

EXTENDING MINDFULNESS TO EVERYDAY LIFE



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Summary

The great spiritual traditions agree that the cultivation of mindfulness is central. Without mindfulness we live in a state of distorted perceptions and fantasies, acting inappropriately with reference to our own true nature and the reality of the immediate situation, and consequently creating stupid and useless suffering. This article is oriented toward those readers already convinced of the value of cultivating increased mindfulness, so I shall not attempt to prove its value here: I have discussed this elsewhere (Tart, 1986), as well as the way modern psychological knowledge supports it. Although the traditions advocate developing mindfulness in all situations of life, advocacy, skillful training, and emphasis are not the same thing. Much traditional Buddhist practice, in particular, effectively puts

its emphasis on formal sitting without engaging in extensive and specific training for mindfulness in everyday life. Because traditional Buddhist practice is a major influence on people interested in meditation, the apparent lack of means for generalizing mindfulness to everyday life can be a serious problem for many Westerners, especially because most of us want to enliven all of life through our growth practices, not retire to a life of solitary meditation. This article discusses ways in which elements of a less well-known mindfulness cultivation tradition, the Gurdjieff training, may be used to increase mindfulness in everyday life situations and to facilitate the generalization of mindfulness from intensive meditation sessions to everyday life. Some specific training exercises are presented, as well as the principles of devising such exercises.

A basic theme of humanistic and transpersonal psychology is that people live in a limited, indeed *constricted* subset of their full potential. This is especially true for those of us who are over-intellectualized: We are too often unmindful of our embodied and feeling nature. In addition to specific defense mechanisms that block awareness (repression, rationalization, etc.), we do not pay clear, mindful attention to the richness of ongoing experience.

Mindfulness, a feeling of clarity of experience, of "presence," is central in Buddhist mind-training practice (see, for example, Dhiravamsa, 1975; Goldstein, 1987; Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Kornfield & Breiter, 1985; Solè-Leris, 1986). During a Buddhist practitioners meeting I attended last year, a student discussed the fact that although she could develop a great deal of mindfulness during a retreat, this mindfulness disappeared rapidly as she left the retreat and was difficult to generate in everyday life. She wanted more mindfulness, but because she could not spend her life on retreat, what could she do? This is a common problem among beginning (and even more advanced) meditators.

This article is a discussion of some possibilities for more effectively extending the mindfulness developed in traditional Buddhist (or similar) practices into everyday life, based on three key themes: (a) the potentiating effect of group work on mindfulness; (b) the psychological principle of generalization; and (c) practical experience drawn from another spiritual growth tradition, the Gurdjieff work, which focuses on developing mindfulness in everyday life. I believe it will be of general interest to all who already know the value of and seek greater mindfulness in life and of special interest to those trained in meditative disciplines like Buddhist *vipasana*

(insight, mindfulness) meditation who might want to adapt some techniques from modern psychology and the Gurdjieff work in order to make the traditional meditative disciplines more effective in contemporary society. Our focus is practical as well as theoretical, so principles for designing exercises for enhancing mindfulness in life will be discussed and several exercises given.

First let us clarify the term *mindfulness*, as it tends to be used in several ways in much spiritual literature.

MINDFULNESS

In one sense, mindfulness refers to a clear, *lucid* quality of awareness to the everyday experiences of life. Much of ordinary life is spent in abstractions and fantasies about what might happen or abstractions and fantasies about what has happened. We seldom live in the present, the only fully real moment. If you are eating an ice cream cone and become more vividly, mindfully aware of just what that tastes like right now, instead of being lost in thoughts about past and future ice cream cones, leading on to thoughts far removed from ice cream cones, you are being more mindful.

In another sense, mindfulness refers to a clear quality of awareness as applied to deeper and more subtle processes of the mind. For example: As I attempt to be clearly and directly aware of my ongoing bodily sensations while practicing vipasana meditation, I might suddenly note that there is a covert belief or bias operating at the fringes of my awareness but exerting some control over that awareness. Perhaps it is a belief that certain kinds of body sensations are "better" or "more meditative" than another kind. This may lead to the insight that covert biases are generally operating in all of my life experiences. I have been mindful in the second sense of the word, seeing a more subtle level of mental functioning.

In a third sense, mindfulness refers to what we might call *awareness of being aware*, to full self-consciousness. I do not mean self-consciousness in the ordinary use of the term to mean feeling awkward and inhibited because of internal doubts, or because of superego processes, but rather self-consciousness in the sense of not *being completely* absorbed in or *totally* identified with the content of ongoing experience: some part of the mind, a "neutral observer" or "fair witness"¹ remains aware, in a relatively objective

way, of the nature of ongoing experience as related to immediate here and now existence. As I sit here typing, for example, I can be completely absorbed in what I am writing, such that only strong sensory stimuli can manage to attract my attention, or I can *remember myself*, to use Gurdjieff's term: thus a nonordinary part of myself is aware that most of me is absorbed in the writing task but I simultaneously know that I am sitting in a bouncing van on my way to the university, portable computer in my lap, hearing other conversations in the periphery of my awareness, having a body with many sensations in it, and so on. I am mindful in the sense of being clearly aware of what is happening while simultaneously being aware that I am aware of these things. I remember myself.

In a fourth sense, mindfulness can be described as a continuous and precise awareness of the process of being aware, such that a thought is recognized at the time as a thought, a perception as a perception, an emotion as an emotion, a fantasy as a fantasy, and so on, rather than mistaking a thought or emotion or fantasy for a perception.

