

FULL CATASTROPHE LIVING

Using the Wisdom of
Your Body and Mind to Face
Stress, Pain, and Illness



Revised and Updated Edition

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The Foundations of Mindfulness Practice: Attitudes and Commitment

To cultivate the healing power of mindfulness requires much more than mechanically following a recipe or a set of instructions. No real process of learning is like that. It is only when the mind is open and receptive that learning and seeing and change can occur. In practicing mindfulness you will have to bring your whole being to the process. You can't just assume a meditative posture and hope that something will magically just happen, nor can you play a CD and think that the CD is going to "do something" for you.

The attitude with which you undertake the practice of paying attention and being in the present is crucial. It is the soil in which you will be cultivating your ability to calm your mind and to relax your body, to concentrate and to see more clearly. If the attitudinal soil is depleted, that is, if your energy and commitment to practice are low, it will be hard to develop calmness and relaxation with any consistency. If the soil is really polluted, that is, if you are trying to force yourself to feel relaxed and demand of yourself that "something happen," nothing will grow at all and you will quickly conclude that "meditation doesn't work."

To cultivate meditative awareness requires an entirely new way of look-

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

If you come to the meditation practice thinking to yourself, “This won’t work but I’ll do it anyway,” the chances are it will not be very helpful. The first time you feel any pain or discomfort, you will be able to say to yourself, “See, I knew my pain wouldn’t go away,” or “I knew I wouldn’t be able to focus or concentrate,” and that will confirm your suspicion that it wasn’t going to work and you will drop it.

If you come as a “true believer,” certain that this is the right path for you, that mindfulness is “the answer,” the chances are you will soon become disappointed too. As soon as you find that you are the same person you always were and that this work requires effort and consistency and not just a romantic belief in the value of meditation, relaxation, or mindfulness, you may find yourself with considerably less enthusiasm than before.

In the Stress Reduction Clinic, we find that those people who come with a skeptical but open-minded attitude do the best. Their attitude is “I don’t know whether this will work or not, I have my doubts, but I am going to give it my best shot and see what happens.”

So the attitude that we bring to the practice of mindfulness will to a large extent determine its long-term value to us. This is why consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be very helpful in getting the most out of the process of meditation. Your intentions set the stage for what is possible. They remind you from moment to moment of why you are practicing in the first place. Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part

of the training itself, a way of directing and channeling your energies so that they can be most effectively brought to bear in the work of growing and healing.

Seven attitudinal factors constitute the major pillars of mindfulness practice as we teach it in MBSR. They are non-judging, patience, a beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. These attitudes are to be cultivated consciously when you practice. They are not independent of each other. Each one relies on and influences the degree to which you are able to cultivate the others. Working on any one will rapidly lead you to the others. Since together they constitute the foundation upon which you will be able to build a strong meditation practice of your own, we are introducing them before you encounter the meditation practices themselves so that you can become familiar with these attitudes from the very beginning. Once you are engaged in the practice itself, this chapter will merit rereading to remind you of ways you might continue to fertilize this attitudinal soil so that your mindfulness practice will flourish.

THE ATTITUDINAL FOUNDATION OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

1. Non-judging

Mindfulness is cultivated by paying close attention to your moment-to-moment experience while, as best you can, not getting caught up in your ideas and opinions, likes and dislikes. This orientation allows us to see things more as they may actually be rather than through our own distorted lenses and agendas. To adopt such a stance toward your own experience requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to the inner and outer experiences that we are all normally caught up in, and learn to step back from it. When we begin practicing paying attention to the activity of our own mind, it is common to discover and to be surprised, even astonished, by the fact that we are constantly generating judgments about our experience. Almost everything we see is labeled and categorized by the mind. We react to everything we experience in terms of

what we think its value is to us. Some things, people, and events are judged as “good” because they make us feel good for some reason. Others are equally quickly condemned as “bad” because they make us feel bad. The rest is categorized as “neutral” because we don’t think it has much relevance. Neutral things, people, and events are almost completely tuned out of our consciousness. We usually find them the most boring to give attention to.

