

MINDFULNESS IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE



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Mindfulness in your everyday life
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Foreword

Back in 2001, I landed in the beautiful City of Vancouver, on the shore of West Coast Canada. At that time, I was thrilled to arrive in such a great and peaceful city, at the young age of 22. Aside from being a regular person, whose passions were software programming and creating electronic music, my spiritual interests related mostly to the mystical and paranormal side of things. I had no idea what a spiritual life means, but I was mostly driven by my own curiosity, looking for that which is not seen, or that which is extraordinary, which is above the regular things in life.

Soon after I arrived, I made a friend that was a dedicated Buddhist practitioner, going to retreats, and also going regularly to a Shambhala Buddhist meditation center, where people gathered to do group meditations or attend courses, talks, or programs. It is there where I was introduced for the first time to meditation, a practice that would, in the long run, “change my life and the way I see things”, as my friend told me.

Everything there was done the proper way. For any beginner, there were meditation instructions that you could take as many times as you would need, presented by experienced meditation instructors. I was there almost every Wednesday, which was their “Open House day”, where anyone could go and meditate, have a 15-minute break for tea, cookies, and chats with the Sangha members and then, if they were up to, listen for another one-hour talk that was being given by a reputable member of the community. Every Wednesday I tried meditating following the words and directions of my meditation instructor, but a strange thing happened: my mind was getting more and

more crowded with tens and hundreds of thoughts that I usually didn't have before. I thought to myself: "this is getting worse; meditation was supposed to get me to this beautiful and serene place inside my mind", as I imagined, "and now I'm getting all this chatter and agitation, I cannot seem to find my place on this meditation cushion, and I even cannot start to understand where all these thoughts are coming from, in the first place".

For a while, I began to skip my visits to the meditation center, and I would just visit occasionally, so I can meet a few friends that I have made there. After two years on the West Coast, it came the time for me to return home. Once I was back home, I focused on my University courses and continued making music, which is now still my main occupation. My interest in Buddhism and Christianity rose year after year, as I was reading and immersing myself in studying spiritual books of all kinds, looking for answers to life-related questions through the pursuit of a spiritual life.

Fast forward 16 years later, it was the year of 2018. All of this time I was trying to meditate on a regular basis, but I could not manage to focus or concentrate enough to find that empty space in my mind, that everybody was talking about, no matter how much I would sit and meditate. The gaps of no-thought were still an unfamiliar thing to me, and I was facing all of the time the chattering stream of random thoughts in my head, not being able to have a clear and relaxed mind. But that didn't stop me from trying, as I somehow knew that by even trying, this is an important part of the journey.

At some point during that year, I came across a short free video of Eckhart Tolle that came in my email from his newsletter. It simply said at some point: "Don't look for your spiritual awakening in the future, when you will be so and so, or have this, or be that. Spiritual awakening can only happen Now, in the present moment." This phrase resonated somehow deep within me, and I kept his YouTube free video in my Internet browser, and as I went to check my emails every day, I would also play it. The tone of his voice was calm, soothing, and full of inspiration. I liked the

way he spoke so much, that I even played it at random times during the day. Every time I had some time off during those days, his words were coming again and again in my mind: “don’t look for spiritual awakening at a later date in the future. Spiritual awakening can only happen Now.”

And then, like a miracle, after almost one week of listening constantly to his words, after trying to be in the here and now as much as possible, one evening, after 18 years from my first attempt, I was trying to relax and meditate, and then it happened. A serene state of mind emerged all of a sudden, a clear space where no thought would occur and a calm warmth enveloped my mind for merely 2 minutes. I had finally discovered what the mind of no-thought meant, that everybody was talking about and managed to rest in the clear and unobstructed space of my mind, effortlessly.

By bringing myself back to Now, in as many instances of the day that I could, I was completely transformed in just one week. The two minutes where I experienced this great serene peace inside my mind healed my mental and emotional being so much, that I felt like every bit of suffering that I experienced during my last 10 years was gone. From that point on, the sensation that I experienced, in the beginning, faded gradually, but my progress with meditation increased every day, and I could slip into the stillness of being while meditating, right after the first few seconds of sitting: being able to be more mindful during the day had really transformed my life, and opened the way to understanding meditation. In this book, which was inspired by this beautiful experience that I had, I am going to talk and teach about my personal experience related to meditation and mindfulness.