In practice the four senses of mindfulness mentioned above often overlap. Too, verbal definitions can only point at mindfulness, not adequately capture it. My focus in this article becomes the question: How can we maintain some or all aspects of mindfulness outside a retreat situation, in the complexity and turmoil of ordinary life?

I have been attempting to cultivate mindfulness, especially the self-remembering kind, for a number of years, with varying degrees of success.² One of the most interesting observations I and others doing this practice have made about it is that it is not at all difficult to be mindful in most circumstances. A tiny effort, a small shift of attention is all it takes. What is difficult is to *remember to make* that effort!

Both Buddhism and the Gurdjieff work emphasize that our minds are ordinarily driven and controlled by the circumstances we find ourselves in, so that in practice we live mindlessly in *samsara* or a kind of waking dream, instead of mindfully in the here and now. Buddhism frequently expresses this in terms of the influence of past karma determining our fate. Gurdjieff expresses it as the *mechanicalness* of ordinary life, that we are best understood as *machines* driven by outside forces. Such mindless experi-

encing and acting leads to maladaptive behavior, which in turn creates useless suffering and more mechanical karma. Modern psychological discoveries lend strong support to this position (Tart, 1986), although they do not operate within a mindfulness framework. While the long-term goal of both disciplines is to develop a continual mindfulness that is *independent* of outside circumstances, our focus here is on the development of mindfulness for those of us at the beginning of the path, where external circumstances are important in aiding or hindering our work. We begin with a consideration of some of the effects of working in a group.

POTENTIATING EFFECT OF GROUP WORK

When you are surrounded by other individuals who are also trying to be mindful, it reminds you of your own intention to be mindful and you make the small effort required to be mindful far more often. An analogy used in the Gurdjieff work is that these others serve as "alarm clocks" to help awaken you. On the other hand, when you are surrounded by individuals who are ignorant of or uninterested in mindfulness, not only are you not reminded to make efforts at mindfulness yourself, you are subjected to the kinds of hypnoticlike interpersonal influences that induce and reinforce the state I have called "consensus trance" (Tart, 1986), the relative mindlessness of everyday life, living in samsara.

Consider an example from a retreat, based on my own and others' experience. You are sitting, doing vipasana meditation, with your eyes open. But you have wandered off into some fantasy for the last few minutes with no mindfulness whatsoever. A woman seated across from you takes a moment to roll her neck to relieve some discomfort. The sight of her moving interrupts your fantasy. You may start on another fantasy after a moment, or, during the period of interruption, you may remember that you are at a retreat and that your intention in being there is to be mindful, not to fantasize. You make the effort to become more mindful, then continue sitting mindfully. This is what we might call a basic-level *reminding function* of group work: The perceptual reality of being in the group reminds you of your purpose.

There is a higher-level reminding function that can happen in a group practicing mindfulness, though. To continue our example,

the sensory stimulation of the woman rolling her neck may not only interrupt your fantasy, but you may notice a certain *nonordinary* quality of her movement, perhaps a certain deliberateness or slowness, that makes it likely that she is not only stretching, she is stretching *mindfully*. This direct observation of apparent mindfulness by another group member is even more likely to remind you to become mindful yourself, rather than to again wander off into fantasy. Once you have become dedicated to being mindful, there is a certain sense in which mindfulness becomes contagious.

The degree of mindfulness you experience at a retreat, then, is a function of the intensity of your own practice, but, at our beginning level, it is also strongly affected by this reminding function of the others in the group. This is a generalization, of course, and individual cases may vary. If you are very well established in your own mindfulness practice, it is not as important. My own experience of Gurdjieff work and group meditation situations has suggested that group reminding is an important factor for almost everyone, even those whose own practice is well established.

The importance of group potentiation of mindfulness can be further appreciated if we consider the nature of most group interactions in ordinary life.

Suppose we are talking with several co-workers at the office. On the surface level we are friendly, but on another level we may be rivals, competing for promotion. As a result, our conversations have hidden agendas, such as an implicit contract that we will focus on the surface friendliness and not notice the hidden rivalries in order to smooth our interaction, avoiding the extra stress that would be generated through open rivalry. A second hidden agenda might be to preserve our own self-concept about not being aggressive. A third might be to spy out information about our rivals' intended actions that might be useful to us: An atmosphere of friendliness might make it more likely that a rival would be lulled and say more than he or she might say if he or she remembered our rivalry. A fourth hidden agenda might involve demonstrating our own superiority by being relaxed around a rival.

Such a situation, although conducive to a biased, self-centered kind of ordinary attentiveness, is not conducive to a general, even-handed mindfulness, to equanimity, to remembering yourself and accurately observing *all* there is to be observed in reality. Unless you are very practiced at maintaining mindfulness, you will

automatically avoid general mindfulness, thus avoiding immediate tension by suppression and repression. This apparent immediate gain does not take account, of course, of the long-term costs. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Tart, 1986), most ordinary interactions are reinforcements and deepenings of the state of consensus trance we live in, quite aside from their ostensible content.

A major reason mindfulness fades quickly after leaving a retreat, then, is that we lose the reminding functions that other retreat participants perform and are subjected to other ordinary "reminding functions," reminding us of the "normalcy" and social desirability of *mindlessness*.

Now let us consider an important psychological principle, *generalization*.

GENERALIZATION OF SKILLS

Generalization was first formally identified in Ivan Pavlov's well-known experiments on classical conditioning. A hungry dog would hear the sound of a bell: Half a second later the sound would be followed by some food. After repeated pairings of the bell sound followed by food, the dog would salivate at the sound of the bell alone. The bell was called the *conditioned stimulus*: conditioned because a dog does not normally salivate to the sound of a bell. *Stimulus generalization* of conditioning referred to the fact that stimuli other than the bell might also elicit salivation, especially if they were like the bell. A bell of a slightly different pitch would elicit much salivation, a scratching sound almost none. The greater the resemblance of the new and originally conditioned stimuli, the more likely the conditioned response would arise.

