

from Simple Mindfulness

The Mindful Living Guide

A Guide to Inviting Joy, Peace and
Happiness Into Your Life

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Mindfulness: The Art of Being in the Present Moment



What is mindfulness?

Definitions from dictionaries include: awareness, attention, regard, heedfulness.

One that I especially liked from Wikipedia is: The practice whereby a person is intentionally aware of his or her thoughts and actions in the present moment, *non-judgmentally*. Mindfulness is applied to both bodily actions and the mind's own thoughts and feelings.

We can be mindful anywhere, any time.

During yoga practice, while brushing our teeth, walking to the car, walking in nature, washing the dishes, while speaking to someone. All the time.

We can be mindful of our bodies: how hard we're trying to maintain yoga poses or relaxing into them, our breathing, how strong or weak we feel at the moment, aches and pains.

And we can be mindful of our thoughts: thinking about things in the past (a previous conversation or event) or the future (all the things we have to do next, how we'll handle certain situations, worrying about the future).

And we can be mindful of our surroundings and the people around us: the temperature, the weather, how someone is reacting to what we said, how others are dressed.

Being mindful is simply noticing what is in the present moment *without judging it*.

Mindfulness Means Slowing Down

It's frequently difficult to stop the constant chatter in our heads (and from our electronic devices).

I remember when I first considered meditation about ten years ago. I was a typical type A person who didn't know how to slow down. I couldn't fathom how anyone could sit still and think of nothing for more than thirty seconds.

Like learning any new skill, I had to start somewhere. And thirty seconds was pushing it for me at the time.

With regular practice I can now happily sit for about thirty minutes.

With more practice, I've been able to bring that same sense of quiet and mindfulness to the rest of my day.

Mindfulness With Other People

This has helped me to be much less reactive and more thoughtful and proactive in my relationships with others.

I now take a moment to notice the condition of the person speaking to me. If they're angry at me, are they having a bad day? Did something else upset them earlier? Have they not had enough to eat (low blood sugar can do a number on most people) or sleep?

I ask myself how I might have contributed to the issue instead of immediately getting defensive.

If I can't figure out the cause, I usually tell myself, "They have issues." This keeps me from taking things personally that usually have nothing to do with me. It keeps me from

needlessly attaching myself (and my ego) to the other person and their issues and causing myself unnecessary anguish.

Mindfulness With Myself

In the first half hour of when I wake up each morning, I'm mindful of how I'm feeling physically and emotionally. Doing this without judgment helps my entire day flow much more easily.

If I'm feeling tired or not as strong as normal, I know not to push myself too hard that day. I don't judge myself as weak, pushing myself harder to get things done only to be disappointed that I didn't complete things as well as I normally would.

If I'm feeling anxious or upset or cranky, I ask myself where that's coming from. If it's something I can do something about, I try to change the situation so I feel better. If it's something I can't control or I can't figure out where the feelings are coming from, I accept things just as they are, take a few deep breaths and smile, even if I don't feel like it. It's amazing how breathing deeply and smiling for at least thirty seconds can change your mood.

I'll do a body scan and notice any aches or tight spots. Instead of approaching them as something bad and something to get rid of (i.e. judging and resisting them), I focus on them deeply. Usually trying hard to get rid of them guarantees that they won't go away.

Mentally I go into the area of pain asking the sore spot what it's trying to tell me. Sometimes that focus and non-judgmental questioning are enough to release it. Other times I learn more about myself from the answers I receive.

It's kind of a running joke between my husband and me. Any time I have any kind of physical issue/pain, we both know that the cause is never from an injury or something outside of me. The cause always comes from within.

I bought Louise Hay's book [Heal Your Body A-Z: The Mental Causes for Physical Illness and the Way to Overcome Them](#) and use it all the time to look up my physical issue and find the related mental/emotional issue. As soon as I focus on resolving the issue in my head, the physical problem "magically" resolves itself.

Judgment

Mindfulness involves not only taking a moment to notice ourselves and our surroundings but to do it in a non-judgmental way. This is very difficult for most people

to do.

We naturally label/judge almost everything in some kind of “good” or “bad” category.

If I’m feeling cranky, that’s bad.

If I’m feeling energized, that’s good.

If someone is mad at me, that’s bad.

If I’m being very productive, that’s good.

Approaching all of these things mindfully means simply noticing them as they are. There is no good or bad. It’s just the way things are. I can choose to change them or accept them as they are.

If I judge them, I become attached to them and I allow them to affect my feelings and possibly my behaviors.

If I notice them in a non-judgmental way, they float by me and I’m free to go about my day feeling lighter.

Mindfulness Is a Practice

Being mindful is something we do one moment at a time, taking baby steps to incorporate it into various aspects of our lives.

It’s a practice that more profoundly affects our lives the more we practice it.

I am infinitely happier now and have much more fulfilling relationships than when I started ten years ago and first considered quieting my mind enough to really notice things. Noticing things without judgment took a little longer and had an even larger effect.

