

Step into YOURSELF -Step into YOUR LIFE
A Journey into Being and Living Authentically

Be You

Listen to your Heart

Being True to Yourself and Living an Authentic Lifestyle

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Becoming You and Living an Authentic Lifestyle

Present Moment/Mindfulness

The present moment is powerful. You must be present with yourself and present with your life. It is the only way to cultivate a true deep meaningful relationship with yourself. Meditation is an important factor in well-being but I believe that mindfulness and mindful living is critical to being present to yourself and living an authentic life.

It was in discovering mindfulness through Jon Kabat-Zinn that began the shift and change within myself. I had spent years of my life with not feeling or being present in my day to day life. Disassociation, separated my feelings from my being. I didn't feel anything except emptiness. I felt separated from each action I was doing and activity each experience that was going on around me. It never bothered me until I had my children. It was then that I began to realize that I couldn't feel or experience anything emotionally. I had no idea at the time why or how to fix it.

I stumbled upon Jon Kabat-Zinn's work and was drawn to it. He lived and ran programs at a hospital an hour away where I lived. Reading his work and going to his talks and speaking with him was a door opening into a space where I could begin to be present in my life. It took much time to begin to actually cultivate feeling s again but just feeling present in my life was wonderful at the time. I could be in the activities with my children, participate with them, even though I still felt emotional distance I was present at least. To me that was a miracle. Then I became more present with myself. I focused on being mindful with my day to day chores. I became mindful about my journaling, my self-care, doing things I use to like, and playing with the girls. It was a turnaround which at the time I thought was everything. I thought I had found the cure and solution. I thought it was all I needed not knowing that it was just the beginning.

Cultivating mindfulness to the point where you are living most of your day, every day, mindful and present is not easy. It will be the most difficult step in the process but it is critical that you become present and mindful in your life.

Mindfulness is a way of being. It must be integrated into your everyday life on every level. Living mindfully is key to becoming your true self and living your best life. I must admit that I spent years cultivating mindfulness. Still every day I have times when I fall out of mindfulness. I get caught up in my mind and thinking and worrying. I am at a place now where I am aware when I fall out of mindfulness and

know how to bring myself back. I recommend that you spend as much time as you need to integrate mindfulness into your daily life. Mindfulness is a way of being in the world.

Mindfulness is being in the present moment, being aware of what you are doing, thinking and feeling, to get the most out of each and every experience. The endless chatter of what you need to be doing, what you did wrong or should have done eats up extensive energy throughout the day. Many of us spend endless hours in the past or the future and never in the present moment. We wonder where the time went and what we spent it doing.

Mindfulness helps us be more aware. In the book, *Wherever You Go There You Are* by Kabat-Zinn (1994). He describes mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally" (Kabat-Zinn. 1994. p.4). "Awareness is not the same as thought" (Kabat-Zinn 1994. p. 93), Awareness is paying attention to what you think and do.

(If you want to go into more detail and understanding about mindfulness I suggest you read Jon Kabat-Zinn's, Wherever You Go There You Are and Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now.)

The two most important components of mindfulness are present moment and attention. In developing mindfulness you direct attention to the experience in the present moment.

You focus your attention to what is happening now with no judgement or labels. You just become aware of what is. Observe and recognize what is going on, accepting and allowing it to just be. Attention can be focused inwardly towards feelings, body sensations, thoughts and emotions or outwardly towards a conversation with a friend, the trees, and cars going down the street, a book or anything else in the world around you.

Focusing your attention to the present moment brings awareness of your body, your impulses and reactions, your thoughts, your emotions, routine activities and social interactions. It gives life to your senses and enriches your experiences.

The present moment is the access point into stillness - into your deepest self - Being- at your fullest potential. It is the access point of connection to yourself and to your life. Stillness accesses the answers deep within you - Action moves you forward into life. It guides you to follow your true self-expression of your soul as you discover it in stillness.

Mindfulness can be applied to any and every activity you are doing. Mindfulness is paying attention to the task at hand - to what you are doing and thinking in the present moment. (Even if that is excavating the past or recalling a memory). Bring your full attention to each moment in each situation.

Mindfulness will be your access point to connect with yourself, listen and hear yourself. It will be applied to the process of knowing yourself, dismantling assumptions, letting go of attachments, and developing a broader perspective. Within you is the essence of everything you are. Being who you are is being present with yourself in the present moment. It is in being present in the moment that we live from our own deep inner core rather than from our roles, expectations, voices of others or what we have been taught or think we should do.