Conditioning was interpreted as a mechanical response not involving consciousness at the time of Pavlov's work and for most of psychology's subsequent history, reflecting the mechanistic worldview then (and still too much) in vogue. In higher animals we can also view the same process as *learning*: The dog, or a human in a similar situation, reaches an understanding that the bell will be followed by a reward and the thought of the reward elicits a bodily response and associated mental responses. For example, you hear a telephone bell and get up and answer the telephone. This is

a learned response: There is no “natural” genetically coded response that tells us that a bell sound is to be followed by picking up an object and saying “Hello” to someone who is not physically present!

Stimulus generalization applies to conscious learning. If we learn to produce a certain mental attitude or overt response to a specific stimulus situation, we are likely to produce that attitude to a very similar situation, produce it somewhat to a fairly similar situation, and not produce it at all to a clearly different stimulus situation. Generalization can aid recall. A practical application, for example, is that students who have difficulty remembering relevant knowledge when they take tests are often advised to study for the test in the same classroom where they will be tested. The identicalness of the testing room (stimulus array) and the studying room makes it easier to recall needed information than if that information were associated with the sensory context of some other room.

Note that I do not believe that mindfulness *per se* can be conditioned in the sense that mindfulness will occur automatically given a certain stimulus situation identical or similar to one in which mindfulness has been cultivated before. When I am feeling frustrated about the difficulty of being mindful, I often wish that I could be automatically and continually mindful, but, in my personal experience, mindfulness almost always involves a small but *deliberate* effort. It does not happen by itself. But conditioning can *remind you* that you want to make the effort to be mindful. Thus conditioning can function as a reminding factor, just as group work can.

Consider the typical meditation retreat situation now. It is intentionally designed to be very different from everyday life. We hold a retreat at a place designated as a “retreat center”; we see only fellow meditators, people playing an unusual social role, around us; we sit in special “meditation postures” through the day; when not meditating our usual social interactions are very circumscribed. This specialness gives the retreat situation definite advantages for learning various aspects of mindfulness.

When we are initially learning mindfulness, for example, we can deal with only so much distraction: too much and we usually learn nothing. So ordinary distractions (social conversation, phone calls, mail, decision making, reading novels, everyday work concerns, etc.) are minimized or eliminated. Internal psychological distrac-

tions still have to be dealt with, but the sheer amount of distraction is less and there is a better chance of coping and going on to experience periods of mindfulness.

The qualities that make the retreat situation so good for initially learning mindfulness are, unfortunately, poor ones in terms of generalizing the practice of mindfulness to everyday life. That is, the reminding functions discussed above, which the people and physical settings of the retreat situation have during the retreat, become mostly inoperative in ordinary life. The retreat situation is too different for mindfulness (or being reminded that we want to be mindful), as a specific response, to generalize to everyday life. We do not sit in "meditative postures" during the ordinary day, or walk slowly and mindfully, so we do not have the special postural sense or conditioned/learned movement style as a reminding factor. We have not practiced mindfulness in social conversations, in business affairs, in phone calls, during decision making, while reading mail, and so on, so it is not surprising that these situations do not make it easy for us to be mindful.

ADAPTING BUDDHISM TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

The problem of lack of generalization of the reminders to practice mindfulness of a retreat to everyday life is, I suspect, partly rooted in historical and cultural traditions that must be skillfully modified if Buddhism is to have a widespread effectiveness in Western culture.

Historically Buddhism in the East has, by and large, been nurtured and institutionalized as a monastic culture. Lay Buddhists would occasionally visit a monastery for special practice, but the core of Buddhist practitioners were monks and nuns. *Life was one long retreat for core practitioners.* There were few problems of generalizing from the special mindfulness practices to ordinary life because there was almost no separation: Monastic life *was* ordinary life for the core practitioners.

It is not the case now, however, and probably will not become so, that monastic Buddhism will be the main form of Buddhist practice in the West. Western lay practitioners expect to meditate, to become mindful, to achieve some degree of enlightenment. For maximum effectiveness, I believe we will have to develop skillful

ways of modifying retreat training procedures to aid the development of mindfulness in situations that span the range from special retreat to ordinary life situations, so the skill of developing mindfulness generalizes more readily to everyday life.

GURDJIEFF WORK

G. I. Gurdjieff was one of the first people to try to adapt Eastern spiritual practices to forms more suitable and effective for contemporary Westerners. Born in Alexandropol somewhere between 1872 and 1877, the area we now call Armenia, he was exposed to both Eastern and Western cultures as a child, and spent much time around the turn of the century traveling in the East. Although he deliberately made it difficult for others to trace the sources of his teaching—he wanted people to test the ideas he presented and personally verify their usefulness, rather than accept them because of his personal charisma or because they came from the mysterious East—he obviously had considerable contact with Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, and Eastern Christian sources. His main theme was that man was “asleep,” in *samsara*, living a life with perception, thought, and feeling badly distorted by automatized beliefs and emotions. “Waking up” to higher levels of consciousness was the only worthwhile goal.

