

THE MINIBOOK OF MINDFULNESS



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" Being Mindful, Kindful and Cheerful
will make our life
Fruitful, Soulful and Meaningful."

- Kaushik Mahapatra

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A very special thanks to all the people at the Indian Leadership Academy, for giving their best in the making of this minibook. We would like to thank our partners for their immense support and priceless contribution in drafting and presenting the contents. Special thanks to our Coach and content designer Ishani Mishra for the immense contribution on editing the content and making it eye soothing and presentable for our valued readers.

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INTRODUCTION

Who should read the Book:

Someone who is new to Mindfulness and meditation and wants to get started with the basics. This is also for Someone who has been following mindfulness but wants to restart with the origins and basics of mindfulness. Moreover, this book is also for people who consider mindfulness and meditation uncool simply because its ancient and should give one more try for this proven therapy which is a quick fix for most of our personal and professional situations in life.

In order to understand a concept, one must really delve deep into the matter and reach its roots. The only way to ensure the authenticity and relative application of a concept is to dig to its origins. Mindfulness as a concept is predominantly of vedantic origin. The practices are simple, effective and easy to incorporate. Let's start the journey with a divine message handcrafted by the great Almighty himself.

Arjuna, one of the five Pandavas, was a great devotee of Lord Shiva, and for that matter a devotee of all the Gods. Arjuna felt the need to please all the Gods and hence, used to spend a lot of time, meditating, chanting and dedicating offerings to the various Gods. He used to dedicate hours and hours to these rituals. One of these rituals included, his daily worship routine to Lord Shiva, which he would perform despite any circumstance. Every morning, Arjuna would wake up early to find the choicest flowers that would please Lord Shiva. He would handpick each and every flower, bring them to his self-made worship hall and with great care and dedication offer each flower with great devotion and patience. Somewhere, this years of practice had planted the seed of pride in him, wherein he had started considering himself the sincerest devotee and meditator of Lord Shiva. Shri Krishna got a glimpse of this, off his vibe and decided to show him the mirror. On one fine sunrise after Arjuna's rituals, they went for a walk. Enjoying the wake of the dawn, near the outskirts of the forest, they could see a man with a cart, with thousands of flowers. Arjuna went to ask him as to what the man was planning to do with a cart load of flowers. He went to the man to quench his curiosity. Upon reaching the man Arjuna asks him, as to what will he do with that many flowers. As if oblivious to Arjuna's presence, the man just kept doing his work. Amazed by this audacity, Krishna and Arjuna decided to follow that man. There in the midst of the woods, stood 10 a many such carts with thousands of flowers, ready to be offered to Lord Shiva. Arjuna took the liberty to ask that man once again as to why he was going through such an ordeal.

The man replied, "I am concentrating on my work now. I do not have the time to reply to you or anyone else. This is the time devoted to my Lord. I can reply to only one person at this time, and that is the second Pandava, Bhima."

"Why is it so? He doesn't even devote an hour to worship! I do it for hours every day!", retorted Arjuna.

The man replied. “Bhima meditates for two minutes, visualising Lord Shiva before having his meals. And voraciously pays all his focus and attention towards the meal served to him. He then focusses the rest of his attention towards his physical fitness and warfare practices. He does complete justice to the task at hand. And thus, he is the only person worthy of sharing my attention.”

From this Arjuna concluded that true devotion lies in true focus of the task at hand and not on the hours spent closing the eyes and meditating on it. It depends on utilising the entire mental space on doing that particular task. And this is nothing but mindfulness.

Thus, Indians have been practicing these from the ancient ages, only the modern era has coined it as a term. Mindfulness is not just a practice, but is a way of living and conducting life in a purposeful and focussed way, ensuring optimum justice and optimum output in everything that a person ventures forth.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness can be described as the practice of paying attention in the present moment, and doing it intentionally and with non-judgment. Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

Mindfulness is a type of meditation. It was popularized originally by Buddhism which emerged as a reformist movement from Hinduism in the Indian subcontinent. This Buddhist practice was adopted by the West and popularized as it was perceived as non-religious and a practice that provided relief from the stresses of the world.

The Buddhist term translated into English as "mindfulness" originates in the Pali term "*sati*" and in its Sanskrit counterpart "*smṛiti*".

According to Robert Sharf, "*smṛiti*" originally meant "to remember," "to recollect," "to bear in mind," as in the Vedic tradition of remembering the sacred texts. The term *sati* also means "to remember." In the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (Buddhist texts) the term *sati* means to remember the dharmas whereby the true nature of phenomena can be seen.