Mindfulness is a critical element of living from your true self - it brings awareness to hear the inner wisdom of your body, to recognize the full spectrum of emotions, to be sensitive to your own needs and of those around you. It allows you to experience life with more feeling and passion bringing a sense of appreciation and wonder that cultivates inner peace and joy.

Mindfulness alone - without doing anything else- can change your being and your life. Without it any and all of the following actions will not result in connecting with and living through your true self. If you do not cultivate mindfulness then you will not benefit from the self-discovery process.

Mindful living will be the foundation of your day, your process, your life

A mindful life is lived from your core engaging in every moment and every aspect of yourself and living from your soul-your inner being-your authentic self

In order to live from your authentic self and to live fully you have to be present with yourself and be present in your life.

Cultivate mindfulness with activities and actions - fine tune your awareness. Before you begin the deep process of self-discovery you must first cultivate a quality relationship with yourself. The starting point for cultivating a relationship with yourself is to be present to yourself.

Being present with yourself you can listen to yourself body, mind and spirit and hear what they are telling you.

Body-Scan

The most common mindful activity is the body scan devised by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Begin by lying down in a comfortable position. Take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing. Remove your focus from your breath to your body. Notice any sensations or feelings you have.

Bring your attention to your feet, notice any feelings that are present, comfort or discomfort, itching, pressure, do not judge just notice it.

Don't worry about where your mind wanders, notice any thoughts that arise and then bring your attention back to your body.

From your feet, move your attention up your body to you ankles, lower leg, knees, thighs, stomach, chest, arms, neck, and head.

Slowly step by step move up your body, sustaining focus on each section, notice tensions, feelings, and sensations that you feel or thoughts that come to you.

End by returning to your breath

Assignment

Take a few moments of time during your sacred time and practice the body scan. See how it feels before and after. Try it a few times before you decide if this will be a good activity for you to incorporate into your life.

Mindful Walking

Find a place to walk

Find a pace that is normal and natural for you.

Bring your attention to your feet and lower legs.

Be aware of your movements of lifting your leg. Feel your feet contact with the ground. Be aware of your arm movements.

If a strong sensation, emotion or thought compels your attention, it can be helpful to stop, notice it until it passes, and then return to walking.

Walk about 5 minutes then change your pace, walk fast for 5 minutes, return to normal pace for 5 minutes, then slow for 5 minutes, then return once again to normal pace for 5 minutes.

Assignment

Practice Mindful walking for at once a day for at least one week. Decide if it is an activity that you might want to use and how often.

Soul Walking

Pick a favorite place to walk, a trail in the woods, the beach, a park or take a walk around your neighborhood. Walk, relax, do not rush, walk slowly, breathe, and focus on nature/environment. Allow your senses to see, hear, smell and taste. Let yourself become one with the experience.

Look at things under foot, notice the surrounding environment, pay attention, and be mindful. Stop, reach out touch, sit down, and immerse yourself in nature.

Look for:

- An object that is finished
- A stone, shell or whatever speaks to you
- A sound that stirs
- An unexpected sight
- Something that is alive
- An object that holds another object
- Something that speaks directly to you

What can any of these items tell you about yourself or your life? Your feelings?

Write or share your experience.

Assignment

Take yourself on a soul walk. When you return journal about your experience. Consider making it a regular weekly or monthly practice

Mindful Eating

This exercise as taught by Jon Kabat-Zinn is done with a raisin. However, any simple food can be substituted. I often do this exercise with a piece of chocolate but you can use nuts, popcorn, or fruit.

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Come into the present moment by taking a few breaths, noticing how you feel physically.
- Place the food item in your hand. Notice the impulse you might have to pop it all in your mouth right away.
- Look at your food item, examine them it as if you've never seen one, like this is your first time full of curiosity.
- Notice how it feels in your hand - the texture, shape and weight. You may want to close your eyes while doing this.
- Notice the color of the color, shape and size and any unique features.
- Slowly bring one piece of food to your nose smell it, what does it smell like. Notice how naturally your arm moves to do this.
- Continue to notice any thoughts of like or dislike you might have of as you observe your food item. Notice whether you're anticipating what it will taste like. Perhaps you're starting to salivate or feeling an impulse to put it into your mouth right away.
- *If you have chosen a piece of fruit that needs to be peeled. Do so slowly and then slice it into bit size pieces and bring the slice to your nose and smell it before continuing on*
- Ever so slowly, place the food item in your mouth, without biting into it. Explore what it feels like in your mouth, notice what your tongue is doing. Keep it in your mouth without chewing for at least 10 seconds. Notice what it's like to take this time before eating the food item.
- When you are ready, slowly and softly bite into the Food item taking one or two bites.
- Without swallowing, notice what it tastes like, how its flavor and texture changes as you chew. Notice your natural impulse to swallow it.
- Swallow the food item.
- Sit quietly and notice what you are feeling.
- Repeat this three times.

