



Mindfulness Based Psychotherapy & Counselling

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Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness Practice

(Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*, Chapter 2)

1. Non-Judging

In mindfulness practice we begin to become aware of constant stream of judging. Good, bad, or indifferent (+ – or neutral), we tend to evaluate everything based on its perceived value to ourselves, or those close to us. We judge things, people, events, ourselves, our own emotions, our body, our life, everything. It seems we all believe, that by judging we can make things better. We can push away what we don't like, draw to ourselves what we like, ignore the rest, and this will make us happy. In fact the result is just the opposite. Judging in this way brings a constant sense of dissatisfaction, irritation, numbness and bewilderment. Because true happiness is an “inside job”, we must find it in our own state of mind right here, right now. No amount of seeking satisfaction outside or manipulating circumstances will ever bring about true happiness. Hence we find judging in this way doesn't really work. Categorizing all of our experience in this way locks our perception into “little-box-thinking”. We become stuck, frozen in the land of our own concepts. The constantly judging mind leaves us no room for contentment, no peace, no clarity, no truth, no relaxation, no enjoyment. We can begin by gently becoming aware of these automatic judgments. Over time we begin to gradually see through our own prejudices and fears to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of our own judgmental thoughts. Starting out, as we observe the judging mind with mindful attention, we also need loving-kindness and gentleness for our selves. There is no need to judge the judger.

2. Patience

Patience is a form of wisdom that lets things unfold in their own time, “you can't push the river”. The butterfly in the chrysalis, if you hurry it, you damage it. Developmental tasks are the same; all of us journey through difficulties and obstacles to grow wiser. There is no need to be impatient with ourselves or with others when nothing particularly positive seems to be happening. Patience and compassionate attention itself becomes the nourishing soil that allows the tiny seeds to grow. We need to learn to give ourselves room to have all these experiences here and now, each one has meaning in the bigger scheme of things. No experience is worthless or meaningless. Why rush through this moment to get to other moments when each present experience is your life's unfolding journey. Impatience, fear and anxiety are all based in future thinking. Future oriented thoughts exert a strong pull on our awareness and cause us to loose contact with the fullness of this present moment which in fact is all we ever have. When starting meditation and mindfulness in everyday life be patient with your active mind. You can accept it and observe it, without getting caught up in the rapid waterfall of thoughts.

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Patience with ourselves gradually expands into patience with others and with our world. Patience is the armor against aggression a virtue that produces peace.

3. Beginner's mind

“In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few.”
Shunryu Suzuki-roshi

With mindfulness we can reclaim our inherent open and curious attitude, a mind willing to see things as if for the first time, every time. We can rediscover the delight and innocence of a small child's fresh perception, and allow the world to touch our tender hearts with its simple, ordinary magic. When we think we know something, we don't see things as they truly are. The veil of habitual thoughts, distorts, masks and blurs our perception to the uniqueness, detail and aliveness of all things floating in their contextual web, pregnant with meaning. When we take the ordinary for granted we miss the ever-present extraordinary quality that lies just under the surface of every experience. Beginner's mind prevents us from getting stuck in the ruts of being who we think we are living the life we think we live. Drop what you think you know and look again. See someone you think you know as if for the first time. See beyond all your thoughts and preconceptions, living trees, flowing water, vast sky, swirling clouds, mountain peaks, ocean waves, the majesty of earth itself, all are infinitely more engaging when we let go of conceptual mind and look again. The map of your thoughts is not the true territory but a flat and lifeless facsimile.

4. Trust

Look inside for guidance, and to the direct feedback of your world, rather than being pulled in many directions by the opinions of others or all of the various influences surrounding you. You don't have to be a slave to the system you are born into. You can blaze a new trail uniquely your own. Trust your intuition. Honour your feelings, if something doesn't feel right to you, let it go and take a risk to see what comes around the next corner. The wisdom of your own true experience is always tugging at you to listen and learn. It is impossible to become like somebody else, so why compare yourself. The only possibility is to become more fully who you really are, your true self. The more you open up to yourself and trust what is right for you, the more you can open to others and trust them as well, respecting them and allowing them the space to find their way. When you trust in your own basic goodness and the inherent rightness of your journey you can also see that for others to facilitate and encourage them along.

5. Non-Striving

Notice that almost every thing you do, you do for a purpose, to get something or go somewhere, grasping at an image of some future satisfaction. This is an obstacle in your meditation practice. With Mindfulness practice non-doing, with no goal other than to be right where you are as you are. When you drop your agendas you can allow yourself to be fully present, fully authentic, right here, right now with no struggle. Try less and be more. Relax into who you are, as you are, and appreciate the richness of moment-by-moment unfolding awareness. Trying to fix yourself, to get better, is based in the idea that you are not OK as you are. This idea itself is your primary obstacle. Rest in being OK right now and smile. The attitude of trying to get something or go somewhere else, gets in the way of paying attention to the fullness of what is, right here and now, and that is where it all truly happens and where you have the most power to make a difference.

6. Acceptance

Acceptance is simply being aligned with the truth of things as they are. This alignment gives you accurate information and earth bound traction to move forward. Not accepting leaves you running in the air like a silly cartoon. You can waste a lot of time and energy denying what is already a fact, trying to force things to be the way you would like them to be. This approach only creates more tension, frustration and anger, which sow seeds for further confusion, suffering and disconnectedness. Not accepting prevents positive change, blocking the natural healing process. Starting, honestly, where you are brings a powerful natural wisdom to bear on the situation exactly as it is. Acceptance is the ground for all change, all healing and transformation. By intentionally cultivating acceptance you create the preconditions for natural healing and growth. This is not a passive attitude that you are satisfied with the way things are, or resigned to tolerating things as you think they have to be, but an open hearted willingness to see things as they are without fooling yourself. From this place of truth you can effect real change, healing and transformation.

7. Letting go

When the monkey grasps the mango through the small hole in the coconut chained to a tree, the monkey seals the trap with his own clinging hand. Letting go would free the monkey. Letting go frees us as well. When we cling to the past and to what we think we know, our mind gets caught in a tight trap. We suffer because we refuse to let go. With mindful attention in self-reflection we can begin to see how we imagine that what we hold onto is more important than our freedom, peace and contentment. Every painful and rigid state of mind can and will change. We only need to ask ourselves; “What am I holding on to?” Once recognized we have a choice to - let go, “I can chose peace rather than this.” Being stuck means not letting go. With mindfulness and loving-kindness we can start by noticing without judgment the grasping and clinging within ourselves. We can feel the texture, the tightness, the uncompromising quality and rigidity of a mind that is grasping, clinging, holding on. Mindfully moving right into the pain itself, the discomfort of that, will provoke our natural intelligence, the letting go.