Mindfulness meditation practices refer to the deliberate acts of regulating attention through the observation of thoughts, emotions and body states. Typical mindfulness activities include:

- Mindful non-judgmental awareness of breath, body, feelings, emotions and/or thoughts (in sitting meditation practice or throughout the day)
- Mindful walking meditation
- Mindful eating
- Mindful body scan in a sitting or lying down position
- Listening with non-judgment

Eight Things to Know About Mindfulness:

1. **Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic.** It's familiar to us because it's what we already do, how we already are. It takes many shapes and goes by many names.
2. **Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do.** We already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn't require us to change who we are. But we can cultivate these innate qualities with simple practices that are scientifically demonstrated to benefit ourselves, our loved ones, our friends and neighbours, the people we work with, and the institutions and organizations we take part in

3. **You don't need to change.** Solutions that ask us to change who we are or become something we're not have failed us repeatedly. Mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.
4. **Mindfulness has the potential to become a transformative social phenomenon.** Here's why:
5. **Anyone can do it.** Mindfulness practice cultivates universal human qualities and does not require anyone to change their beliefs. Everyone can benefit and it's easy to learn.
6. **It's a way of living.** Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress. Even a little makes our lives better.
7. **It's evidence-based.** We don't have to take mindfulness on faith. Both science and experience demonstrate its positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
8. **It sparks innovation.** As we deal with our world's increasing complexity and uncertainty, mindfulness can lead us to effective, resilient, low-cost responses to seemingly intransigent problems.

Mindfulness vs Meditation

Meditation means making our mind empty. In simple language Meditation is ending the wasteful thought-stream of our mind. Once our mind is more or less empty, we have a tremendous capability of receiving energy around us. This leads to good health and clarity in thought processes leading to a joyous life.

Anyone can practice meditation without necessarily holding on to any religious or mystical philosophy. Most of the meditation techniques is to consciously observe the natural happening breath. Meditation in the beginning means making the worldly mind calm soon a deep spiritual restful state is attained.

Conscious breathing allows us to bring our attention to our breath again and again by consciously cutting down on the unnecessary thoughts which distracts us.

Meditation is the greatest gift which can be given by our own efforts to our lives. Spiritual health is a very important and integral part of the holistic health needed in human beings. spiritual health is the root and physical health is the fruit.

Meditation is very easy to practice. One can meditate at any time of one's choosing according to your convenience. However, it is important to practice meditation regularly. The grand voyage in consciousness can only be done by exploring the reality within oneself.

As a meditator begins his/her meditational journey he/she is able to observe his/her thoughts and truth objectively.

There are different stages in Meditation:

1st Stage: When we are with the normal and natural flow of breath the mind becomes rather empty. When the mind is rather empty a huge amount pf cosmic energy gets flooded into the physical body. When sufficient amount of cosmic energy enters the physical body the result is a reasonable amount of activation of the third eye

Anyone can meditate:

In fact, children take to meditation faster and in an easier way compared to adults as children have simple minds. The objective of meditation is to stop all the routine and useless wanderings of the mind.

Simply observe your breath and let your journey begin.

To meditate one can sit in a comfortable posture, eyes should be closed because 80% of the stimulation to our brain happens through our eyes. Closing our eyes will restrict the outward flow of 80% of body energy.

Meditation for how long?

Meditation for a minute corresponding to every one year of your age.

So if you are 20 years of age, start the twenty minutes of meditation in a day. If you are 40 years of age, you need to meditate for forty minutes and if you are 60 years of age, sixty minutes of meditation in a day is sufficient.

Meditation is the first step towards controlling our material mind and outward senses. While meditating deeply time passes quickly so do not get surprised if fifteen or thirty minutes in meditation seem like five.

In ancient wisdom that one can vitally recharge every cell of the body by taking to meditation.

As we proceed further in our spiritual journey through more and more regular meditation we begin to understand each and every physical experience and this will lead to greater transformation within we can also self-assess our progress by exchanging our experiences with other meditators.

Benefits of Meditation:

- Mind always stays in peaceful and joyous state
- Memory power increases
- All work gets done with greater efficiency
- Sleep time requirements get reduced
- Healing happens naturally
- Relationships become more meaningful and fulfilling
- Purpose of life is better understood.

Origins of Meditation and Mindfulness

The Origins of Meditation goes back to The Origins of Yoga.

How Mindfulness Relates to Yoga

There is a lot of overlap between mindfulness and yoga, both historically and presently. Many yoga practices incorporate mindfulness and some mindfulness meditation practices, such as the body scan, are very similar to yoga as they both involve awareness of one's body.

Yoga is a Sanskrit word which comes from the word "YUJ" which means to "Join" . At a basic level it means to join the body with the mind. At a more spiritual level it implies a process of joining a human with the eternal spirit (brahman)

The word first finds mention in the "Rig Veda" an ancient Sanskrit text (approx. 10,000 years old). Further mentions are found in the "Svetasvatara and Katha Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita (Vedic texts) and several types of Yoga are mentioned like Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga , Gyan yoga , Raja Yoga etc. This knowledge was part of Vedic thought encapsulated in the concept of "Sanatana Dharma" or Eternal principles (truths) that were meant to be relevant across all time periods. This knowledge evolved within the Indian subcontinent by the "Rishis" (seers) as was part of the earliest civilizations on planet earth.