This habit of categorizing and judging our experience locks us into automatic reactions that we are not even aware of and that often have no objective basis at all. These judgments tend to dominate our minds, making it difficult for us ever to find any peace within ourselves, or to develop any discernment as to what may actually be going on, inwardly or outwardly. It’s as if the mind were a yo-yo, going up and down on the string of our own judging thoughts all day long. If you doubt this description of your mind, just observe how much you are preoccupied with liking and disliking during, say, any given ten-minute period as you go about your business.

If we are to find a more effective way of handling the stress in our lives, the first thing we will need to do is to be aware of these automatic judgments so that we can see through our own usually unexperienced prejudices and fears and liberate ourselves from their tyranny.

When practicing mindfulness, it is important to recognize this judging quality of mind when it appears and assume a broader perspective by intentionally suspending judgment and assuming a stance of impartiality, reminding yourself to, as best you can, simply observe what is unfolding, including your reactions to it. When you find the mind judging, you don’t have to stop it from doing that, and it would be unwise to try. All that is required is to be aware of it happening. No need to judge the judging and make matters even more complicated for yourself.

As an example, let’s say you are practicing watching your breathing, as we did in the last chapter and as we will do a lot more in the next. At a certain point you may find your mind saying something like, “This is boring,” or “This isn’t working,” or “I can’t do this.” These are judgments. When they come up in your mind, it is very important to recognize them

as judgmental thinking and remind yourself that the practice involves suspending judgment and just watching *whatever* comes up, including your own judging thoughts, without pursuing them or acting on them in any way. Then go back to riding the waves of your breathing with full awareness once again.

2. Patience

Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. A child may try to help a butterfly to emerge by breaking open its chrysalis. Usually the butterfly doesn't benefit from this. Any adult knows that the butterfly can only emerge in its own time, that the process cannot be hurried.

In the same way, we cultivate patience toward our own minds and bodies when practicing mindfulness. We intentionally remind ourselves that there is no need to be impatient with ourselves because we find the mind judging all the time, or because we are tense or agitated or frightened, or because we have been practicing for some time and nothing positive seems to have happened. We give ourselves room to have these experiences. Why? Because we are having them anyway! When they come up, they are our reality; they are part of our life unfolding in this moment. So we treat ourselves as well as we would treat the butterfly. Why rush through some moments to get to other, "better" ones? After all, each one is your life in that moment.

When you practice being with yourself in this way, you are bound to find that your mind has "a mind of its own." We have already seen in Chapter 1 that one of its favorite activities is to wander into the past and the future and lose itself in thinking. Some of its thoughts are pleasant. Others are painful and anxiety-producing. In either case thinking itself exerts a strong pull on our awareness, eclipsing it. Much of the time our thoughts overwhelm our perception of the present moment. They may cause us to lose our connection to the present entirely.

Patience can be a particularly helpful quality to invoke when the mind is

agitated. It can help us to accept this wandering tendency of the mind while reminding us that we don't have to get caught up in its travels. Practicing patience reminds us that we don't have to fill up our moments with activity and with more thinking in order for them to be rich. In fact, it helps us to remember that quite the opposite is true. To be patient is simply to be completely open to each moment, accepting it in its fullness, knowing that, like the butterfly, things can only unfold in their own time.

3. *Beginner's Mind*

The richness of present-moment experience is the richness of life itself. Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we "know" prevent us from seeing things as they really are. We tend to take the ordinary for granted and fail to grasp the extraordinariness of the ordinary. To see the richness of the present moment, we need to cultivate what has been called "beginner's mind," a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time.

This attitude will be particularly important when we engage in the formal meditation practices described in the following chapters. Whatever the particular practices we might be using, whether it is the body scan, the sitting meditation, or the yoga, we can resolve to bring our beginner's mind with us each time we practice, so that we can be free of our expectations based on our past experiences. An open, "beginner's" mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise, which often thinks it knows more than it does. No moment is the same as any other. Each is unique and contains unique possibilities. Beginner's mind reminds us of this simple truth.

You might try to cultivate your own beginner's mind in your daily life as an experiment. The next time you see somebody who is familiar to you, ask yourself if you are seeing this person with fresh eyes, as he or she really is, or if you are only seeing the reflection of your own thoughts about this person, and your feelings as well. Try it with your children, your spouse, friends, and co-workers, and even with your dog or cat if you have one. Try it with problems when they arise. Try it when you are outdoors in

nature. Are you able to see the sky, the stars, the trees, the water, and the rocks as they are right now, with a clear and uncluttered mind? Or are you actually seeing them only through the veil of your own thoughts, opinions, and emotions?