Gurdjieff’s main practices, *self-observation* and *self-remembering*, were intended to produce increasing degrees of insight and mindfulness in everyday life situations. I shall briefly describe these practices: Greater practical detail can be found in my book, *Waking Up* (Tart, 1986), or in traditional sources such as Nicoll (1984), Ouspensky (1977), Speeth (1976), or Walker (1974). Although Gurdjieff felt that occasional special retreat and training situations were useful, he noted that ordinary life is where we live, so mindfulness must be developed and applied there. Indeed, the technically simplified situation of a retreat could even hinder the development of a capacity for full mindfulness because many of the stimulus situations that trigger our automaticity and mindless mechanicalness are absent in the retreat, so we cannot practice dealing with them mindfully.

To illustrate, you have little social interaction with others in a retreat, and what interaction there is is usually positive and

considerate. In ordinary life, however, others frequently treat us inconsiderately, and sometimes actually attack us emotionally and verbally. To facilitate training mindfulness in this kind of stress situation, Gurdjieff actually provided free room and board to a Russian refugee at his training center, a man who had no interest whatsoever in Gurdjieff's work (Peters, 1964). But this man had an outstanding virtue for training mindfulness under stress: He was one of the most inconsiderate, annoying, irritating people one could hope to meet! He was, to use Carlos Castaneda's term, a "worthy opponent" for students working on developing mindfulness under stress. On one occasion when his students banded together to play cruel practical jokes on this man until they finally got him so angry he left, Gurdjieff drove to Paris to find him and paid him to return!

SELF-OBSERVATION AND SELF-REMEMBERING

Self-observation is necessary because we live in samsara, in a state of constant illusion and self-deception. Since this state is an active, *dynamic* state, rather than simply a collection of simple bad habits, it often cannot just be changed, in Gurdjieff's view, by intending to change it: You must understand it *thoroughly* before attempting any major changes, otherwise these changes may backfire. This is similar to the modern psychological view that some of our problems are expressions of deep conflicts, so if you just work on the particular expression, the conflict may come out somewhere else. Self-observation is a practice of trying to observe neutrally the manifestations of your mind, being a "fair witness" or "objective observer" of yourself. The process is difficult, of course, as we tend to identify with our thoughts, feelings, and actions and so justify them rather than observe and study them objectively. If worked with sufficiently, however, a great deal of knowledge about the functioning of our ordinary mind—what Gurdjieff called *false personality*, because so much of it was conditioned in us by society and others, rather than being our own choice—can be built up. Then changes can be made that will result in great increases in available energy, as that energy will no longer be automatically wasted in the workings of false personality, in ordinary consensus consciousness.

Self-remembering is somewhat similar to (and facilitates) self-observation. Basically it involves deliberately splitting off a small part of your awareness to monitor the rest of the operation of your mind in general, thus producing mindfulness. While self-remembering ultimately involves self-awareness of everything that is happening, internally and externally, the more practical version for beginners is to focus clearly on external events while simultaneously keeping some body awareness. This body awareness acts like an “anchor” in the here and now, because body sensation exists in the here and now, thus inhibiting getting lost in thought or fantasy or becoming totally absorbed by external stimulation at the cost of losing contact with yourself. It is similar to returning to following the breath in vipasana meditation when you find you have drifted off in thought.

This is a simplified description of a rather sophisticated process, so I refer interested readers to the sources mentioned above for more detail.

PRACTICE IN GURDJIEFF WORK

Self-observation and self-remembering are intended to be practiced in every aspect of ordinary life. Like meditation, it is not easy for beginners. While only a small effort is usually called for to be mindful in this way, *remembering to make the effort* can be difficult. Success in either or both practices (and they can often blend into one another) is very rewarding. Any ordinary action, such as brewing a cup of tea, can become an ordinary-yet-extraordinary action if done mindfully. Gurdjieff work can be very useful in bringing mindfulness and its inherent satisfactions into ordinary life.

To see some of the possibilities in Gurdjieff-type “workdays,” especially in light of our interest in generalizing mindfulness to everyday life, I will describe a few aspects of a typical such workday, drawing from my own and others’ experience. Note that this is an example of highlights—I have compressed several hours of experience into a couple of pages of description—and actual mindful experience is much more temporally dense.

Note that the usefulness of the following description, as that of most of this article, depends on the degree to which the reader

already values the cultivation of mindfulness and the degree to which personal experience has demonstrated that it is not an easy thing to cultivate. Without some background here, the following description may sound like making a big deal out of perfectly ordinary actions. On the other hand, it might stimulate the reader who has not begun to value mindfulness and practice it to do some self-reflection.

A typical day of intensive Gurdjieff work begins with awakening in the morning. Almost at once a few minutes are devoted to a body scanning exercise (see Tart, 1986, chap. 18), somewhat like the "sweeping" method of one contemporary form of vipasana. This morning exercise has multiple functions, but two primary ones are to start the day off with consciousness of what is happening in your body and to remind you that you intend to be mindful through the day. This morning exercise leads directly into self-observation and self-remembering.

Washing, dressing, eating, all are to be taken as occasions for self-observation and self-remembering. Traveling to the workday site is another such occasion. I mention these briefly, but they are just as potentially rich ground for self-observation and self-remembering as the more organized work later.

You arrive at the workday site, mindfully check an assignment roster and see, for example, that you are assigned to a building crew that is shingling the side of a building. You have never shingled a building before: Perhaps that is why you have been assigned this particular task. Remembering to be mindful of at least some of your body sensations as well as clearly aware of the external world, you walk (perhaps just slightly slower and more mindfully than normal) to the tool shed and check out a hammer and box of shingling nails. Others are going to and from the tool shed, carrying various tools and supplies, so you must stay aware of exactly where they are and where you are—it would not be genuinely mindful to "feel" mindful inside and then bump into someone who was carrying a sharp tool!