Take a moment right now to be mindful. Be present.

Notice your thoughts. Are they here in the present moment? Or in the past or future?

Notice your body. Do you feel relaxed or tense? Where do you feel these sensations?

Notice your environment. Is it quiet or noisy? Hot, cold or comfortable? What, exactly, do you hear and see? Who is around you?

How do you feel because of how you interpret all of these things? Nothing and nobody “makes” you feel a certain way. It’s all about how you choose to interpret it and how you choose to react or feel about it.

Be mindful now, in the present moment. This is really all you have.

Mindful Body: Creating the Body You Want With New Choices



How do you feel about your body?

How does your body feel?

It's amazing how disconnected we are from our bodies even though our bodies are what physically get us through our days.

Our minds take over telling us that we must be productive – get things done! It's also what society tells us is important. We are the things we accomplish.

It's time we start breaking those rules, standards, expectations.

Honestly, we can't accomplish much if our bodies aren't properly cared for. And you know this but you continue to put caring for yourself off to when you "have the time."

You stay up late watching TV or working, cutting into the precious hours of sleep that you know you need.

You have dessert for breakfast with the big coffee drinks (have you checked the sugar and calorie content in those things?) and drink more coffee and eat more carbs and sugar throughout the day to keep you going. Gotta be productive, right?

You grab whatever is fast and convenient because you don't "have" the time to think about something healthier. You actually have the time. You don't choose to take it.

You skip your workout because you've got some pending deadline or you're so tired that you just don't feel like it.

And where does that leave you?

Tired, spent, fuzzy headed, stressed, anxious, weak.

There's a much better way and you know it. You hear about how to live a healthier lifestyle all the time. So why aren't we all choosing this lifestyle?

Because it's hard to stop and be still and listen to what's really going on inside of us. Sometimes it's downright painful.

It's so much easier to gloss over the tough stuff inside with the easy stuff outside.

My question to you is: Do you want to feel this way for the rest of your life? That's a long time. And your life is all you have.

A Powerful 10 Minutes

Instead of making New Year's resolutions that you'll never keep for more than a couple weeks or saying that you'll change your ways – promise! - or going on yet another diet, how about just sitting still for 10 minutes every day?

At first 10 minutes will be painful. Start with one or two if that's the case and build up slowly over time.

Commit to devoting 10 minutes each day for you. You're so worth it.

And what do you *do* during those 10 minutes?

Nothing but breathe.

Don't do anything.

Just be.

And breathe.

Do a body scan and notice the sensations in every part of your body.

Notice your thoughts. Don't judge them or yourself for having them.

How do you feel in the moment? Where in your body do you feel that feeling?

Whatever you're experiencing in the moment - experience it fully with an inquisitive mind, a beginner's mind. No judgment. No attachment.

You are not your thoughts.

You are not your emotions or feelings.

All of these things are temporary. They come and go. You are still as they come and go.

If you're experiencing something painful, stay with it. It has something very important to tell you.

Treat the pain, whether it's physical or emotional, as another person or being and have a conversation with it. Be inquisitive and light. Ask it why it's there. Ask it what message it has for you. Take whatever message you receive to heart.

All of this may seem totally hokey and woo-woo to some of you but, trust me, it works.

This is one way to practice mindfulness.

Understanding Choices

Now what does any of this have to do with having a healthier body?

It's all about the choices we make in every second of every day and night.

It takes mindfulness to understand why we make the choices we do.

Without getting to the core of a problem (the driver of our choices), anything we do only treats the symptoms and the problem will rear its ugly head again and again. This is actually what anti-depressants and anti-biotics do and doctors prescribe them over and over because it's not their job to get to the heart of the problem. It's our job.

Do you overeat and remain overweight because you experienced some kind of hurt or abuse and now you can't bear to allow others to be close to you so you use the weight

to keep yourself unattractive?

Are you driven to work crazy hours, sacrificing exercise and sleep, because of an internal belief that you're not good enough and, no matter what you do, you'll never be good enough but you push yourself harder and harder anyway? Or do you over-exercise for the same reasons?

Do you have a big enough "why" to compel you to make the changes you say you want to make?

Without understanding your why and keeping it front and center, without understanding why you make the choices you do, lasting change is almost impossible.

Implementing Mindfulness

If you decide that you want to lose weight, before making any changes, start to notice how you feel when you make the choice of what to put in your mouth throughout your day. Why did you choose what you chose? Before you take the next bite, ask yourself if you really want it. How will it make you feel in an hour or the next day?

If you want to start a regular exercise program, start to notice how you feel when you wake up and at other times during the day. Could you motivate yourself to even the easiest of exercises? If not, why not? If you can, then do that exercise. Notice how you feel with either choice.

One of the keys to mindfulness is to notice things *without judging them*.