Centuries later Patanjali produced a text called "Yoga Sutras" on the philosophy of yoga. He outlined eight limbs (steps) which are meant to be sequentially followed and indicate progress on the path to self-realization.

1. *Yama* - Five abstentions (or outer observances)
2. *Niyama* - Five inner observances
3. *Asana* - Meaning "seat" and referring to the physical posture needed for meditation which popularly evolved as "**Hatha Yoga**"
4. *Pranayama* - Controlled or suspended breath/breathing exercises
5. *Pratyahara* - Withdrawal of the senses
6. *Dharana* - Single pointed concentration
7. *Dhyana* – **Meditation (discussed later)**
8. *Samadhi* – Liberation

Most of the **Western world** however is familiar and primarily concerned with "**Asana**" or **Hatha Yoga** which are **physical postures** which are required for **good health and wellbeing**.

Is Hatha Yoga (asana) the same as physical exercises?

They are NOT the same and very different.

In Hatha Yoga the individual is meant to focus or bring awareness to his movements and breath and hence it meant to be performed with concentration in quietude. In exercises there is no

requirement to concentrate and hence very often gyms have music, TVs etc. to entertain people. In exercises very often weights and machines are used, but in yoga an individual uses his body weight if required. Some props may be used in yoga like towels or belts to help individuals reach a certain posture. Further exercises are primarily concerned with the outer body (muscles etc.) whilst yoga works at massaging and stimulating organs within the body in addition to the outer body.

Let's Explore the World of Meditation

The English word *meditation* is derived from old French word "*meditacioun*" and the Latin "*meditation*" from a verb "*meditari*" meaning "to think, contemplate, devise, ponder".

Meditation is a western word for the eastern Vedic practice of "Dhyana" mentioned as the seventh step in Patanjali's "yoga sutras" (refer the section on origins of yoga at the beginning of the article) and only one before final 8th step of Samadhi (nirvana, moksha, self-realization).

The origin of the word "Dhyana" comes from the Sanskrit word "Dhyai" which is interpreted in English to mean to contemplate.

The classical definition of Dhyana/Meditation is the ability to focus on an "object or thought or being" to the exclusion of all other thought. This is possible ONLY when the mind is quiet, disciplined and is a result of vigorous spiritual practice of the first 6 steps of the Patanjali yoga sutras. It is possible only when the mind has been trained to withdraw its senses from the external world of object and beings.

Today human beings are constantly subject to external messaging in terms of communication in various forms that encourage them to consume more (hence the term consumers) to live the projected perfect life. Success is defined materially in terms of material wealth reflected in terms of income, cars, houses, holidays etc. The "instant culture" of instant success, recognition, satiation has resulted in minds and bodies being agitated and in a constant flux as people feel inadequate and strive harder for instant gratification and in the process, disturb natural body rhythms of getting rest, sleep etc. The results are a host of ailments from obesity to indigestion, to behavioural disorders, depression etc.

As is the case for most spiritual practices, the constraints of modern living in terms of time constraints has led to dilution of disciplined practices to adapt to modern day living needs. However, the benefits of these practices can still be reaped in modern day life.

How to start meditation?

YOU CAN MEDITATE ANYWHERE

People practice many different forms of meditation, most of which don't require specialized equipment or space.

You can practice with just a few minutes daily to begin with and increase gradually as time permits.

If you want to start meditating, try choosing a form of meditation based on what you want to get out of it.

There are two major styles of meditation:

- **Focused-attention meditation:** Concentrates attention on
 - **Object:** e.g. candle, sun, moon etc
 - **Thought:** e.g. gratitude, kindness, health
 - **Sound:** e.g. sound of nature (waves, snowfall, wind)
 - **Visualization:** walk on the beach, forest, seaside

It emphasizes ridding your mind of attention and distraction.

Meditation may focus on

- **Breathing:** incoming or outgoing breath
 - a mantra: e.g. “OM”
- **Open-monitoring meditation:** Encourages broadened awareness of all aspects of your environment, train of thought and sense of self. It may include becoming aware of thoughts, feelings or impulses that you might normally try to suppress.

There are many forms of guided meditation (someone speaking and guiding you) available on You Tube or even apps like Calm etc. that can help a new student.

If your regular work and home environments do not allow for consistent, quiet alone time, consider participating in a class. This can also improve your chances of success by providing a supportive community.

Alternatively, consider setting your alarm a few minutes early to take advantage of quiet time in the morning. This may help you develop a consistent habit and allow you to start the day positively.

What are the benefits of Meditation?