At the shingling site several others are already at work. A woman you know tells you she is in charge of the shingling crew and gives you instructions as to just what to do and how to do it. If you are a man, this could be a particularly rich situation for practicing self-observation and self-remembering. Suppose, for example, you are a man with some deep feelings of insecurity. Do

you notice a resentment that you, a man, are getting orders from a woman? Orders about traditionally male work? Is there a feeling of embarrassment that you are a man but do not already know how to do this traditionally male work? Does your awareness tend to identify with a feeling of resentment at getting orders from a woman? Might a funny internal “flavor” to this resentment suggest it is covering over the less pleasant feeling of embarrassment?

Can you remember yourself sufficiently while making these observations to avoid identifying with these feelings as they occur? That is, can you be mindful enough that you can act from a clearer, more mindful place, remembering yourself, your (nonordinary) “self” that is here to learn about itself and how to practice mindfulness? Can you pay full attention to the instructions so they do not need to be given again, for example? If you need to ask for clarification, can you do *only that*, without any hidden games in your words expressing, say, resentment?

Now you begin nailing on shingles, still observing and remembering yourself. Or have you forgotten to do either? If so, as in meditation, you gently bring your attention back to that task. Now you begin nailing on shingles. Is there enough attention on the necessities of the task that your nails are going in straight? Without cracking shingles? Is your body in a comfortable, efficient posture? Does it have unnecessary strains? Are there any emotional tones associated with those body strains, such as resentment from the previous interaction, still identified with, surfacing in another way?

Suppose you are not able to be very mindful and concentrate on the shingling: Your mind is still replaying a quarrel with a friend from the previous day. Because you are attempting to be mindful and concentrate on the shingling that you are doing in the here and now, though, the replay of the quarrel does not run as mechanically, as automatically as usual, you are more aware of it. You are at least more mindful than usual; perhaps you will have some insights into normally invisible aspects of how you feel when you are angry.

Another group member walks by, someone toward whom you feel an immediate dislike. There is something about him or her that is mindful, though, reminding you that you are trying to practice mindfulness, so you do so. Immediately you see your feeling of dislike more clearly and realize it concerns a quarrel with

someone at work last week who physically resembles the group member who walked by, and you see the process of projection in action.

Suppose you are able to be fairly mindful. It is a beautiful day, your shingling is going well, you enjoy the movement of the work, the mindfulness you are creating adds a quality of subtle joy and light to existence. Suddenly a messenger appears and tells you to stop shingling, go to the front yard, and get instructions on how to water the rose bushes. Now there is a rich opportunity to observe possible attachment. Are your mindfulness and good feelings dependent on shingling? On your success at it? Have you gotten attached to it? Do you think it's a "better job" than watering roses? More appropriate to who you think you are, or what you deserve? If subtle (or not so subtle) feelings like this run through you, can you still practice self-observation and self-remembering?

Suppose the message is that you are to join the kitchen cleaning crew and function as supervisor, telling others what needs to be done. How will you handle this authority? Can you observe the kind of emotional "intoxication" that authority may bring? If that happens, can you be mindful of the feelings behind the need to identify with the authority? Can you remember yourself sufficiently, be mindful enough, not to let those feelings affect the way you tell someone to sweep the kitchen stairs? Can you say something like, "Bob, sweep the kitchen stairs and put the sweepings in the garbage can" and have it be a completely clean communication, meaning nothing but what it says, without any covert messages like "I am the boss here, recognize my authority by doing what I say!"?

And so the day goes on. You may do a single task all day (what happens to your mindfulness without the benefit of novelty, when you are tired, cold, or bored?) or switch frequently. There will probably be brief meetings where some kind of talk will be given by the teacher about practicing mindfulness, or questions may be asked. Can you maintain mindfulness while asking a question? Being with others who are speaking mindfully can stimulate deep mindfulness on your part. You may take a coffee break, which is also an occasion to practice mindfulness. The time comes to go home: Do you let your mindfulness go like a burden and lapse back into the apparently comfortable mechanicalness of everyday thought, feel-

ing and action? If you do, can you observe it and learn from it? The workday never stops, it just changes its form.

Obviously the Gurdjieff workday situation, although special and different from ordinary life, is much more like ordinary life in many ways than the classical meditation retreat. You do talk to others, take and give orders, make some decisions, wash the dishes, water the garden, and so on in ordinary life, so the practice in mindfulness in the workday can generalize to ordinary life situations more easily than practices in the classical meditation retreat. You still have to make the effort to be mindful, but ordinary life can frequently remind you of the work situation in which you have practiced mindfulness, and you can be mindful again. This may be a mindfulness that is probably deeper than it might have been from your unaided efforts, as it is connected with an earlier mindfulness in a workday situation, that is, mindfulness can sometimes cumulate around specific areas.

GURDJIEFF WORK AND BUDDHISM

In terms of range of potential experience and growth, Buddhism and Gurdjieff work are both systems that claim they can lead people to a degree of enlightenment well beyond ordinary functioning. I deliberately say "claim," as I have not personally experienced the higher ranges of either discipline, and so cannot speak with any authority there. In terms of my personal experience with the beginnings of both paths, the varieties of mindfulness engendered by both paths is similar in some ways, different in others.

Both paths advocate mindfulness in *all* areas of life, and so in principle overlap greatly. I have received some training in Zen, several forms of Theravada, and several forms of Tibetan Buddhism. From my limited experience of Buddhist practice I note that the emphasis is on mindfulness generated in formal meditation, that is, in a technically simplified, quieted, nondemanding situation. Consequently I can be mindful of very subtle aspects of experience after the "noise" of my ordinary mind quiets down. Gurdjieff work, on the other hand, is mostly practiced in the "noise" of ordinary life. Consequently there are less of these insights into very subtle aspects of mind (although they are not lacking), but more insights into the normally hidden dynamics of how I relate to the world and

other people, a class of insights much less frequent, in my experience, in formal Buddhist meditation.