Don't beat yourself up for not being able to live up to what others think you should do. Or what you think others think you should do.

It's not going to work for everyone to get up early, exercise for an hour, eat a big, healthy breakfast and hit the day running.

I started experimenting with my day and found that I feel much better when I exercise around 1pm or 2pm in the afternoon instead of 5am like I did for years.

I found that I'm not very hungry until later in the morning and I only need about half of what I had been eating. I noticed how full I felt after eating only half of my bowl of oatmeal.

At the tender age of 44 I'm finally learning how to not eat everything on my plate like I was made to do as a child. It actually took my husband pointing it out to me for me to

realize I was doing it. Thankfully I've been blessed with a healthy metabolism.

Simple Steps

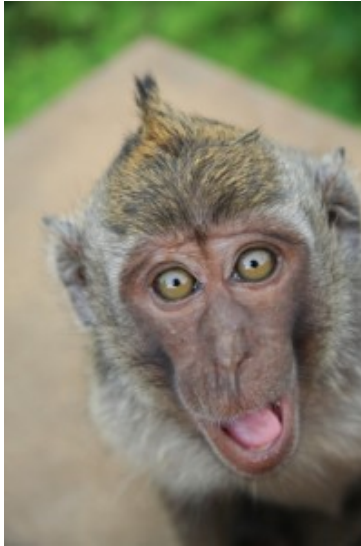
Mindfulness is a practice. Like any practice, at first we have to remind ourselves to practice the practice.

Consider setting an hourly timer on your phone (there are a variety of mindfulness apps out there). Or put a ring on a finger that you don't normally wear it on. Whenever those things capture your attention, remember to be mindful of your thoughts, emotions and actions in the moment.

How do you want your body to look and feel?

Are your moment-to-moment choices supporting that vision?

Mindful Mind: You Are Not Your Mind



While the mind is capable of great things, much of the time it limits us.

Call it what you will: the monkey mind, the reptilian brain, the ego – they're all the same. You are not your mind. And as one of my mentors says: Your mind is not your friend.

While your mind may try to keep you safe, it does not support your growth as a person.

The terminology is confusing here because your mind is what gets in the way of mindfulness and inspiration.

What happens when you come up with a great, off-the-wall kind of idea? Usually your monkey mind immediately jumps in to tell you why it's a stupid idea that will never work.

You have scared the monkey mind by coming up with something so different. You're shaking up the status quo. You're suggesting change. And that scares the monkey mind.

He'll do all he can to keep you right where you are. Safe.

The Mind as Task Master

The mind also gets in the way by reminding us of all the things we "should" be doing at the moment instead of having fun and following our passions.

My mind was programmed with the old thinking that I can only do something fun after I've completed all my chores, to-do's, "important" things. This leaves very little, if any, time for fun.

The mind also creates arbitrary timelines within which all those to-do's must be completed and beats us up if we don't get things done perfectly and on time. This is otherwise known as goal setting.

Lately I've been feeling fairly stressed about not accomplishing all that I want to do quickly enough. In an effort to feel better about what I do accomplish, I didn't set arbitrary deadlines (that I would frequently miss in the past). Even without the deadlines, my mind is still beating me up for what I haven't completed yet instead of focusing on all the great things I have accomplished.

While meditating today, I had a little talk with my monkey mind. I explained to him that it doesn't really matter when I accomplish all the things on my list. I made up the things and the timing anyway. Do I really want to live each day of my life feeling stressed and cranky about what I haven't accomplished yet? Or do I want to feel joy and peace every day? I want the latter. So how do I do this?

By choosing to do the things *that bring me joy* first. I know that all the goal-getting books out there tell us to do the *most important* thing first to get it out of the way. I'm choosing to do the *most joyful* thing first (which very well may be the most important thing, or it may not). That way, my day starts off happy and I bring that happiness into all the other things I choose to do, or not do.

I also reminded my mind that no one will punish me if I don't get all my chores done before doing something fun. I have chosen to make my livelihood something that I love, something that I think is really fun. My monkey mind is having a hard time with this and starts dreaming up chores for me to do before I focus on writing, creating and learning more about my chosen path.

Sometimes, when I let my mind run my day, it's 2pm or 3pm before I stop to realize that I haven't done anything really fun or anything to move my business forward. I let my

mind tell me that I have to do dishes, laundry, cleaning of all sorts, organizing, cooking, check and respond to emails, etc. This is how my day goes when I don't mindfully choose how I want it to play out.

New Choices

Realizing that we really can choose how we want to feel all day is very empowering. We don't have to react to everything that comes our way. We don't have to habitually accept our mind's old interpretation of events. We are free to make new, happier choices.

I used to get bent out of shape and angry when my husband snapped at me or made some negative comment. By taking it personally, I let it ruin my day. I would let it take me from happy to cranky and resentful in a heartbeat and I would stay there all day, spewing my negativity on everyone around me (which is contagious, unfortunately).