- 1.Reduces Stress
- 2.Controls anxiety
- 3.Controls blood pressure
4. Promotes mental health
5. Enhanced self-awareness
6. May reduce age related memory loss.
7. Lengthens attention span
8. Can generate Kindness

9. May help fight addictions
10. Improves Sleep

Mindfulness Techniques

There is more than one way to practice mindfulness, but the goal of any mindfulness technique is to achieve a state of alert, focused relaxation by deliberately paying attention to thoughts and sensations without judgment. This allows the mind to refocus on the present moment. All mindfulness techniques are a form of meditation.

Basic mindfulness meditation – Sit quietly and focus on your natural breathing or on a word or “mantra” that you repeat silently. Allow thoughts to come and go without judgment and return to your focus on breath or mantra.

- **Body sensations** – Notice subtle body sensations such as an itch or tingling without judgment and let them pass. Notice each part of your body in succession from head to toe.
- **Sensory** – Notice sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Name them “sight,” “sound,” “smell,” “taste,” or “touch” without judgment and let them go.
- **Emotions** – Allow emotions to be present without judgment. Practice a steady and relaxed naming of emotions: “joy,” “anger,” “frustration.” Accept the presence of the emotions without judgment and let them go.
- **Urge surfing** – Cope with cravings (for addictive substances or behaviours) and allow them to pass. Notice how your body feels as the craving enters. Replace the wish for the craving to go away with the certain knowledge that it will subside.

Mindfulness meditation and other practices

Mindfulness can be cultivated through mindfulness meditation, a systematic method of focusing your attention. You can learn to meditate on your own, following instructions in books or on tape. However, you may benefit from the support of an instructor or group to answer questions and help you stay motivated. Look for someone using meditation in a way compatible with your beliefs and goals.

If you have a medical condition, you may prefer a medically oriented program that incorporates meditation. Ask your physician or hospital about local groups. Insurance companies increasingly cover the cost of meditation instruction.

Getting started on your own

Some types of meditation primarily involve concentration—repeating a phrase or focusing on the sensation of breathing, allowing the parade of thoughts that inevitably arise to come and go. Concentration meditation techniques, as well as other activities such as tai chi or yoga, can induce

the well-known relaxation response, which is very valuable in reducing the body's response to stress.

Mindfulness meditation builds upon concentration practices. Here's how it works:

Go with the flow. In mindfulness meditation, once you establish concentration, you observe the flow of inner thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without judging them as good or bad.

Pay attention. You also notice external sensations such as sounds, sights, and touch that make up your moment-to-moment experience. The challenge is not to latch onto an idea, emotion, or sensation, or to get caught in thinking about the past or the future. Instead, you watch what comes and goes in your mind and discover which mental habits produce a feeling of well-being or suffering.

Stay with it. At times, this process may not seem relaxing at all, but over time it provides a key to greater happiness and self-awareness as you become comfortable with a wider and wider range of your experiences.

Practice acceptance

Above all, mindfulness practice involves accepting whatever arises in your awareness at each moment. It involves being kind and forgiving toward yourself.

Some tips to keep in mind:

Gently redirect. If your mind wanders into planning, daydreaming, or criticism, notice where it has gone and gently redirect it to sensations in the present.

Try and try again. If you miss your intended meditation session, simply start again.

By practicing accepting your experience during meditation, it becomes easier to accept whatever comes your way during the rest of your day.

Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness improves well-being. Increasing your capacity for mindfulness supports many attitudes that contribute to a satisfied life. Being mindful makes it easier to savour the pleasures in life as they occur, helps you become fully engaged in activities, and creates a greater capacity to deal with adverse events. By focusing on the here and now, many people who practice mindfulness find that they are less likely to get caught up in worries about the future or regrets over the past, are less preoccupied with concerns about success and self-esteem, and are better able to form deep connections with others.

Mindfulness improves physical health. If greater well-being isn't enough of an incentive, scientists have discovered that mindfulness techniques help improve physical health in a number of ways. Mindfulness can: help relieve stress, treat heart disease, lower blood pressure, reduce chronic pain, improve sleep, and alleviate gastrointestinal difficulties.

Mindfulness improves mental health. In recent years, psychotherapists have turned to mindfulness meditation as an important element in the treatment of a number of problems, including depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, couples' conflicts, anxiety disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder

Transcendental Meditation

Let's look at one of the most famous type of meditation - **Transcendental Meditation**

The **Transcendental Meditation technique** or **TM** is a form of mantra meditation developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. "Mantra is a specific thought which suits us, a suitable sound for us which we receive from a trained teacher of Transcendental Meditation. The meditation practice involves the use of a mantra and is practiced for 20 minutes twice per day while sitting with one's eyes closed.