I am not really concerned with comparing Buddhism as the formal system of Buddhism with Gurdjieff work as the formal system of Gurdjieff work, however. It is the cultivation of mindfulness per se and its consequent effects of psychological and spiritual evolution that is important. Accurate observation of what is actually happening here and now is the essence, with what conceptual system it fits into being an important, but secondary question. Both Gurdjieff and the Buddha instructed their students to investigate the truth of psychological and spiritual matters through their direct, mindful experience, and to not accept any teachings on faith alone.

Thus the central thesis of this article is that for us beginners, the incorporation of some Gurdjieff-type work would probably be generally useful in helping mindfulness cultivated in retreats and meditation sessions generalize into everyday life more effectively, as well as cultivating mindfulness in everyday life in a direct way. Similarly, the introduction of some periods of Buddhist vipasana-type meditation into traditional Gurdjieff work would probably aid that process in developing comprehensive mindfulness.

Such incorporation of new elements into a tradition is experimental work. It should be done as mindfully as possible, the results assessed as carefully as possible, and adjustments made as necessary.

I end this article on a practical note by describing some general rules for creating special mindfulness exercises, and then presenting several particular exercises that could be introduced into traditional Buddhist retreats near their end as experiments in helping to transfer mindfulness into everyday life.

GENERAL RULES FOR DESIGNING MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

First, there is really only one "rule" for designing mindfulness-training exercises, namely to be *mindful yourself in all things and experimentally try various practices to help others to be mindful*. Any action can be used as a mindfulness exercise in this general sense. The word *experimentally* is important here, as it means you check how well various procedures work as objectively as possible,

rather than being wedded to some conceptual system. Because always being mindful tends to be too vague for most of us, though, and so easily forgotten, we can be helped in the initial development of mindfulness by using much more specific exercises.

Second, these are contrived *exercises*, not rules on how to live. Both students and instructors should remember this, because it is too easy to get caught up in a system of ideas and turn technical practices into “teachings” and rules.

Third, mindfulness exercises usually sound silly to the intellectual mind. Thus the proper way to evaluate them is to practice them, not simply read about them and form a judgment.

Fourth, contrived exercises will work only temporarily, then they will gradually wear out. Mindfulness exercises provide an opportunity to practice mindfulness, but mindfulness is a small effort you must make yourself. Because of the novelty and/or tension-inducing characteristics of an exercise, your activation level goes up and mindfulness is easier, but that novelty will wear off after a while. Sometimes the usefulness of an exercise can be stretched by modifying it, but eventually the exercise should be abandoned. This time of usefulness differs for different individuals, so there are no hard and fast rules here. I have personally found some exercises to lose their special stimulation value for me in minutes; others work for years of intermittent use.

Fifth, doing an exercise for a specified interval and clearly stopping it will allow it to be used again at a later time. Trying to be mindful in the specified way all the time or for an unspecified period of time will wear out the exercise fast.

Sixth, the mechanics of the exercise are not the same thing as the mindfulness it is intended to help induce. Do not kid yourself that going through the motions of an exercise is *per se* mindful. When you find yourself doing one of these mindlessly on repeated occasions, that is a good indication to drop the exercise for the time being.

Seventh, a moderate amount of tension (physical, intellectual, or emotional) can be helpful in mindfulness exercises, as mindfulness will convert that tension into “free energy” that can intensify awareness. Too much tension, however, can activate people’s automatic defense mechanisms too strongly, grabbing all attention, and making mindfulness very difficult. There are considerable individ-

ual differences here. An exercise that is relaxing and easy for one person may cause considerable nervousness in another.

In practice, I often arrange mindfulness exercises in a series, starting with easy, low-tension ones and gradually increasing the tension to higher levels. This also allows participants to observe the kinds and qualities of tension that interfere with their mindfulness. When tension is deliberately increased, it is wise to allow a safety valve, an option for a person to say he or she has become too tense to practice mindfulness and withdraw to a more passive role.

Let us now look at some specific mindfulness exercises. I have arranged them from what I feel is roughly easiest to hardest, but the order will not be the same for everyone.

THE THRESHOLD-CROSSING EXERCISE

The basic form of this exercise is one used at the Green Gulch Zen Center near San Francisco. Be mindful whenever you approach a doorway, and control your pace so you first step across the threshold with the foot nearest the hinge on the door. Doorways thus serve as a reminder to be mindful. Ordinary life is full of thresholds to cross, so this generalizes easily into everyday life.

A difficulty with exercises of this type, that call for a particular behavioral response as well as mindfulness, is that the behavior eventually becomes automated and conditioned. How quickly this happens varies from person to person. As the behavior becomes automated, there is a strong tendency for your mind to have a *fantasy* about being mindful in that situation instead of actually being mindful.

As with other mindfulness exercises, it is a good idea to stop the exercise once automatization starts to happen, so as not to reinforce fantasies about mindfulness. Or, you may make the exercise more complex. In this instance, once you notice a tendency for mindless automatization, you might add a rule like doing it this way on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, using the opposite foot on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and just letting whichever foot happens to be in front go through first on Sundays.

Another and especially useful way to deal with automatization of mindfulness exercises is to use exercises that give you sensory

feedback about whether you are actually being mindful or not. Many of the practical work tasks done in Gurdjieff workdays do this, for instance. If you are nailing something together and not really being mindful, you will bend more nails and leave more hammer marks on the wood. I have also found the Japanese self-defense art of Aikido very helpful this way. When I am standing on the mat daydreaming about how aware I am, my partner's grab for me or punch at me seems quick and startles me. When I am actually being mindful and present, there is much more time to handle the situation smoothly.

