

Being Present - The Greatest Gift

December 1, 2022

Last month the subject of the blog was on traditions and the contributions they make to our well-being. One important aspect noted as being necessary to gain the most benefits from celebrating a tradition was that of conscious intent. In a similar vein to conscious intent, this month's blog is on being present in the moment. Many of us have heard this phrase often, but what exactly does that mean? Why is it important? And how do we manage that in a culture and society that does not promote it?

Being present in the moment means exactly that. Your awareness and conscious focus is on the here and now. In other words, you are mindful of what is happening at this very moment. That sounds like it should be easy to do. However, we as humans have more distractions than ever that can make mindfulness a challenging task.

First and foremost, there is an element of rushing or lack of time in our society. Because we have family and work obligations, most of us have very busy lives. While thinking ahead and planning are very important, it is also important not to stay in that mode. The trick is to find the balance of setting your daily goals and then to be present in the execution of them. There is also the misconception that multi-tasking saves time, however, the truth is that multi-tasking can actually make focusing more difficult.

So if we are always feeling pressed for time and have so much to accomplish, what about being present in the moment is of aid to us? Study after study show a multitude of benefits for people practicing mindfulness. Of great significance is that anxiety and stress can be reduced and managed. So can worry, overthinking, and racing thoughts. One's focus improves. Being present allows one to be better able to deal with one's emotions including anger and fear. It also aids in dealing with pain more effectively. And our relationships with others improve simply by giving them our undivided attention. Lastly, we learn how to savor enjoyable experiences.

Before we discuss how to implement being present in the moment in our daily lives, we also need to briefly touch on finding the balance on thinking about the past. Looking back at our past can be a critical tool in learning

from our mistakes. The point is not to dwell there. It is more appropriate to focus on how to make the here and now a more meaningful experience.

So how does one practice being present in the moment and keep our minds from wandering? There are lots of options to choose from and one can start very simply.

-One easy practice is to start your day spending as little as ten minutes doing a full body scan. Check in with how your body is feeling. You can also go deeper and scan your emotions to see if anything is bothering you. Bringing to resolution any issues you can will help free up your mind from nagging thoughts.

-Use your breath. You can just take a few minutes a few times a day to stop and focus on how you are breathing (or not) and take some slow, deep breaths. Or you can learn to do breathwork (a topic discussed in the June 2021 blog).

-You can take moments out in your day to practice taking stock of your surroundings. Bring awareness to what is around you. You can even take a mindfulness walk.

-Practice eating your meals without distractions. Notice the smells and tastes of the food. You may find yourself enjoying your meal more and that you digest your food better.

-Practice gratitude and appreciation. Take some time to write down three things you are grateful for every day.

-Journaling is very helpful. Particularly free-writing which means you write what-ever pops into your head. Writing can be a great way to release some of those thoughts making your mind wander.

-Meditation. Whether ten minutes or an hour, meditation works on training the mind to be present.

-Yoga, Tai Chi and Qi Jong are also valuable tools for being mindful.

-Lastly, go out in nature and get lost in the moment of experiencing her beauty.

Attentiveness takes practice. One can not expect to go out and run a marathon without training. The same is true of mindfulness. Start small. Take breaks from your screens and social media . Open your eyes to what and who is right in front of you. This enormously beneficial form of self-care is not only doable, but worth it!

"It takes courage to say yes to rest and play, in a culture where exhaustion is seen as a status symbol." - Brene Brown

"If it is out of your hands, it deserves freedom from your mind too." - Ivan Nuru

"Be where you are, not where you think you should be." - Unknown

"Quiet the mind and the soul will speak." - Buddha

"A mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work if it isn't open." - Frank Zappa