The TM technique consists of silently repeating a mantra with "gentle effortlessness" while sitting comfortably with eyes closed and without assuming any special yoga position. The mantra is said to be a vehicle that allows the individual's attention to travel naturally to a less active, quieter style of mental functioning.

Like all meditation techniques the benefits are similar resulting in improved health, wellbeing, being calmer and more efficient.

Does Yoga or Meditation involve faith?

Yoga and meditation are universal practices to be followed even though they may originate in India which is primarily known as a Hindu country. These are gifts to the world from one of the oldest civilizations.

It is like saying that the iPhone or Computer is Christian because they were developed in a country that practices Christianity.

Any civilized open-minded individual should follow these practices as they are the most natural, non-invasive practices which result in improved physical and mental health.

These practices are highly recommended in a world that is getting polarized, radicalized and fragmented based on religion and race.

It is my firm conviction that because these practices are based on principles of human love, compassion and acceptance they will promote harmony and peace.

Highly recommended for everyone to have a more peaceful life and coexistence.

Approaches to Mindfulness

In Vedic thought Mindfulness is an outcome of a calm and serene mind that is cleansed of desire and the impurities of the mind. A calm and serene mind was established as the CAUSE and the effect was MINDFULNESS. The focus was on the cause.

When the West adopted it, the focus was on the various techniques and practices. It was taken as a SOLUTION to the EFFECT (modern day problems of stress, depression, loneliness etc)

To reduce the agitation in the mind there are some commonly agreed practices that help minds to heal namely

1. **Acceptance**
2. **Forgiveness**
3. **Gratitude**
4. **Self-Love**

1. Acceptance

Acceptance might not be what you think it is; it just might change your life.

Penned by Rienhold Niebuhr and popularized by, the Serenity Prayer has been guiding people for decades. The most commonly used version of it goes like this:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference."

The wisdom contained in this succinct but powerful invocation is timeless, and its central premise resonates with almost everyone. On some level, we all know how important it is to accept the things we cannot change. What the research shows, and most of our experiences validate, is that our willingness to accept the unchangeable has a great deal to do with our emotional and psychological well-being.

Whether we're talking about a financial crisis, a health diagnosis, the loss of an important relationship, or any other unanticipated, unpleasant event, fighting what is won't make it not so.

Instead, when we do battle with reality, we cripple our capacity to cope with the situation and manage all the emotions we experience in response to it.

A big part of healing and recovering from the painful parts of life is accepting what's taken place. In order to move on, we must first acknowledge what's happening now. But, as all of us know, this is much easier said than done. Despite being one of the most important life hacks any of us can master, the practice of acceptance is enduringly difficult.

Where many of us get stuck is that we start out with a warped understanding of what acceptance is and how it works. We think that accepting something means getting over it. But this isn't the case. Being willing to accept that someone we love has died, for example, doesn't mean skipping the grief process or seeking to place a silver lining on an obviously dark cloud. It doesn't mean minimizing the significance of what happened or how you're feeling about it. It simply means being willing to acknowledge what is, without resisting or denying it.

Another major source of confusion shows up when whatever we're accepting involves somebody else. Let's say, for instance, that your partner has a temperament that can be terrifying. He loses his cool easily and often, and you frequently end up being the target of his rage. You know from things his mother has shared with you that he's always been this way, and his friends tell a similar story. Whenever you speak to him about it, he always seems to justify his behaviour, saying, "That's the way I've always been. It's never going to change."

You know that what's happening doesn't feel right, but you keep convincing yourself to stick it out, hoping that things will change. Acceptance, in this example, would be a necessary step toward deciding whether or not this relationship is right for you. If you fail to accept this undesirable quality in your partner, you'll suffer deeply every time it rears its ugly head. You'll experience confusion, frustration, and anger, and your desire for things to be different will make it difficult for you to connect with what's happening here and now.

Did the suggestion that you should accept a partner's pattern of explosive episodes make you uncomfortable? If that's the case, you might be confusing acceptance with approval. And, you see, the two are not the same. Acceptance is acknowledging what's already happened; approval is consenting to more of it in the future. To accept that the person you're in a committed relationship with has a side to him that causes harm to you doesn't mean that you're okay with it or want it to keep happening. It simply means that you're facing reality as it's being presented to you so you can make a decision about how to proceed.

Failing to accept reality creates suffering where there's already pain. It creates confusion where there can be clarity, anguish where there can be peace. We don't accept things in order to change what's happening, nor do we do it in order to feel better about it. We accept because it's the only logical thing to do. Whatever is happening is happening; whatever occurred already occurred. We embrace reality because it's already here, right now, and resisting it won't make it go away.

Learning acceptance is a lifelong process, and we're guaranteed to be given plenty of opportunities to practice. With clarity about what it means to accept and what effect it has on our well-being, we can approach our experiences differently, perhaps experiencing different results. What becomes

possible when you release your ideas about what should be and embrace what is instead? I invite you to explore what new and unexpected things happen when you start accepting reality on reality's terms.