Mindfulness can be seen as the clear and focused aspect of the mind while it is immersed in the present moment, and it is, indeed, a byproduct of meditation. I will bring you, the reader, from not knowing anything about mindfulness to the complete knowledge about what mindfulness is, how to practice it best in different

circumstances, and how to reach it even if you confront yourself with difficult situations.

This book was born out of the desire to share my knowledge, insights, and experience with others. I find that mindfulness, although it is a very coined term in the 2020s, has yet to be understood by the majority of people, and most of all, practiced. My main spiritual influences that are present in this book come from Orthodox Christianity, which is my native faith, from Buddhism, and from a lot of spiritual teachers of today, among which Eckhart Tolle, which coins mindfulness with his own term, “presence”, and creates his unique system of understanding on how to be Here and Now, in the present moment.

I hope that you will become a better you after you have read this book and I deeply feel that by understanding and practicing “how to be mindful”, this will create a whole new ground for yourself, which will, in turn, show you the world as it is, in its whole aspect of peacefulness and beauty, by being rooted in this very precious moment of Now, that we all have, and that we all should cherish.

Namaste

Chapter 1

What is mindfulness

In simple words, mindfulness means bringing your awareness, your conscious attention, into the present moment. It can also be described as the practice of paying attention in the present moment and doing it intentionally and with non-judgment. Mindfulness is a very simple concept to grasp but the difficulty comes when we apply it in practice, in our real life. It is so, because our habits, mental filters, and habitual thoughts are so deeply enrooted in our minds, that we can find it quite hard to overcome them, in the beginning.

Mindfulness is the basic foundation for living a conscious life. It is also a practice that reminds us all the time to be present, to be here and now, rooted in the mighty Earth and firm with our feet on the ground. This kind of attitude can give us the strength, the courage, and the power to overcome all the situations and problems that might appear like ripples on the surface of our lives, and since mindfulness takes the busyness of our minds away, we will start to experience lighter and clearer states of mind, the more we practice it, and even the most daunting tasks will seem doable and interesting.

In being mindful, one has a relaxed but sharply aware attitude, with the intention of dwelling in the present moment and regarding anything else as what is “happening” on the surface of the present moment. To assure a continuous mindful attitude throughout your day, it is as easy as bringing your point of attention back again to the present moment, whenever you feel your mind has

wandered off. In practicing this way, all the things that we are doing are just a means to keep our momentary mindfulness, to sustain our practice. We just do them so we can enjoy being in the present moment, not the other way around. We shift our focused attention from the object that we are working on, to ourselves and to our surroundings, and in doing so, we manage to keep our momentary awareness all throughout the day.

The experience of being mindful starts when you begin to gently observe your self, your outer surroundings, and when you begin to immerse yourself in the present moment. A clear and sharp mind is starting to manifest, and that is coming from the diminishing of the constant stream of thoughts that happens in the back of our minds. This background daily chatter that we all have going on in our minds, be it that we are aware of it or not, makes us usually pay attention only to what happens in our minds and on the surface of the present moment, making us being identified with our thoughts and living mostly in the captivity of our own minds. Mindfulness, or the exertion of being aware in the present moment, will help us gradually clear our minds of this kind of non-necessary stream of thoughts, by observing and gently letting go of anything that surfaces our minds. Since we consider the intention of being in the Here and Now as a primary necessity and we offer no resistance to our surroundings, we start to slowly perceive in a clear light, everything that the here and now has to offer.

After we start practicing being mindful, we notice that there's a natural feeling about it. We start to notice gradually the spaces between our thoughts, which reveal to us the natural state of our minds, which is called the mind of no-thought. In our empty and clear mind, the only thing that exists is our awareness of the present moment. This natural and uplifted state of mind that appears when we're being aware, is the encouragement for our practice, which points us towards the need to stay more in our mindful state, throughout our day, resting more in the awareness of the

present moment, no matter what situation is currently occurring in our lives.