4. Trust

Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation training. It is far better to trust in your intuition and your own authority, even if you make some “mistakes” along the way, than always to look outside yourself for guidance. If at any time something doesn’t feel right to you, why not honor your feelings? Why should you discount them or write them off as invalid because some authority or some group of people thinks or says differently? This attitude of trusting yourself and your own basic wisdom and goodness is very important in all aspects of the meditation practice. It will be particularly useful in the yoga. When practicing yoga, you will have to honor your feelings when your body tells you to stop or to back off in a particular stretch. If you don’t listen, you might injure yourself.

Some people who become involved in meditation get so caught up in the reputation and authority of their teachers that they don’t honor their own feelings and intuition. They believe that their teacher must be a much wiser and more advanced person, so they think they should venerate the teacher as a model of perfect wisdom and do exactly what he or she says without question. This attitude is completely contrary to the spirit of meditation, which emphasizes being your own person and understanding what it means to be yourself. Anybody who is imitating somebody else, no matter who it is, is heading in the wrong direction.

It is impossible to become like somebody else. Your only hope is to become more fully yourself. That is the reason for practicing meditation in the first place. Teachers, books, CDs, and apps can only be guides and offer signposts and suggestions. It is important to be open and receptive to what you can learn from other sources, but ultimately you still have to live your own life, every moment of it. In practicing mindfulness, you are

practicing taking responsibility for being yourself and learning to listen to and trust your own being. The more you cultivate this trust in yourself, the easier you will find it will be to trust other people more and to see their basic goodness as well.

5. *Non-striving*

Almost everything we do we do for a purpose, to get something or somewhere. But in meditation this attitude can be a real obstacle. That is because meditation is different from all other human activities. Although it takes a lot of work and energy of a certain kind, ultimately meditation is a non-doing. It has no goal other than for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are. This sounds paradoxical and a little crazy. Yet this paradox and craziness may be pointing you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less and being more. This comes from intentionally cultivating the attitude of non-striving.

For example, if you sit down to meditate and you think, "I am going to get relaxed, or get enlightened, or control my pain, or become a better person," then you have introduced an idea into your mind of where you should be, and along with it comes the notion that you are not okay right now. "If only I were calmer, or more intelligent, or a harder worker, or more this or more that, if only my heart were healthier or my knee were better, then I would be okay. But right now, I am not okay."

This attitude undermines the cultivation of mindfulness, which involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening. If you are tense, then just pay attention to the tension. If you are in pain, then be with the pain as best you can. If you are criticizing yourself, then observe the activity of the judging mind. Just watch. Remember, we are simply allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is. The invitation is to simply embrace it and hold it in awareness. You do not have to *do* anything with it.

People are either referred to the Stress Reduction Clinic by their doctors or come on their own because something is the matter. The first time

they come, we ask them to identify three goals that they want to work toward in the program. But then, often to their surprise, we encourage them not to try to make any progress toward their goals over the eight weeks. In particular, if one of their goals is to lower their blood pressure or to reduce their pain or anxiety, they are instructed not to try to lower their blood pressure nor to try to make their pain or anxiety go away, but simply to stay in the present and carefully follow the meditation instructions.

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

6. Acceptance

Acceptance means seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a headache, accept that you have a headache. If you are overweight, why not accept it as a description of your body at this time? Sooner or later we have to come to terms with things as they are and accept them, whether it is a diagnosis of cancer or learning of someone's death. Often acceptance is reached only after we have gone through very emotion-filled periods of denial and then anger. These stages are a natural progression in the process of coming to terms with what is. They are all part of the healing process. In fact, my working definition of healing is *coming to terms with things as they are*.

However, putting aside for the moment the major calamities that usually take a great deal of time to heal from, in the course of our daily lives we often waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is already fact. When we do that, we are basically trying to force situations to be the way we would like them to be, which only makes for more tension. This actually prevents positive change from occurring. We may be so busy denying

and forcing and struggling that we have little energy left for healing and growing, and what little we have may be dissipated by our lack of awareness and intentionality.

