

Mindfulness: Keep company with yourself

By: Patricia Howard

Besides being one of the buzz words out there today, Mindfulness is a way to learn to be with what is. So often we are missing out on what is because we are lost in regrets about the past or in fear about the future and we miss out on what is happening now. We spend a lot of energy resisting what is here either by spacing out, fighting with it or trying to be in control of life.

The practice of Mindfulness teaches us a new way, the way of staying. My students often tell me Mindfulness creeps up on them. We become so identified with our reactions that we forget how precious we are, we are often too busy to receive life's simple pleasures. Nor are we in the practice of treating ourselves with kindness. As we start to embody these practices we start to bring our presence with us - no longer needing to run away from ourselves, we discover a sense of synchronicity and connectedness in life. We also know that we can have our reactions, yet we do not need to act them out. We can wait, and then consciously choose a new way. This is very exciting. Here's how two students replied when I asked them to share with you how taking the MBSR changed their lives.

JS: My car experience:

My car broke down around midnight on the highway. My reaction a few months ago, when the same thing happened, was to go into "panic mode;" this time I was calm and collected! What was even more surprising to me, a person who lived in "panic mode" most of the time, (whether there was a reason for it or not), was that I got out of the car while waiting for AAA and actually enjoyed myself! I looked at the beauty around me, the moon in a clear cold sky and the branches of the mini forest that was at the side of the highway and a feeling of peace and love for the beauty in the world took me over! This was the first time in years that I felt such a liberating joy of existence in the here-and-now!

It was such a contrast to the constant worry and anxiety that has been my lot for so long!

JG: MBSR changed the way I look at my life and my world.

I no longer try to fight nearly every emotion that comes into my head. I notice it, ponder it, greet and accept it and then I can move on. It is so freeing!!! I realize that if I have an anxious thought, it does not make me an anxious person. If I have a selfish thought, it does not make me a selfish or self-centered person, etc. At 47, I looked at life in a certain way. At 47 and two months, I look at life from a much different perspective - one full of hope and a positive outlook for the future. Because I now understand why I looked at the world in a certain way, I can now spin that to my advantage and say.. "I don't have to look at the world this way anymore!!." I am able to "drink in" the moment, as opposed to always being prepared for what's coming next - in the next minute, hour, day, week, etc. I am continuously working on no longer living "in close proximity to my body."

James Joyce wrote of one of his characters that "he lived in close proximity to his body." We joked about this in class. We often tend to do that, hang around and not really show up. It can be a new experience to embody our sense of self and start participating with life from this place.

Mindfulness is a practice, a time we need to give to ourselves everyday. Many people often have a huge resistance to self care. We are so ready to give to others and not tend to ourselves. The practice of Mindfulness can turn these beliefs on their head, as the more time I practice, the more I am present and everyone around me benefits from this.

This is quite a simple practice - yet it is not always so easy. You will soon discover that your back

muscles may not be so strong and your mind wanders incessantly. Indeed many beginners do not realize that this witnessing of our monkey mind is indeed meditating. Remember Mindfulness is not the practice of being at peace - it is the practice of being with what is and bring our awareness to our breath.

So the practice may be both simple and challenging at times — its side effects are highly recommended. Physically you will notice lower blood pressure, less tension in your body, deeper sleep. It is a way we can tap into our body's natural healing capacity so it supports healing of heart disease, diabetes, cancer. Emotionally you will be able to understand your reactions better and keep company with them. Mentally you will have the ability to play with your perceptions and understand our initial perception is really coming through our own filter. This knowledge will broaden your view of the challenges you face in life and allow you to meet these challenges knowing you have the capacity to come up with creative solutions. Spiritually, Mindfulness is another word for Grace. As you invite more grace into your life you become in touch with your connection to the divine. The practice deepens this connection and strengthens your sense of purpose in the world. Life time patterns can fall away, leaving you with the deliciousness of your own presence - what a treat for everyone.

Patricia Howard graduated from the practicum teacher training at the Center for Mindfulness at UMass Medical. She is also a graduate of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and the Advanced Course in Education and Supervision. *All That Matters*, Wakefield, RI, regularly hosts classes on MBSR. Visit www.allthamatters.com for details.