2. Forgiveness

Forgiveness means giving up the suffering of the past and being willing to forge ahead with far greater potential for inner freedom. Besides the reward of letting go of a painful past, there are powerful health benefits that go hand-in-hand with the practice of forgiveness

Forgiveness transforms anger and hurt into healing and peace. Forgiveness can help you overcome feelings of depression, anxiety, and rage, as well as personal and relational conflicts. It is about making the conscious decision to let go of a grudge. Why would anyone want to forgive someone who has wronged her in the past? It is not about letting someone off the hook for a wrongdoing, or forgetting about the past, or forgetting about the pain. It certainly does not mean that you stick around for future maltreatment from a boss, a partner, parent, or friend. It is about setting yourself free so that you can move forward in your own life.

Forgiveness means giving up the suffering of the past and being willing to forge ahead with far greater potential for inner freedom. Anne Lamott famously declared, "Forgiveness is giving up all hope of having had a different past." Besides the reward of letting go of a painful past, there are powerful health benefits that go hand-in-hand with the practice of forgiveness. In the physical domain, forgiveness is associated with lower heart rate and blood pressure as well overall stress relief. It is also associated with reducing fatigue in some patient populations, and improving sleep quality. In the psychological domain, forgiveness has been shown to diminish the experience of stress and inner conflict while simultaneously restoring positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

The problem for many of us is that sometimes we can choose to forgive another, but still in our heart of hearts, the anger or resentment lingers. However, it is in fact possible to forgive and truly let go of past disappointments, hurts, or blatant acts of abuse. Although at times this may seem implausible, *forgiveness is a teachable and learnable skill that can dramatically improve with practice over time.*

Harvard researcher and physician George Vaillant describes forgiveness as one of the eight positive emotions that keep us connected with our deepest selves and with others. He considers these positive emotions to be key ingredients that bind us together in our humanity and they include love, hope, joy, compassion, faith, awe, and gratitude.

Whether you have a spiritual bent or not, the research supports the notion that developing stronger positive emotions supports us in leading healthier, happier, and more connected lives. When we forgive and develop these other positive emotions we become less encumbered by the scars of the past.

The question remains: How do we give up a grudge and forgive someone who has hurt, disappointed, or betrayed us? Fred Luskin talks about the way we develop our grievance story in his book *Forgive for Good*. Your grievance story is the one you tell over and over to yourself, and possibly to others, about the way you were maltreated and the way you became the victimized. Luskin teaches us to cast our story in such a way that we become a survivor of difficult times, or - better yet -- the hero of our story.

The following strategy model for learning forgiveness is derived from an amalgam of work by several researchers and my own work as a psychologist:

a). Inquire deeply about the root of your anger or grudge. Look at the situation honestly, without embellishing or rearranging the details. Pay attention to how this anger is holding you back and keeping you hostage in your own day-to-day existence.

b). Review your grievance story and reengineer that story so you see yourself in a more empowered way. Perhaps you chose to disengage or limit your time spent with a friend or family member that has consistently been hurtful to you. Perhaps you left a toxic partner. You had the fortitude to leave a bad situation. You were indeed the survivor and hero in your own story. Look at the strengths that you developed as a result of this situation. Being hurt or compromised can be your invitation to a transformative new path and a more fulfilling life.

c). Develop your capacity for empathy and compassion for yourself for landing in a painful situation. Blaming yourself for not seeing the signs sooner doesn't help, and slows down the process of making change. Also, in my professional experience, usually abusers have been abused themselves, and they are operating at a deficit. Without accepting their hostile behaviours, try to understand the pain and suffering that he or she must be enduring. You can understand and forgive without accepting bad or abusive behaviour.

d). Create new associations with your old story of neglect or abuse. Perhaps you can practice a ritual that signifies the end of things as they were and say goodbye to the past as you once experienced it. Welcome the good, the support, and the love that you now invite into your life. Light a candle, for example, to symbolize the brightness of the moment and the days ahead, or gather some friend to celebrate the end of an era and the beginning of a new phase of life.

Remember that you cannot control others, but you can control your own choices. As you continue to reshape your grievance story -- becoming the hero of that story, developing empathy, and compassion for the abuser and celebrating your strengths -- you will undoubtedly begin to notice a shift in your consciousness. Your feelings of anger and sadness are likely to quiet down and your self-esteem is likely to blossom, as will your relationships.

3. Gratitude

Many of us express gratitude by saying "thank you" to someone who has helped us or given us a gift. From a scientific perspective, however, gratitude is not just an action: it is also a positive emotion that serves a biological purpose.

The Harvard Medical School provides more detail, writing that gratitude is:

“A thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives ... As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals—whether to other people, nature, or a higher power”

This provides a more helpful context, leading us into the next definition from psychiatry researchers, who define gratitude as:

“the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation” (Sansone & Sansone, 2010).