If you are overweight and feel bad about your body, it's no good to wait until you are the weight you think you should be before you start liking your body and yourself. At a certain point, if you don't want to remain stuck in a frustrating vicious cycle, you might realize that it is all right to love yourself at the weight that you are now because this is the only time you can love yourself. Remember, now is the only time you have for anything. You have to accept yourself as you are before you can really change. Your choosing to do so becomes an act of self-compassion and intelligence.

When you start thinking this way, losing weight becomes less important. It also becomes a lot easier. By intentionally cultivating acceptance, you are creating the preconditions for healing.

Acceptance does not mean that you have to like everything or that you have to take a passive attitude toward everything and abandon your principles and values. It does not mean that you are satisfied with things as they are or that you are resigned to tolerating things as they "have to be." It does not mean that you should stop trying to break free of your self-destructive habits or to give up on your desire to change and grow, or that you should tolerate injustice, for instance, or avoid getting involved in changing the world around you because it is the way it is and therefore hopeless. It has nothing to do with passive resignation. Acceptance as we are speaking of it simply means that, sooner or later, you have come around to a willingness to see things as they are. This attitude sets the stage for acting appropriately in your life, no matter what is happening. You are much more likely to know what to do and have the inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening versus when your vision is clouded by your mind's self-serving judgments and desires or its fears and prejudices.

In the meditation practice, we cultivate acceptance by taking each moment as it comes and being with it fully, as it is. We try not to impose our ideas about what we "should" be feeling or thinking or seeing in our expe-

rience. Instead, we just remind ourselves to be receptive and open to whatever we are feeling, thinking, or seeing, and to accept it because it is here right now. If we keep our attention focused on the present, we can be sure of one thing, namely, that whatever we are attending to in this moment will change, giving us the opportunity to practice accepting whatever it is that will emerge in the next moment. Clearly there is wisdom in cultivating acceptance.

7. Letting Go

They say that in India there is a particularly clever way of catching monkeys. As the story goes, hunters will cut a hole in a coconut that is just big enough for a monkey to put its hand through. Then they will drill two smaller holes in the other end, pass a wire through, and secure the coconut to the base of a tree. Then they slip a banana inside the coconut through the hole and hide. The monkey comes down, puts his hand in, and takes hold of the banana. The hole is cleverly crafted so that the open hand can go in but the fist cannot get out. All the monkey has to do to be free is to let go of the banana. But it seems most monkeys don't let go.

Often our minds get us caught in very much the same way in spite of all our intelligence. For this reason, cultivating the attitude of letting go, or non-attachment, is fundamental to the practice of mindfulness. When we start paying attention to our inner experience, we rapidly discover that there are certain thoughts, feelings, and situations that the mind seems to want to hold on to. If they are pleasant, we try to prolong these thoughts or feelings or situations, stretch them out, and conjure them up again and again.

Similarly, there are many thoughts and feelings and experiences that we try to get rid of or prevent ourselves from having because they are unpleasant, painful, or frightening in one way or another and we want to protect ourselves from them.

In the meditation practice we intentionally put aside the tendency to elevate some aspects of our experience and reject others. Instead we just

let our experience be what it is, and practice observing it from moment to moment. Letting go is a way of letting things be, of accepting things as they are. When we observe our mind grasping and pushing away, we remind ourselves to let go of those impulses on purpose, just to see what will happen if we do. When we find ourselves judging our experience, we let go of those judging thoughts. We recognize them and we just don't pursue them any further. We let them be, and in doing so we let them go. Similarly, when thoughts of the past or of the future come up, we let go of them. We just watch—resting in awareness itself.

If we find it particularly difficult to let go of something because it has such a strong hold over our mind, we can direct our attention to what “holding on” feels like. Holding on, or “clinging,” is the opposite of letting go. We can become an expert on our own attachments, whatever they may be and whatever their consequences in our lives, as well as how it feels in those moments when we finally do let go and what the consequences of that are. Being willing to look at the ways we hold on ultimately shows us a lot about the experience of its opposite. So whether we are “successful” at letting go or not, mindfulness continues to teach us if we are willing to look.