I've learned to stop and be mindful of where he's coming from before I decide how to react. Usually he's tired or stressed about something that has nothing to do with me. When I ask him what's going on with him and how I might help the situation, the negativity is usually quickly diffused.

By realizing that his negativity has nothing to do with me and by not taking it personally, I'm free to choose different responses that not only keep me from slipping down the negative slope but can get him to notice his state and turn it around. When he feels like I'm supporting him instead of blaming him or feeling resentful of him, his tone lightens and becomes more positive. He knows I'm on his side and I'm there for him.

Sometimes I wake up feeling tired and a little grumpy. I used to let this go unexamined and have a grumpy day and negatively affect those around me. Now, as I'm having my morning tea, I stop and have an internal dialogue to ask myself what's up. I ask myself what I need to feel better. I remind myself that it would suck to feel like this all day. I smile, whether I want to or not, because it makes me feel better. I think of things for which I'm grateful. And I make the choice to be happy.

Simple Steps

When you're feeling fear openly or in one of its many guises (anger, stress, depression, anxiety, etc.), stop and have a little chat with your monkey mind. Realize that you are not your mind.

Ask your mind what the problem is. Have a conversation from an objective, non-judgmental point of view.

Whatever the issue is, follow it down the path of the worst possible scenario. What is the absolute worst thing that could happen? Don't stop or catch yourself on the way down. Make it as bad as you possibly can. As long as the worst possible scenario isn't your untimely death, it's really not that bad.

Whenever I run down the worst case path, I usually end up on a path that I've actually experienced and realize that, not only did I survive the disaster, I learned a few things that have made my life better.

Next time your monkey mind jumps in to tell you how stupid you and your choices are, all the people and things you should fear and avoid, how inadequate you are because you don't meet up with some arbitrary standard, tell your monkey mind where he can go. As soon as you face him and non-judgmentally question his assertions, the faster he'll take a hike and you can go on having a happy day.

Mindful Spirit: How Noticing Your Inner and Outer Worlds Opens the Door to Happiness



If you look up the word “spirit” in the dictionary, you will find that it comes from the Latin, *spirare*, meaning “to breathe.” The inbreath is inspiration; the outbreath expiration. From these come all the associations of spirit with the breath of life, vital energy, consciousness, the soul, often framed as divine gifts bestowed upon us, and therefore as aspect of the holy, the numinous, the ineffable. In the deepest sense, the breath itself is the ultimate gift of spirit. But, as we have seen, the depth and range of its virtues can remain unknown to us as long as our attention is absorbed elsewhere. The work of mindfulness is waking up to vitality in every moment that we have. In wakefulness, everything inspires. Nothing is excluded from the domain of spirit.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are*

How do you define spirituality? Here are some definitions that I found:

- that which relates to or affects the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or

physical things

- an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being
- whatever makes you feel peaceful, joyful and content

I believe that spirituality is our quest for connection with something larger than ourselves. I like that third definition too.

As children, we start out believing that we are the center of the universe. Our parents have generally reinforced that belief with their love for us.

As we get older and become more independent, we realize the importance of others and our environment in the interconnectedness of things.

As more time passes we start to wonder about why we're here and how everything works together – the BIG questions. This usually leads to some form of quiet contemplation in the form of meditation or prayer.

Initially we seek answers from people and other sources outside of ourselves. We look for validation and succinct answers that we later find don't exist.

Some seek answers from religion. Others from more secular sources.

Ultimately, we find that the answers are within us.

We Are Spiritual Beings

When I get caught up in my to-do list and stress about getting "enough" done, I have to remind myself that I'm a human "being" and not a human "doing." Society tells us that we are nothing but a list of accomplishments; that the act of being is a waste of time.

I have found being to be the most powerful thing I can do.

When I get caught up in doing, I tend to shut out the important things in life that bring me real joy. Things like:

- looking into my children's eyes to see their beauty and purity
- watching an amazing sunrise and sunset
- feeling my body unwind during a great yoga practice
- listening to the wind in the trees and the birds chirping
- breathing in the cold crispness of a winter day
- watching a fire burn in the wood stove and feeling its warmth
- tasting each sip of a perfect cup of tea.

Stopping to notice these things and being mindful of their presence and how they affect us is spirituality.

Realizing that we are part of something grand that includes all of this magnificence is spirituality.

Be Mindful of Your Spirit

Have you had times of serendipity where things just seem to fall into place perfectly? You may ask yourself how this happens.

It's all part of the flow of energy in which we exist. Our energy affects the energy of everything around us. Some call this the Law of Attraction.

Your thoughts and feelings are creating an energy. What kind of energy are you sending out right now?

We attract more of what we focus on. It's like sending out a tractor beam, whether we realize it or not.

