelings or sensations during this meditation that surprised you? – Did you have any memories come up? – Does this bring up any memories of past teachings about food or your experience as a child with your family?

## **20 Ways to Be More Mindful During the Workday**

- 1) Take a few minutes in the morning to be quiet and meditate--sit or lie down and be with yourself...gazing out the window, listen to the sounds of nature or take a slow, quiet walk.
- 2) While your car is warming up, take a minute to quietly pay attention to your breathing.
- 3) While driving, become aware of body tension, e.g. hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, shoulders raised, stomach tight, etc. Consciously work at releasing, dissolving that tension. Does being tense help you to drive better? What does it feel like to relax and drive?
- 4) Decide not to play the radio and instead to be with yourself.
- 5) On the freeway, stay in the right lane and go the speed limit miles.
- 6) Pay attention to your breathing or to the sky, trees, etc., when stopped at a red light or a toll plaza.
- 7) After parking your car at your workplace, take a moment to orient yourself to your workday.
- 8) While sitting at your desk, keyboard, etc., monitor bodily sensations and tension levels, and consciously attempt to relax and let go of excess tension.
- 9) Use your breaks to truly relax rather than simply "pause". For example, instead of having coffee or talking with co-workers, take a 2-5 minute walk, or sit at your desk and meditate.
- 10) At lunch, change your environment and be aware and observant of that new environment.
- 11) Or try closing the door (if you have one) and take some time to consciously relax.
- 12) Decide to "stop" for 1-3 minutes every hour during the workday. Become aware of your breathing and bodily sensations. Use it as a time to regroup and recoup.
- 13) Use the everyday cues in your environment as reminders to "center" yourself, e.g. the telephone ringing, turning on the computer, etc.
- 14) Choose to eat one or two lunches per week in silence. Use it as a time to eat slowly and be with yourself.
- 15) When interacting with co-workers or clients, really focus completely on what they are saying and how they might be feeling or thinking. When you are speaking, pay attention to your words as you speak, rather than thinking ahead to what you want to say next. Keep a small part of your awareness on the inner sensations of your body, noticing any tension that may be related to the conversation.
- 16) At the end of the workday, retrace your activities of the day, acknowledging and congratulating yourself for what you've accomplished and write down a list for tomorrow.
- 17) Pay attention to the short walk to your car, consciously breathing. Notice the feelings in your body, try to accept them rather than resist them. Notice the feeling of the earth beneath your feet. Listen to the sounds outside the office.

- 18) While your car is warming up, sit quietly, and consciously make the transition from work to home. Take a moment to simply be; enjoy it for a moment. Like most of us, you're heading into your next full-time job: home.
- 19) While driving, notice if you're rushing. What does this feel like? What could you do about it? Remember, you've got more control than you can imagine.
- 20) When you pull into the driveway or park your car, take a minute to come back to the present. Orient yourself to being with your family or household members before getting out of the car.