Letting go is not such a foreign experience. We do it every night when we go to sleep. We lie down on a padded surface, with the lights out, in a quiet place, and we let go of our mind and body. If you can't let go, you can't go to sleep.

Most of us have experienced times when the mind just would not shut down when we got into bed. This is one of the first signs of elevated stress. At these times we may be unable to free ourselves from certain thoughts because our involvement in them is just too powerful. If we try to force ourselves to sleep, it just makes things worse. So if you can go to sleep, you are already an expert in letting go. Now you just need to practice applying this skill in waking situations as well.



In addition to these seven foundational attitudinal elements of mindfulness practice, there are other qualities of mind and heart that also contrib-

ute to broadening as well as deepening the embodiment of mindfulness in our lives. These include cultivating attitudes of *non-harming, generosity, gratitude, forbearance, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity*. In many ways, these are not separate from the seven we just explored, and arise naturally out of them and from paying attention to how we conduct ourselves in the face of challenging circumstances. The underlying power of these attitudes is easily discovered by experimenting with them, especially in easy, relatively stress-free moments. We can do this simply by keeping them in mind as best we can, and noticing how difficult it can be to be in touch with our gratitude, our impulses to be generous, our inclination to be kind, especially to ourselves . . . in other words, to be mindful of our *lack* of trust, or patience, or non-striving, or of generosity, kindness, empathic joy, or equanimity for that matter, in key moments. Mindfulness of being mistrustful, or impatient, or of clinging rather than letting go, of harming rather than non-harming, or of self-centeredness rather than generosity, is still mindfulness, and it is out of our intentional cultivation of the non-judging awareness that mindfulness is that a shift can slowly emerge, tilting us bit by bit toward these more spacious, even virtuous qualities that already reside within us by virtue of our being human. We can then notice how much they “affect the quality of the day,” in Thoreau’s famous words.*

COMMITMENT, SELF-DISCIPLINE, AND INTENTIONALITY

Purposefully cultivating the attitudes of non-judging, patience, trust, beginner’s mind, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go will greatly support and deepen your engagement with the meditation practices you will be encountering in the following chapters.

In addition to these attitudes, you will also need to bring a particular kind of energy or *motivation* to your practice. Mindfulness doesn’t just

* “To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.” Thoreau HD. *Walden*. New York: Modern Library; 1937:81.

come about by itself because you have decided that it is a good idea to be more aware of things. A strong commitment to working on yourself and enough self-discipline to persevere in the process are essential to developing a strong meditation practice and a high degree of mindfulness.

In the MBSR classroom, the basic ground rule is that everybody practices. Nobody goes along for the ride. We don't let in any observers or spouses unless they are willing to practice the meditation just as the patients are doing, that is, forty-five minutes a day, six days a week. Doctors, medical students, therapists, nurses, and other health professionals who go through the program as part of an internship training program* all have to agree to practice the meditation on the same schedule as the patients. Without this personal experience, it would not be possible for them really to understand what the patients are going through and how much effort it takes to work with the energies of one's own mind and body.

The spirit of engaged commitment we ask of our patients during their eight weeks in the MBSR program is similar to that required in athletic training. The athlete who is training for a particular event doesn't practice only when he or she feels like it—for instance, only when the weather is nice, or there are other people to keep him or her company, or there is enough time to fit in a workout. The athlete trains regularly, every day, rain or shine, whether she feels good or not, whether the goal seems worth it or not on any particular day.

We encourage our patients to develop the same attitude. As already mentioned, we tell them from the very start, "You don't have to like it; you just have to do it. When the eight weeks are over, then you can tell us whether it was of any use or not. For now, just keep practicing."

Their own suffering and the possibility of being able to do something themselves to improve their health are usually motivation enough for the patients signing up for MBSR to invest this degree of personal commitment, at least for the eight weeks we require it of them. For most, it is a new experience to be in intensive mind-body training, to say nothing of working systematically within the domain of being. The discipline requires

* Now called the Practicum.

that people rearrange their lives to a certain extent around the training program. It takes a major and immediate lifestyle change just to make the time to engage in the formal meditation practices for forty-five minutes each day, never mind bringing mindfulness more and more into everyday life.