According to Dr. Robert Emmons, the feeling of gratitude involves two stages (2003):

First comes the acknowledgment of goodness in one’s life. In a state of gratitude, we say yes to life. We affirm that all in all, life is good, and has elements that make worth living, and rich in texture. The acknowledgment that we have received something gratifies us, both by its presence and by the effort the giver put into choosing it.

Second, gratitude is recognizing that some of the sources of this goodness lie outside the self. One can be grateful to other people, to animals, and to the world, but not to oneself. At this stage, we recognize the goodness in our lives and who to thank for it, i.e., who made sacrifices so that we could be happy?

The two stages of gratitude comprise the recognition of the goodness in our lives, and then how this goodness came to us externally lies. By this process, we recognize the luck of everything that makes our lives—and ourselves—better.

Purpose of This Emotion

People can use gratitude to form new social relations or to strengthen current ones.

Acts of gratitude can be used to apologize, make amends and help solve other problems.

Alternatively, people may feel gracious because it can be an intrinsically rewarding process. Simply being grateful for being alive is a great way to motivate oneself to seize the day.

The idea that tomorrow is not guaranteed is a strong motivator for some people to be their “best self” today.

Why Gratitude Works

Gratitude is a selfless act. Its acts are done unconditionally, to show to people that they are appreciated. “A gift that is freely given” is one way to understand what these acts are like.

For example, if someone is sad and you write them a note of appreciation, you are likely not asking for something in return for this person; instead, you are reminding them of their value, and expressing gratitude for their existence. At the moment, you are not waiting for a “return note” from this person.

Even when we do not expect a return, sometimes they happen. Gratitude can be contagious, in a good way. In the previous example, maybe when you are down, this person will write you a note too.

Here are two processes gratitude can influence.

a). Catharsis

Catharsis is the process in which an individual releases strong emotions.

For example, after a stressful or traumatic event, crying provides a means for such a strong release, rendering the activity cathartic. Catharsis works with gratitude.

The use of gratitude serves as an agent of catharsis, where both parties feel satisfied in the end.

b). Reciprocity

Reciprocity, as a concept from social psychology, is about the exchanging of actions.

In this case, it is about the exchange of positive emotion. When someone performs an act of gratitude for another person, in turn, that person may be motivated to do something gracious for the former person or continue the favour for a stranger.

Philosophical Perspectives on Gratitude

Whilst Gratitude has its origins in early Vedic (8000 years old) thought in terms of being grateful to the universe, to nature, to all beings etc. it has found a central role in most major religions

For at least 2,000 years, intellectuals have been considering the important role gratitude plays in daily life.

Ancient and not-so-ancient philosophers, such as Cicero, Seneca, and Adam Smith, preached the importance of giving thanks (Fox et al., 2015; McCullough et al., 2002). Cicero and Seneca thought of gratitude as a key virtue foundational to any successful civilization.

If gratitude is a foundational human emotion, then it makes sense why humans have been studying it for millennia. Our species benefits from it, in so many ways.

Religious and Spiritual Perspectives on Gratitude

Unsurprisingly, religious and spiritual movements have explored gratitude too. Vedic scriptures, Theravada Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are some of the main religions with writings on this.

Historically, many religions referred to gratitude strictly regarding the need to be thankful for a higher power. More so, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism stressed gratitude as an integral step on the path to a good life.

In the older writings of Theravada Buddhism, gratitude connects practitioners to their pasts. Today, gratitude and the concept of karma is a driving force behind philanthropic Buddhism in China. Like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, gratitude plays a unique role in Buddhism historically and presently.

Modern Psychological Perspectives on Gratitude

Here is an overview of nine recent psychological findings related to the study of gratitude:

a). Enhanced Well-being

Expressing your thanks can improve your overall sense of well-being. Grateful people are more agreeable, more open, and less neurotic

This is not to say that “depressed people” should simply be more grateful, as depression is a very complicated disease and struggle for millions of people. Instead, perhaps gratitude practices need to be a part of the therapy and treatment for people who struggle with depression.

b). Deeper Relationships

Gratitude is also a powerful tool for strengthening interpersonal relationships. People who express their gratitude for each other tend to be more willing to forgive others and less narcissistic

Giving thanks to those who have helped you strengthens your relationships and promotes relationship formation and maintenance, as well as relationship connection and satisfaction

c). Improved Optimism

When people are optimistic about their well-being and health, they may be more likely to act in ways that support a healthy lifestyle.

d). Increased Happiness

In the pursuit of happiness and life satisfaction, gratitude offers a long-lasting effect in a positive-feedback loop of sorts. Thus, the more gratitude we experience and express, the more situations and people we may find to express gratitude towards.

e). Stronger Self-Control

Self-Control helps with discipline and focus. Long-term well-being can benefit from self-control, for example, resisting nicotine in cigarettes for someone who is trying to quit smoking. Self-control helps us stick to the “better choice” for our long-term health, financial future, and well-being.

f). Better Physical and Mental Health

Research performed in 2015 showed that patients with heart failure who completed gratitude journals showed reduced inflammation, improved sleep, and better moods; this reduced their symptoms of heart failure after only 8 weeks.