My husband is a master of this. When I hear him say that he wants something in his life to be a certain way, I know with certainty that it will manifest in a relatively short period of time. For example, he'll say that he's overworked and needs a few days off but his schedule is packed. Then, out of the blue, his truck won't start (he relies on his truck in his business). It has to be towed to the shop for repairs that will take a few days and the shop "coincidentally" doesn't have any loaners for him. And the repairs all happen to be covered under warranty.

Or he says that he wants better quality clients. As soon as he stops complaining about the clients that he doesn't want (and giving energy to them), the kind of clients that he does want appear out of nowhere. It happens every time.

My powers of manifestation seem to be more muddled so I try to learn from him. From what I can gather from discussions with him and the wealth of information out there on the topic, I need to learn how to *feel* things more deeply to be a part of the energy that flows around and through me.

I've always been more of a thinker vs. a feeler. Growing up, showing or expressing my feelings wasn't "safe" for me so I learned how to shut them off. At times this came across as cold or heartless while I saw it as being objective.

Over time I've learned how damaging this is to my happiness.

Taking time to meditate and realize that I even have feelings was a huge first step for me. To many people this may sound ridiculous. For others out there, you know what I mean.

I never found a safe place to allow this to happen until I met my husband. For him, feeling his feelings is so essential.

Over time I have learned that it's OK to not only have feelings but also to feel them and express them. It's been a scary process for me but the results have been magical.

Taking the time to be with myself in meditation has allowed me to see how much of my life I was living to make other people happy. Once I realized that what I was doing with my life wasn't making *me* happy, I had to go deeper to find what did make me happy.

There are tons of resources out there to help you find your passions. From my experiences, these are great places to start but, unless you get out there and experiment and experience all those things you write down, you're no farther ahead than when you pulled out the piece of paper to write down your ideas.

One of the biggest lessons that I have learned is that we are all here to help others in our own unique way. It's our mission to figure out what our unique gifts are and how to best express them to the world.

The world is waiting for you.

The world needs you.

Now.

Simple Steps

Feel the Connection

Stop reading right now and look up. What do you see? Really look and notice.

If you see other people, look at each person individually. Think about how they might be feeling right now. What is their average day like? What is their life like? How could you help them be a little happier right now? Do it.

If you see nature, focus on specifics. What is the temperature like? Is it sunny or cloudy

and how does that make you feel? What do you hear? Notice the trees and plants. How old do you think they are? What have they seen? How can you make your surroundings a little nicer? Do it.

If you see animals, wonder about how they experience the world. How can you make them happier? Do it.

By interacting with your surroundings instead of making them separate from you, you can better understand how interconnected everything is. Feeling this brings joy.

Take a Moment To Be

Close your eyes and take three deep breaths.

Slowly perform a body scan from your head, down your neck, arms, fingers, back, hips, legs and feet.

What kind of sensations do you feel?

If you notice an area that's sore or tense, don't try to relieve it. Think of that area as something separate from you. Another being that has inhabited a part of your body.

Ask it why it's there and wait for an answer.

Be curious about the painful sensations you may be feeling. *Exactly* where are they in the specific muscles and joints?

When you focus on these areas in a curious and non-judgmental way, they frequently disappear.

Other times the dialogue you create with the painful area helps you to understand how you've buried your feelings about something or someone in your body. The process reminds you that the issue needs to be dealt with in order to relieve the pain.

I've used this process many times and I know it works. It's extremely rare that I have any aches and pains that aren't psychological.

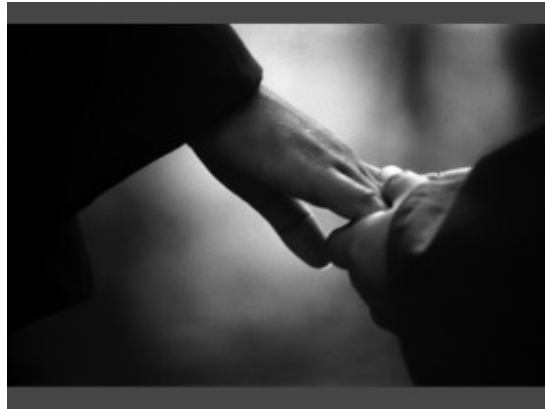
The Paths to Happiness

These are two exercises: one focused on our external environment and one focused on our internal environment, where we can open ourselves up by simply being. By getting out of our minds and into our hearts, we slow down and notice the things we normally

block out.

It's in this noticing, this mindfulness, that we open the door to allow more happiness into our lives.

Mindful Relationships: How a New Point of View Can Dramatically Increase Your Happiness



It's amazing that we humans are so programmed to be social creatures when all we ever think about is ourselves (usually).

We expect others to accept and appreciate us as we are and yet we expect them to be the way *we* want them to be. Not exactly fair.

We expect those close to us to know what makes us happy and do those things on a regular basis.

Whenever we make decisions about how to spend our time, money or energy, we consciously or subconsciously answer the question: "What's in it for me?"