THE AUTO EXERCISE

As Westerners, we not only spend a great deal of time in automobiles, we have very strong feelings toward them. An outside observer might be led to believe that automobiles are an object of religious veneration among many Americans, with all sorts of cults having formed around them. Thus training awareness around automobiles is useful for transferring mindfulness skills to everyday life. The following type of exercise is useful near the end of a retreat, when most participants will leave the retreat to get into a car.

Instruct the retreat participants who have their cars parked outside to stand up. Those without cars should then pick a driver they will work with, preferably someone they do not know well. The driver and his companion(s) should not exchange any words during this exercise.

Each driver should then walk mindfully (and at slightly less than a normal rate of walking) outside to their car, accompanied by their companions without cars. They should stop near the car, looking at it mindfully, noting any internal reactions they have toward it.

Now mindfully walk close to the car, close enough to touch it, but do not. Be mindful. Now touch the car, gently, affectionately, appreciatively, as you would touch a baby or a lover. Be mindful of what you experience. The driver should mindfully put the key in the lock and make a mindful resolution to come to his senses and be mindful every time this key touches this lock for the next two weeks. (Resolving *while* mindful to be mindful in future situations similar to the one you are in is helpful.) Before unlocking the car,

however, the driver should then mindfully remove the key and hand it to the companion he least knows, and then mindfully turn away and walk back to the retreat hall. A most interesting set of feelings to be mindful about is likely.

The companion or, if alone, the driver, should now get in the car and mindfully look around the interior. Then sit in the driver's seat and look ahead as if driving. Put the key in the ignition, turn it far enough to turn on the ignition, but not the starter. Turn it off, remove the keys, and leave and lock the car. If the driver is doing this, he should make a mindful resolution to come to his senses and be mindful every time this key touches this lock for the next two weeks. If this is being done by a companion who has no car of his or her own, this person should make a mindful resolution to become mindful every time he or she has a key of any kind in his or her hand for the next couple of weeks.

The companion mindfully returns to the meditation hall and quite slowly walks toward the driver, car keys in hand, and returns them.

THE SOLITAIRE MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUE

There is a kind of solitaire card game, a slightly modified version of the very popular Klondike solitaire,³ that I played frequently as a child. While needing to keep busy through some stressful waiting periods recently, I discovered that it can be an excellent mindfulness-training technique. The very idea of playing cards to cultivate mindfulness has some shock value in itself!

I find Klondike solitaire an excellent mindfulness-training exercise at an intermediate level of difficulty, excellent for transferring mindfulness to ordinary life. Other forms of solitaire games would probably work as well.

The game itself requires that you pay attention to what cards are up and their numerical and color relations to each other. You must be alert to potential plays, because it is a disqualifying error to skip a possible play. You must occasionally make strategic decisions about which of two or more possible moves is better. You must deal the cards properly and play through the remainder of the deck (by threes) over and over again until you either win or are stuck with no further moves. The physical world around you may

provide distractions from the game, but you must not miss plays. Compared to classical vipasana meditation, considerable activity of physical motion, counting, and decision making is added, thus moving closer to life.

To work on paying adequate attention to the game and playing to win, while maintaining mindfulness, is very rich, but not as overwhelming as ordinary social interaction. Observations of transient mental and emotional phenomena that apply in many areas of life is possible in this rich situation, as I will illustrate by describing a typical experiential sequence for me.

I am mindful that I am sitting at a table, seeing the room around me, hearing the sound the cards make as I shuffle them, feeling the coordinated hand motions necessary to shuffle them. I must count out the first seven cards to form my playing field. The count tends to develop an inertia and rhythm of its own: Can I remain mindful, or do I get pulled into the counting activity so much that I lose track of my immediate sensory impressions? Impatience to get the game set up manifests, urging me to deal faster. Can I remain mindful and keep an even pace? Or might I deal faster but still try to be mindful during the faster deal? Could I deliberately deal slower as a way of increasing my impatience, so I can better observe it? Can I remember to be aware of the tactile qualities of each card as I deal it, being mindful of the fact that I am aware of these qualities, that I am directing my attention to be mindful?

I finish dealing and see that I have no aces to go up top and all black cards up; nothing can play on anything else. A flash of disappointment wells up! Can I stay mindful of this emotion, perhaps taste its flavor precisely? I start going through the remaining deck by threes, and red cards that play on the black cards on the playing row start turning up. I get excited, mindfulness starts slipping as my attention gets constellated into the good feeling that I am on a winning streak! The touch of the cards, the sound they make as I play them, my peripheral field of vision all start to narrow and become lost. Oops, stay mindful with that feeling, a little attention and again I feel the cards in my hands, hear their sounds, see the table I am sitting at while still feeling the excitement over the idea of a winning streak, see my attraction to the excitement, remain mindful that I am experiencing these things.

But after the initial run nothing plays for a while. My thoughts tell me that I am going to be stuck, I will lose this hand. The

disappointed feeling starts sucking my attention in but I see the feeling and manage to maintain mindfulness. Yes, the disappointing feeling is associated with a desire to hurry, be less aware, get it over with if I am going to lose anyway. I lose mindfulness for a minute again, come back just in time to see that a run of plays has again excited me, I am going to win! Lose mindfulness for half a minute in the attachment/absorption in the idea of winning, then manage to get mindfulness back. I remember, "Doesn't Buddhism say something about the transience of feelings?" Each was eternal when I lost mindfulness and was absorbed in it, yet I see they come and go like the wind as the play of the cards changes.