This time does not appear magically in anyone's life. You have to rearrange your schedule and your priorities and plan how you will free it up for practice. This is one of the ways in which enrolling in the stress reduction program can increase the stress in a person's life in the short run.

Those of us who teach in the clinic see meditation practice as an integral part of our own lives and of our own growth as people. So we are not asking our patients to do something that we don't do on a regular basis ourselves. We know what we are asking of them because we do it too. We know the effort that it takes to make space in one's life for meditation practice, and we know the value of living in this way. No one is ever considered for a staff position in the clinic unless he or she has had years of meditation training and has a strong daily meditation practice. The people referred to the clinic sense that what they are being asked to do is not something "remedial" but rather "advanced training" in mobilizing their deep inner resources for coping and for healing. You might think of it as advanced training in the art of living. Our own commitment to the practice as MBSR instructors conveys wordlessly our conviction that the journey we are inviting our patients to undertake is a true life adventure, one that we can engage in and pursue together over the eight weeks of the MBSR program. This feeling of involvement in a common pursuit makes it a lot easier for everyone to keep up the discipline of the daily practice. Ultimately, however, we are asking even more of our patients and of ourselves than just a time for formal meditation practice on a daily basis. For it is only by making the practice a "way of being" that its power can be put to practical use. The real mindfulness practice is how we live our lives from moment to moment, whatever we are doing, whatever our circumstances. Even the eight weeks of MBSR is just the beginning. We see the MBSR program as a launching platform for the rest of one's life. The ongoing cultivation and embodiment of mindfulness is that important.

To tap this power in your own life, we recommend that you set aside a particular block of time—every day, or at least six days a week, for at least eight consecutive weeks—to practice. Just making this amount of time every day for yourself is already a profound and very positive lifestyle change. Our lives are so complex and our minds so busy and agitated most of the time that it is necessary, especially at the beginning, to protect and support your meditation practice by making a special time for it and, if possible, by making a special place in your home where you will feel particularly comfortable and truly “at home” while practicing.

This time needs to be protected from interruptions and from other commitments so that you can just be yourself, without having to do or respond to anything. Although it is not always possible to set things up in this way, it is hugely helpful if you can manage to do it. One measure of your commitment is whether you can bring yourself to shut off your various electronic devices for the time you will be practicing.* It is a great letting go in and of itself to be home only for yourself at those times. Great peace can follow from this alone.

Once you make the commitment to yourself to practice in this way, the self-discipline comes in carrying it out. Committing yourself to goals that are in your own self-interest is easy. But keeping to the path you have chosen when you run into obstacles and may not see “results” right away is the real measure of your commitment. This is where conscious intentionality comes in, the intention to practice whether you feel like it or not on a particular day, whether it is convenient or not, with the determination of an athlete.

Regular formal meditation practice is not as hard as you might think

* In the process, you can bring mindfulness to just how difficult this may be, and how much of the time your mind wants to check your email or your text messages or post a tweet. You might become aware of how addicted we can be to our devices, and to that 24/7 connectivity that has us always available and immediately responsive to everybody else, clutching our phones as if they were our oxygen line to life itself, and in the process, perhaps losing touch more and more with ourselves and with our moments—so that, ironically, some of the most important connections of all, namely, with our own deepest analog self, with our body, and with our present-moment experience, can be seriously eclipsed.

once you make up your mind to do it and pick an appropriate time. Most people are inwardly disciplined already to a certain extent. Getting dinner on the table every night requires discipline. Getting up in the morning and going to work requires discipline. And taking time for yourself certainly does too. You are not going to be paid for it, and chances are you will not be enrolled in an MBSR program in which you know that everybody else is doing it and so feel some social pressure to keep up your end of things. You will have to do it for better reasons than those. Perhaps the ability to function more effectively under pressure, or to be healthier and feel better, or to be more relaxed, self-confident, and happy will suffice. Ultimately you have to decide for yourself why you are making such a commitment.

Some people have resistance to the whole idea of taking time for themselves. In the United States at least, the Puritan ethic has left a legacy of guilt when we do something for ourselves. Some people discover that they have a little voice inside that tells them that it is selfish or that they are undeserving of this kind of time and energy. Usually they recognize it as a message they were given very early on in their lives: "Live for others, not for yourself." "Help others; don't dwell on yourself."