How happy are you in your relationships with friends, family and your significant other?

I have found a huge correlation between our personal happiness and how much we focus on others.

When we get all wrapped up in our own issues and wonder why someone isn't beating down the door to help us, we get angry, bitter and resentful. We blame anyone we can find for our problems.

The funny thing is, as soon as we stop focusing on our own issues and focus on how to make others happy, we get happier.

You have to give to get. Reap what you sow.

Take a minute right now to notice how you feel about your closest relationship.

The Good

What are all the things you love about the other person and the dynamics of the relationship?

Have you told the other person these things? If so, how often? If not, make it a point to tell them *today*. They'll never hear it enough.

Showing and verbalizing your gratitude for others in your life is a huge win-win. They're happy that you notice and appreciate them and their happiness makes you happy. They keep doing the things that you like because you took the time to show your thanks.

The Bad

What are all the things – large and small – that irritate you about the other person or the relationship?

If you just feel a general negative feeling, define what is creating that feeling. What does the other person do that drives you crazy?

If that person did the same things around someone else, would the other person interpret it as irritating?

You are the backdrop against which you interpret other people's actions. Different backdrop, different interpretation. Something that you find irritating might be fun and quirky to someone else.

The Other Person

Rather than thinking purely about yourself and how you see the other person, put

yourself in their shoes.

Consider their background and life experiences. Why do you think they do and think the way they do?

Consider your own background. Why do you interpret their actions the way you do?

How we interpret their thoughts and actions is our choice. We can choose to love and accept them for who they are or we can allow things to bother us.

Honest acceptance is a major key to happiness. Not resignation but acceptance. It's not always easy but, like mindfulness, it's a practice that must be practiced regularly for maximum benefit.

My Story

My father used to drive me crazy with his barrage of judgmental comments. It was as if nothing I did was right or good enough. My interpretation was that he wanted me to still be his little girl who had to do things his way as long as I lived under his roof. But I was over 30 years old and I didn't live under his roof and hadn't for a long time.

I would let every little thing he said get under my skin and make me angry. I wasted a lot of time talking about this with my husband and I wasted a lot of energy on the whole ordeal.

Then I started to look at things from his point of view. He grew up in the deep South with a tyrannical mother and quiet father, neither of whom openly showed their love for him. His mother constantly picked him apart. In a misguided effort to gain attention, he became a bully. To "fix" this problem, his parents sent him off to military school which only exacerbated the problem.

I started to see my large (he's 6'8"), overbearing bully of a father as a sad and angry 12 year old boy who lashes out at the world because he's not getting the love and attention he deserves from his parents. He makes himself feel better by tearing other people down and beating them up.

And *none* of this has anything to do with me.

He's just doing what he has always done. I noticed that he does it to almost everyone he's close to.

When I asked him to notice it and consider how it affects others, he felt threatened and

got angry and defensive. Questioning it is a threat to his very big ego.

Once I started seeing him in this way (as a 12 year old little boy doing the only thing he knew how), it became much easier for me to accept him for who he is. He has no intention to change and I stopped trying to change him.

Given the negativity that exudes from him, I've made the difficult choice to significantly limit my exposure to him. It has taken some time but it appears that he has finally accepted this. He used to complain regularly about how I never call him but that has lessened.

We have light conversations once every month or two. We make no point in visiting each other (he lives half way across the country from me). And I'm finally OK with all that.

I've realized that I'm much happier accepting him for who and what he is. I have tried many different ways of improving our relationship that all fell flat. I feel like I've done all I can. It's a two-way street and he has to want to change too but I've discovered that change is extremely threatening for him. So I let it go.

Ask for What You Want

If you're not getting what you want out of your relationships, I have two questions for you:

1. Do you really know what you want?
2. Have you told the other person what you want in enough detail that they can deliver?

You may be thinking: "If they loved me, they would know. If they cared for me, they would do what I want."

Man or woman, none of us are mind readers. You can't expect someone else to always know everything about you if you don't tell them. We all change and we can't expect others to fully comprehend our changes.

Take responsibility for your own happiness in your relationships. If you leave it up to the other person, as well intentioned as they may be, you'll end up disappointed.

Simple Steps

- Tell those close to you what you love and appreciate about them.
- Take some time to examine aspects of your relationships you're not happy with. How can you see things from the other person's perspective? How do you contribute to the issues?
- Tell those close to you what you want in a loving way and how they can make you happy. Follow up by asking them what you can do to increase their happiness. Help them give you what you want.

You get what you give. What are you giving?

Mindful Finances: How Noticing Your Feelings Can Change Your Results



We all know the rules of money:

- Make a budget and stick to it
- Save 10% in a fund you don't touch
- Give 10%
- Spend less than you make

These are the simple basics. So why do so few of us actually do these things?

- I can't afford to save or give
- Budgets aren't realistic
- I can't be confined to rules like these
- I deserve to have the things I want
- But what about my *needs*?