Assignment

Pick one meal this week and follow the guidelines of mindful eating. Write about the experience in your journal. What did you learn about yourself and your eating habits? What did you learn about the foods you eat?

Things Mindful people do

1. Take walks
2. Pay attention to their breath
3. Turn daily tasks into mindful moments/paying attention to the activity they are doing
4. Create-bake, draw, knit, sing, dance or other creative activities
5. Focus on one activity at a time (no multitasking) then take a break and return to activity or begin a new one
6. Know when not to check their phones-have times their phones and e-mail/computer are not in sight or are turned off, stow phones when talking or interacting with other people
7. Seek out new experiences, try new activities, foods, go to new places, change up their routines
8. Go outside-spend time in mother nature-nourish and reboot your energy, renew sense of wonder and awe, awareness, awakens senses
9. Feel what they are feeling-accepting the moment and what is not resisting what they are feeling or control it-accepting both negative and positive feelings and remaining even keel to cope with the emotions and situation in a mindful way
10. Meditate
11. Conscious of what they are putting into their body/mindful eating/ focus on the act of eating using their senses-sight, smell, taste
12. Pay attention to what they feed their minds- less tv, social media, etc.
13. Don't take themselves seriously. Don't get wrapped up in emotions. Laugh at themselves
14. Let their minds wander, daydream, fantasy, and use their imagination.

Mindfulness should become a way of life

Mindful Living=Joy=living life fully through your true being (self)

Use meditation & nature to help this process along

Assignment

Pick one activity every day and do it with awareness and mindfulness. Try to be mindful for a half a day, then try for a whole day.

Every time you are in your sacred space be mindful of everything you do. Start each session by taking three deep breaths and a few minutes focusing on your breathing and do the action or activity or exercise mindfully with awareness.

Cultivating mindfulness will take time. This is the area where I spent several years really focusing on. I integrated it with journaling and self-care/self-nurturing activities. Since I was already journaling each morning it was not something I had to work on. Mindfulness was a struggle and still can be sometimes. Mindfulness is a lifelong practice. It is hard to live mindfully all the time.

Spend some time just focusing on developing mindfulness practices into your day. Being present to the day and what is going on. I believed for a long time that this was the miraculous answer to connecting to myself and my life. It was but it was deeper and more. Mindfulness was the door, the key, the process to discover, uncover and divulge into the deeps of myself. It wasn't the final answer it was the process.

As life moves forward, as I grow deeper into myself when I get stuck or unsure it is because I have been ignoring the source and foundation. I refocus on mindfulness until it unlocks the next level and next step in my evolution. It is that powerful. The power of potentiality and possibilities exists in the present moment, through mindfulness. So yes in a way it is the answer in the solution but not the completion but the pathway.

If writing was home, my safe place then present moment/mindfulness was the place of hope and possibilities. It is where a window opened in my spirit. It was where I began to feel again. Here is where I began to feel not a safe peace but a content peace. It is definitely where the turnaround began. It didn't happen overnight or even quickly. It was a progress of moving forward from the darkness to the light.

Discovering Jon Kabat-Zinn's work on mindfulness was like finding a speck of gold in the sand. It stopped the haunting past from holding me hostage. It took away the anxious worry and panic about the future.

I slowly was able to get up and not feel the depilating sadness and uselessness I had been feeling for a long time. I was able to do the basic everyday chores of getting the girls off to school, laundry, basic house cleaning, and cooking meals.

It is where I could begin to explore options and possibilities to heal my body, emotions and spirit. It allowed me to think and write. I could interact with the girls and be somewhat normal. I began to feel human again. I began to feel like I was finally visible.

As I began becoming more present to myself and my life, I began to feel like I mattered. That my needs mattered. I was able to believe I was worth caring for. That it was ok for me to take care of myself and my needs even my emotional and spiritual needs. I know had the courage to step into the process of cultivating a better relationship with myself.

This is an excerpt from my NEW Book *Becoming You: Step into Yourself/Step into Your Life*

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