If I am making this sound exciting, it can indeed be when you are mindful enough to see this rapid play of emotion!

This solitaire play situation is parallel to much human interaction. You are engaged in "games," structured interactions with rules. The initial "deals" of the games excite or depress you, your spirits rise and fall with the momentary course of the interaction, mindfulness and absorption come and go. The "emotional stakes" are generally much higher when you are playing with another human, though, instead of in this artificial situation with a deck of cards.

A more advanced form of this exercise would involve actual two-person card games, so the human interaction component is added.

HERE AND NOW REPORTING AND WITNESSING

A useful exercise for learning to cultivate mindfulness during interpersonal interactions is derived from a Gestalt psychology exercise known as the *continuum of awareness*, here presented with some modifications that make it more mindful for both participants.

People are asked to choose a partner, preferably someone they do not know well. It is much harder to do well with friends or lovers because of the implicit contracts we have about keeping the relationship within certain limits.

The partners sit opposite each other so they can look at each other's faces and bodies. A traditional meditative posture is fine, as are more informal postures. The partners choose who will start in the role of talker, with the other in the role of neutral witness.

At a signal from the group coordinator, the talker is to begin talking continuously, with the aim of being continuously aware of whatever he or she is experiencing *in the present moment* and describing it aloud to his or her partner. The emphasis is on describing what you are experiencing *now*, not associations or analyses. For example, as I write, I am aware of the touch of the keys against my fingers, of a frustration that description is slower than experience so that I cannot describe *all* of my experience, of a swollen feeling in my fingers, of a tension in the small of my back, of a “quiet” analytical thought that wanted me to have a broader scope of experience, of wondering what the person sitting beside me must think about what I am doing, of remembering a fear that comes up in this exercise that I might have a socially unacceptable thought about my partner to whom I am describing my ongoing experience, such as a sexual thought about the partner, and so on. Note that the last experience I reported is on the borderline between a here and now experience and drifting off down memory lane or into formal analysis.

The hardest form of this exercise is to call for continuous reporting of *all* ongoing experience because we do have social taboos that are not completely overcome just by instructing participants to report on everything. Thus in introducing the exercise I usually add a qualifying instruction that if the talking partner has an experience that he or she fears is too unacceptable to communicate, he should say “censoring,” and go on with reporting the next experience, such as, “There is tension in my legs, censoring, I feel embarrassed that I’m censoring, I feel my face flushing, I feel embarrassed at being embarrassed, my foot itches,” and so on.

The role of the talker is deliberately difficult, for we are attempting to train mindfulness under conditions of interpersonal interaction. The tension can actually be used as a kind of energy for deep mindfulness, though. The role of the listener, the neutral witness, is also difficult. The instructions to the listener are to stay present, listen to and observe the talker attentively, and *give no social feedback of any kind*. That is, the listener cannot nod, smile, frown, look sympathetic, or say *anything*. The listener must sit perfectly still, looking at and listening to the talker. This is a skill that most people must learn. As they learn it, they will find not only that their skill at mindfully listening improves, but a whole host of internal psychological reactions occurs that can lead to important insights.

A listener may find, for example, that he has an enormous compulsion to nod agreement, and, being mindful of the feeling tones associated with that compulsion, can lead to the discovery of important aspects of early conditioning.

I generally have the partners talk for about five minutes in this way, then call time and have them switch roles.

A mindful discussion by the group and sharing of experiences to this exercise can be quite useful.

EXPERIMENTAL APPLICATION

Both Buddhism and the Gurdjieff work are powerful and sophisticated paths for developing mindfulness. I am not advocating that either be replaced by the other, but that each may be able to profit by experimenting with adapting some techniques from the other. Here I have emphasized that Gurdjieffian mindfulness techniques that are practiced in situations that closely resemble ordinary life may be useful in helping to generalize the mindfulness developed in traditional meditation retreats into everyday life.

I stress that this is an experiment, and a long-term experiment. Straightforward borrowing may or may not be appropriate; some techniques may need modification and successive adaptation. I have presented some general principles and some specific exercises that I have designed from my own experience in teaching an experimental form of the Gurdjieff work (Tart, 1986). I look forward to hearing from teachers who adapt some of these to see how helpful they are.

NOTES

1. The quotes around these terms are to remind us that I refer to a *process* that is difficult to describe verbally, not to a fixed sort of *thing* that the use of nouns implies.

2. As a scientifically trained writer, conditioned to the norms of the scientific subculture, I find it awkward to refer to my own experience frequently, especially because I do not consider myself particularly adept at formal meditation or Gurdjieffian mindfulness. In the study of mindfulness, however, the investigator is the primary instrument, and it would be silly and misleading to depersonalize the writing.

3. In Klondike solitaire, you deal out seven cards in a row, the first (leftmost) face up. Then you deal six in a row on top of cards two through seven, again first card face up, and so on, until you have dealt out one card, face up, over the original seventh card. This is your playing row or tableau. Aces play above this row and you play cards on them that match suit and number sequentially, that is, two of diamonds on the ace of diamonds, and so on. Meanwhile on the original piles you play down red on black by number, and so on. The aim is to get all 52 cards up on the aces. In the most difficult version of Klondike solitaire, cards are turned up from the remaining pack one by one to see if they play either red on black down on the tableaux or directly up on ace piles. If not, they go down in a pile, and, because there is only one pass through the pile, needed cards can easily be irretrievably buried. The modification I use is to go through this pile by threes over and over again until I am stuck.

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