While we like to call them "reasons," these are all just excuses and I'm guilty of using all of them.

These "reasons" are all driven by feelings and emotions we have that usually have

nothing to do with how we're about to spend our money.

Our financial situation is a reflection of our self-image and self-esteem.

This is one of the lessons of the saying: "You are the average of the five people you spend most of your time with."

Most people spend most of their time around the people with whom they're comfortable, people who don't threaten or challenge their self-image or self-esteem.

I think it's time we start pushing the boundaries of our comfort zones. Feel the fear and do it anyway kind of thing.

Feelings Around Money

How do you feel when you spend money? Obviously it depends on what you're spending the money on so consider your feelings when you spend money on:

- food
- housing (mortgage or rent)
- clothing
- gifts
- art
- furnishings
- your career or business
- vehicles
- entertainment
- debt
- travel
- charity
- education
- pets
- savings
- medical expenses
- taxes
- fun

Each category probably stirs up different feelings, some strong and some almost non-existent. Notice them.

Do you take a moment to notice those feelings right before you commit your life

energy (money) to that thing? I think most of us would probably make different decisions if we took a moment to notice and consider such questions as:

- How do I feel right now?
- Am I buying this to placate my feelings or am I fulfilling a real need?
- How will I feel about this purchase tomorrow, next week, next year?
- Does making this purchase take me away from fulfilling other goals?
- Can I wait to make this purchase?

Each dollar spent today is more than a dollar we take from our future.

Make a Different Choice

I challenge you to make a different choice in how you spend your money *for one week*.

First of all, try not buying things you normally buy. Things like lunches or dinners out, coffee, clothing. Think of alternatives that cost less or nothing at all or go without.

For all the things you probably need to buy, like groceries, pay in cash. Not with a debit card or anything else that resembles plastic. Just cash – bills and coins. You'll think about the purchase differently.

At the end of the week, notice if you spent less money and, if so, how much less.

More importantly, notice how you feel about yourself and your finances at the end of the week.

Tweak it a little based on what you learned and try it for another week. And one more week. Twenty one days makes a habit.

If you need support, turn it into a challenge among you and your friends. When you feel like breaking the rules, call one of your participating friends and ask them for support.

Back to the Rules

After noticing your thoughts and feelings about your daily financial habits, consider your thoughts and feelings about the rules of money. What comes up when you slowly read each rule?

What is the origin of those thoughts and feelings?

Did you choose them or are they just part of the programming you received growing

up?

Given the choice, would you freely choose them or something different?

You have that choice.

You can change your thoughts and feelings that create your actions that create your results.

Simple Steps

As Steven Covey would say: Begin with the end in mind. What kind of result do you want? What actions would create that result? What feelings would create those actions? What thoughts would create those feelings?

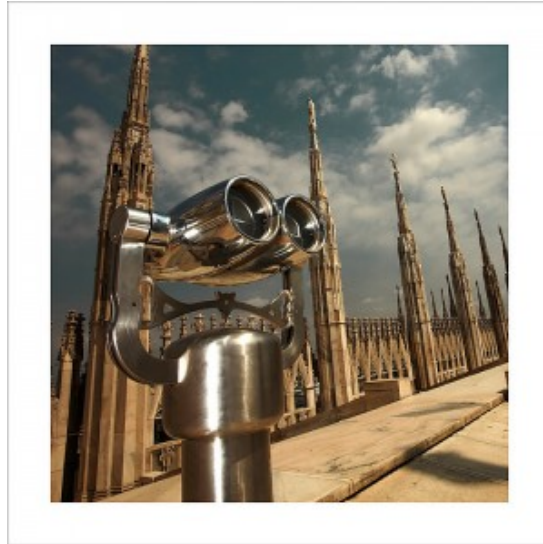
Make yourself have those thoughts. Write them down and put them everywhere: on your bathroom mirror, on your refrigerator, on the dashboard of your car, in your wallet, next to your bed, on the ceiling above your bed, everywhere.

Say them to yourself as you're waking up and as you're going to sleep and many times throughout your day.

And, most importantly, make sure you're feeling good as you're having those new thoughts. Do things you enjoy. Look at or think of beautiful people who you love. Envision all the things for which you're grateful.

Your financial future really has no relation to your financial past. There are plenty of examples of people who have gone from homeless to incredibly wealthy. It's a choice. Your choice.

Mindful Career: A Blessing or a Life-Long Sentence?



I looked up the definition of *career* because we all talk about it like we know exactly what it is. But do we?

Most of the definitions I found were something along the lines of:

- An occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress.
- A field for or pursuit of consecutive, progressive achievement, especially in public, professional or business life.
- An occupation or profession, especially one requiring special training, followed as one's lifework.

But the one that caught me off guard that I really liked was:

- A path or course, as of the sun through the heavens.