We have to differentiate and explain an important thing from the beginning. Being in the present moment does not mean being aware of what's happening in the present moment. It just means being present, being here and Now. Everything that "happens" in the present moment, is only manifesting on the surface of the present moment. The present moment can be envisioned like a really deep, unwavering, and clear lake, on whose surface ripples appear, and these ripples are our momentary thoughts and the events that happen from time to time. The present moment can also be envisioned as the stillness and the silence that is always here and now, out of which everything can appear or manifest. This stillness of Now has a strong connection with the very deepness of our being, where we can also find the silence and stillness of our soul, especially while we are immersed in contemplating, or when we are meditating. Seeing and understanding this difference, between the Now and what is "happening" Now, will make us understand correctly what mindfulness means, and will ensure that we practice the right way, every day.

One important consequence of being in the present moment is the cessation and dissolving of every past event or future outcome, from our momentary attention. Any possible story about our future or any identification with an event from the past is gone because by being now, we observe only what the present moment is offering to us. The future outcomes might appear in the future, and the past events are written in our past history, but when we are mindful, all our attention is focused on the here and now, when we only witness our deep and peaceful state of existence. As we dwell more into the present moment, we start to notice slowly more and more details around us, and that will root us more into the beautiful experience of being now. A certain type of silence enters our being and our minds, and that is what it feels to be mindful, to be present, or to exist in the present moment.

The importance of being mindful is undeniable because usually, our minds are always busy with thinking by default. The average thoughts a human being thinks during a day is about 60 to 70,000. We are used to thinking on a regular basis and we think about anything we encounter in our lives, even though sometimes it is not necessary to do so. And most of the time we tend to exaggerate by thinking too much. Overthinking has become an impulsive and also a compulsive way of being for some people, most of which are not being able to stop their stream of thoughts, to the point where this situation can even become unbearable. So thinking can become a problem; it can steal us the ability to be able to stay focused, it can deprive us of having a clear and peaceful mind, in the stillness and quietness of the present moment, and this can lead us to not being able to relax, accomplish even the easiest tasks, or even sleep, for some of us. The need to observe our own thoughts, to befriend them, to befriend ourselves, to understand ourselves at a deeper level, to understand how our mind works and thinks, has become now a critical and most important thing, for many of us.

That's where mindfulness comes in. Observing our own thoughts in silent meditation or in the daily active practice of mindfulness, where we are only aware of the Here and Now, gives our mind the reference point of the still, clear, and unwavering present moment. In meditation, we are purely engaged in the mere observation of our own minds, by being aware of our breath, and in being mindful, we are also purely engaged in the experience of our momentary truth, that is always to be found in the present moment. By practicing this for a longer period, our current discursive thought patterns will dissipate more, and our mind will clear itself out of anything that prevents us to witness the world in its simplicity, in its beauty, deepness, and peacefulness, as it is.

In this book, I will mostly be referring to the activity of being aware of the present moment as mindfulness, but sometimes I will also call it presence. Mindfulness is a term that comes from Buddhism and it refers to the aware or

conscious mind of the day that captures the same pristine and clear quality of the mind that is to be found in meditation, while presence is a term coined by the spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle, which basically points out to the same thing. Both presence and mindfulness mean placing our momentary awareness, in a relaxed but alert fashion, on the present moment, where we experience a direct connection with our immediate surroundings, and where our senses and our perception are immediately connected to the fresh reality of the Now. Being aware of the present moment and our surroundings, makes us become more conscious of ourselves and of everything that is around us, helps us in clearing up our minds of unnecessary thought, and causes us to experience cleaner levels of thinking and perceiving. Being mindful feels as if we have stepped into a fresh, new world, where there is tremendous clarity, and where a particular joy of being and doing appears, in every moment. By dwelling in the simplicity of the present moment and by rejoicing in the happiness that being aware gives us, we start to experience the aliveness of this world, which will, in turn, bring about great changes in our lives.

We will explore the art of being mindful in this book, chapter by chapter, seeing all the aspects, characteristics, and ways of practice that could lead us to the mastering of this practice, which can immensely improve the quality of our lives, clear our own perception about the world, and also ensure that we are always making progress on our spiritual path.

Chapter 2

A view on meditation

In the first chapter, we defined and briefly explained what mindfulness is, stressing the importance of this practice and its capacity of quieting our minds. In this chapter, we will look at meditation, which is the most basic and straightforward spiritual tool that can help us develop and sustain our mindfulness. So what is meditation?