If you do feel undeserving of taking time for yourself, why not look at that as part of your mindfulness practice? Where do such feelings come from? What are the thoughts behind them? Can you observe them with acceptance? Are they accurate?

Certainly the degree to which you can really be of help to others, if that is what you believe is most important, depends directly on how balanced you are yourself. Taking time to "tune" your own instrument and restore your energy reserves can hardly be considered selfish. *Intelligent* would be a more apt description.

Happily, once people start practicing mindfulness, most quickly get over the idea that it is "selfish" or "narcissistic" to take time for themselves. They come to see the difference that making some time to just be has on the quality of their lives and their self-esteem, as well as on their relationships.

We suggest that everyone find their own best time to practice. Mine is early in the morning. I like to get up an hour or so before I would other-

wise and meditate and do yoga. I like the quiet of this time. It feels very good to be up and have nothing to do, by agreement with myself, except to dwell in the present, being with things as they are, my mind open and aware—and staying away from the Internet and all electronic devices, no matter how strong their pull. I know the phone won't ring at that hour. I know the rest of my family is asleep, so my meditation practice is not taking time away from them. When our children were young, for years the littlest one in the family always seemed to sense when there was awake energy in the house, no matter what time it was, and so there were periods when I had to push my meditation time back as far as 4:00 a.m. to be sure to get some uninterrupted time. As they got older, at times they would meditate or do yoga with me. I never pushed it. It was just something Daddy did, so it was natural for them to know about it and to do it with me from time to time.

Practicing meditation and yoga in the early morning invariably has a positive influence on the rest of the day for me. When I start off the day dwelling in stillness, resting in awareness, inhabiting and thereby nourishing the domain of being, and cultivating some degree of calmness and concentration, I seem to be more mindful and relaxed the rest of the day as well, and better able to recognize stress and handle it more effectively. When I tune in to my body and work it gently to stretch my joints and feel my muscles, my body feels more alive and vibrant than on the days I don't do it. I also know with much greater sensitivity what condition my body is in that day and what I might want to watch out for, such as my lower back or my neck if they are particularly stiff or painful that morning.

Some of our patients like to practice early in the morning, but a lot don't or can't. We leave it to each individual to experiment with times to practice and to choose the best one for his or her schedule. Practicing late at night is not recommended in the beginning, however, because it is very hard to keep up the alert attention required when you are tired.

In the first weeks of the stress reduction program, many people have trouble staying awake when they do the body scan (see Chapter 5), even when they do it in the daytime, because they get so relaxed. If I feel groggy when I wake up in the morning, I might splash cold water on my face until

I know I am really awake. I don't want to meditate in a daze. I want to be alert. This may seem somewhat extreme, but really it is just affirming the value of being awake before engaging in a period of formal practice. It helps to remember that mindfulness is about being fully awake. It is not cultivated by relaxing to the point where unawareness and sleep take over. So we advocate doing anything necessary to wake up, even taking a cold shower if that is what it takes.

Your meditation practice will only be as powerful as your motivation to dispel the fog of your own lack of awareness. When you are in this fog, it is hard to remember the importance of practicing mindfulness, and it is hard to locate your attitudinal bearings. Confusion, fatigue, depression, and anxiety are powerful mental states that can undermine your best intentions to practice regularly. You can easily get caught up and then stuck in them and not even know it.

That is when your commitment to practice is of greatest value. It keeps you engaged in the process. The momentum of regular practice helps to maintain a certain mental stability and resilience even as you feel under tremendous pressure to get things done, or find yourself going through states of turmoil, confusion, lack of clarity, and procrastination. These are actually some of the most fruitful times to practice—not to get rid of your confusion or your feelings but just to be conscious and accepting of them.



Most people who come to the Stress Reduction Clinic, no matter what their medical problem is, tell us that they are really coming to attain peace of mind. This is an understandable goal, given their mental and physical pain. But to achieve peace of mind, people have to kindle a vision of what they really want for themselves and keep that vision alive in the face of inner and outer hardships, obstacles, and setbacks.

I used to think that meditation practice was so powerful in itself and so healing that as long as you devoted yourself to it on a regular basis, you would eventually see growth and change. But time has taught me that