We tend to think that a career is something we go to college for or get some kind of special training. It's what we do to make money. And, generally, once we pick a career, we tend to stick with it for a very long time whether or not we like it.

The Choice of a Lifetime

I'll never forget a line from Bee Movie where the main character has just graduated from school and now has to choose a career at the honey factory. The very pleasant sounding tour leader at the honey factory tells all the recent grads that it's now time to pick a career that they'll have *for the rest of their life*. To which the main character responds in horror: "For the *rest* of my *life*?!?!?!"

So many people won't change paths and find a new career even when their current career isn't serving them. They don't want to "waste" their education and all the years they've invested in that path. They'll resign themselves to being **comfortably uncomfortable** and unhappy *for the rest of their life*.

If that's you, my question to you is: Why do you want to be relatively unhappy *the rest of your life* (the next 30 to 50 years) because of how you have spent the last 10 to 30 years? Why let your past dictate your future? Really, the only thing that dictates your future is the present – your choices *right now*.

A New Choice

For most of us, we don't relate the word *fun* with *career*. Career is something we *have* to do (gotta pay the bills, right?) and we might even be pretty good at it.

I've spent the last twenty-odd years of my career in corporate finance. I went to college for it. I enjoy it and I'm pretty good at it. But I wouldn't call it *fun*.

Although it has paid pretty well, I'm finding that it's possible to make just as much, if not much more, doing something I really enjoy – something fun – that also helps people (a major bonus!).

And so I let my CPA license lapse this year. That was hard to do. I had put so much into obtaining it and keeping it. But it doesn't really serve me anymore.

I intensely enjoy writing. Being a finance type, I never thought of myself as a writer (funny how much we limit ourselves by how we define ourselves). Sure, I can write a mean contract, but creative writing – something that people enjoy reading – just wasn't me. Or so I thought. Until I started writing.

Now I'm looking at all the ways I can make money with my writing, teaching and coaching in a way that supports my desired lifestyle.

Yes, I have finally discovered *lifestyle design*. What a concept! Do what you love, help other people and live your life in a way that you love.

Why haven't we been doing this all along? Obviously the System was not set up to serve its workers. It was set up to perpetuate itself. And the workers are suffering.

Redefine Yourself

Back to the definition of *career*: A path or course, as of the sun through the heavens.

This definition is much more open and liberating than what most of us think of when we think *career*.

Do you love what you do?

Is it fun?

Is it fulfilling?

Are you contributing in a way that satisfies and excites you?

What would you do for a career if it only had to fit this definition: a path or course?

While I'm still in a corporate job, I found one where I can work from home and live the lifestyle I want. I am so grateful for this!

At the same time, I'm working on my writing, blog and business so that I can transition full-time to the new career of my choice.

My years in finance were well spent and taught me how to run a business, understand financial statements, and manage people among many other things. Those years have certainly not been wasted. They provided the platform from which my next phase is being launched.

And I couldn't be happier.

Do you want to spend *the rest of your life* doing what you're doing?

If the answer is yes, then how can you do it even better, with more gusto, in a way that makes you even happier?

If the answer is no, then when will you make a change? Remember that your new choice is also *not* for the rest of your life. If you make the "wrong" choice, you're free to

make a different choice at any time. Over and over again until you find something you love.

In the meantime, how can you decide to be happier with what you're doing today?

If there are things about your career that you don't like, are you resisting them and, in doing so, making yourself unhappy and perpetuating those things? Situations and people are what they are. It's our resistance to them that creates our own suffering. And resistance is our choice.

Simple Steps

- What do you love about your career?
 - Make a list. Maybe you have a long list or maybe "your paycheck" is the only thing on it. Think hard and get creative.
- What do you dislike about your career?
 - For each item, is it something you can change? How can you change it? When will you make the change?
 - If you can't change it, can you accept it? Without accepting things and people that you can't change, you're sentencing yourself to more unhappiness and suffering.
 - How are you resisting each item on this list? If you weren't resisting the item, if you fully accepted the person or situation the way it is, then it wouldn't stir up negative emotions for you.
- Can you see yourself doing what you're doing for the rest of your life?
 - If so, how can you do it in a way that makes you even happier?
 - If not, what career/passion/lifestyle could you choose that would lead to a positive answer?
 - Make a list of possibilities.
 - If you don't know where to start, search the internet for the volumes of free tools to help you identify your passions.
 - Take the first step toward this path by:
 - Contacting someone you know who is already doing what you're interested in.
 - Finding someone doing it online and learn more about that person.
 - Find forums on your passion/career and get involved.
 - Read books on the subject.
 - Just take a step – any step – to get the ball rolling.

Acknowledging your passions and giving them the breath of life will lead you to places you never could have planned or expected. And you'll be happier when you give yourself permission to explore.



About Simple Mindfulness

It's my mission to support you in new, mindful ways of being that will allow you to live a happier and more fulfilled life. For more ways to implement mindfulness to transform your life...

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