Meditation is an ancient technique that uses the focusing of our awareness on either our breath (which is called Shamatha meditation, or peaceful-abiding) or on our body sensations (which is called Vipashyana meditation, or insight meditation), as a way to calm our minds and access our conscious state of being. There is a fine difference between both, and they yield quite different results: while Shamatha meditation aims at cleaning the mind and helping us find that peaceful state of being, where only our awareness is present, Vipashyana meditation aims at gaining insights about the Truth of this world, at large, that will, in turn, open our minds and our eyes, towards a simple and direct experience of our lives. We can see that in both cases, we are giving our mind a point of focus that it can start following, so we can be anchored in the present moment, being aware of what is going on inside and around us. In this book, we are going to relate mostly to Shamatha meditation, or classical breathing meditation, as it is mostly interlinked to the concept of mindfulness and it is the best type of meditation for any beginner. In Shamatha meditation, by giving our mind a point of focus, or by directing our attention towards our breath, our mind's usual

internal chatter is disrupted, thus giving us a chance at taming or at befriending our wild minds, which is what we are looking for.

Breathing meditation is the classic form of meditation, where we are paying attention to one of our natural processes, which is our breathing. By doing so, we relax in the present moment, following gently our breath, becoming the gentle observers of our surroundings and of ourselves, and of our minds. By not grasping on any thought that comes up and by just observing them and gently letting them dissipate, in their own time, we are practicing the sacred art of meditation.

Meditation is not a thing that you do to feel good. Meditation is not a way to stop thinking. Meditation is not a way to go into blissful states of mind, although, at a rather advanced level of practice all these are real. In the beginning, meditation is just a spiritual tool that we can use to closely watch and observe what is really going on inside our minds, inside ourselves, be it that they are current thoughts, emotions, visual images, or memories from the past, resurfacing. It is the first step that we need to take if we want to know ourselves better and to befriend our real selves, and if we want to really see what is actually going on inside our minds when we are awake. The object we can focus on in meditation can be your breath, it can be an image, a statue of a deity, a mandala, a lighted incense stick, or it can be anything that you want to focus on.

When focusing your attention on one thing, the mind is focused on that particular thing as well, and the stream of continuous random thinking about various other things that you need to do today is interrupted. When we are bringing the mind to the point of focus of our breathing, we begin to be aware of our breathing. By being aware of our breathing, our minds start to gradually loosen their grip on thinking and begin to just follow the simple process of our breathing. This type of meditation brings gradually a clearer mind and also improves our ability to focus better, that we can use later on, in our day, to focus better on our tasks. A focused and aware mind is what we are always looking for in life, as

by only being so, we can be sure that we can make responsible and conscious decisions, and everything that we do becomes a natural expression of our own deepest desires, that we need to manifest, in our lives.

Meditation in itself is not a particular answer to a certain problem, or even to all the problems that we might have, but instead, it provides a vehicle through which we can find for ourselves the solutions to all our particular circumstances, by seeing things in a conscious manner. By resting in a meditative state, which can be translated by simply being aware of our breath and our surroundings, including ourselves, we can gradually clean our minds of our prejudices and of our illusory mental filters, so we can wake up to the true and unwavering reality that is to be found around us, where everything is seen with simplicity, for what it is. So meditation is not a means to an end, but instead, meditation can be seen as the instruction on how to simply be a conscious observer of our lives, where we can clearly see what is really going on and be able to make the proper decisions.

In practicing meditation, in simply sitting on the meditation cushion and just being aware for a while, a certain humbleness and softness start to develop inside us. We start to witness and understand the world directly, not through our mind's concepts and labels anymore, and that makes us let go of all our distorted views that we have built over time, regarding everything that we know in our world. Meditation is also the most-used way to quieting the inner-chatter of our minds. Focusing on our natural process of breathing for enough time, with just the simple intention of watching our breath, will make our minds follow this focal point and, as a result, the usual thoughts that were going on inside our minds will subside, as there is no real mental discourse that we can develop regarding our simple act of watching our breath. Of course, at some point, our wild minds that were so used to think a thousand things, will lose this focus and start wondering again. There is the point where we can begin to see what thoughts were going on, unconsciously, in our minds, while we were immersed in our