The link between the mind-body connection aligns with how gratitude can have a double benefit. For example, the feeling of appreciation helps us to have healthier minds, and with that healthier bodies.

g). An Overall a Better Life

Over the last two decades, the evidence supporting the benefits of gratitude has increased a lot.

Consider this quote from the Wall Street Journal’s article “Thank you, No, Thank you.”

“...adults who feel grateful have more energy, more optimism, more social connections and more happiness than those who do not, according to studies conducted over the past decade. They’re also less likely to be depressed, envious, greedy or alcoholics.” – Melinda Beck

h). Stronger Athleticism

Studies from researcher Lung Hung Chen found that an athlete's level of gratitude for their success can influence their levels of well-being (Chen, 2013; Chen & Wu, 2014). More specifically, adolescent athletes who are more grateful in life are also more satisfied and tend to have higher levels of self-esteem.

i). Stronger Neurologically-Based Morality

Neuroscience is beginning to explore what gratitude does to the mysterious human brain.

In other words, these findings suggest that people with an "attitude of gratitude" experience lower levels of stress.

The gratitude visit involves three basic steps:

First, think of someone who has done something important and wonderful for you, yet who you feel you have not properly thanked.

Next, reflect on the benefits you received from this person, and write a letter expressing your gratitude for all they have done for you.

Finally, arrange to deliver the letter personally, and spend some time with this person talking about what you wrote.

Social Effects of Gratitude

Gratitude can be observed at an individual level, with its subsequent effects, or at a greater social level. The recipient of gratitude may not reciprocate directly back, but in turn, may lend a favour to a third party, effectively expanding a network of good

Effectively gratitude can create social networks and help individuals work towards goals and challenges, and overall, simply have stronger coping skills for life's hardships.

Gratitude in Relationships

Gratitude and indebtedness are associated with the intention to repay for the received benefit. It leads to internal motivation and external motivation to reciprocate.

➤ Thoughtful Actions

When these feelings of gratitude are noticed by the partner, the relationship well-being of the partner also increases.

➤ Gratitude Intervention

Couples who want to improve their relationship might benefit from writing about their relationship and paying attention to moments of gratitude. Therapists can use this as “homework” for their clients.

By practicing the partners can become more aware of the thoughtful actions of their partner and respond to them with gratitude. This exercise can induce an upward spiral and improve the relationship well-being and can be a powerful intervention and communication tool for romantic partners.

Apply It to Your Life

This very evening, before you go to sleep, think of the positive things that happened during the day. Take a moment to do every night. Consider a gratitude journal as well.

For those struggling with depression or anxiety, this can also frame the beginning of a day: before getting out of bed, consider three things—however small—that they are grateful for. Even on a really hard day, make yourself do this, even if your internal voice is one of sarcasm: just three things.

When people express gratitude to each other, it compels a desire to reciprocate, and this is a positive chain reaction to encourage in any family, workplace, town, and society.

A Take-Home Message

Modern psychology research confirms that gratitude is an important social emotion that can benefit the lives of religious people who practice gratitude, and that practicing gratitude can also benefit non-religious people.

Gratitude is a human emotion that can be most simply defined as appreciation or acknowledgment of an altruistic act.

a gratitude journal, or maybe it is acting kindly towards a stranger because someone did that for you.

Next time you have a free moment, try practicing some gratitude. You might just be surprised by the benefits it brings you. As always, let us know your thoughts and experiences with this valuable emotion.

4. Self-love

Many people mistakenly believe that self-love is the same as narcissism, or having a big ego. It's not. So, what do we mean when we say "self-love"?

Self-love means having a high regard for your own well-being and happiness. Self-love means taking care of your own needs and not sacrificing your well-being to please others. Self-love means not settling for less than you deserve.

Loving yourself doesn't mean you think you're the smartest, most talented, and most beautiful person in the world. Instead, when you love yourself you accept your so-called weaknesses, appreciate these so-called shortcomings as something that makes you who you are. When you love yourself you have compassion for yourself.

You take care of yourself like you'd take care of a friend in distress. You treat yourself kindly. You don't nit-pick and criticize yourself. For many, especially those of us who grew up in households that lacked love or in which love waxed and waned, loving yourself will take work. Self-love is a practice and it's a skill that takes work.

Self-love isn't about instant gratification. A new pair of shoes or eating an entire pizza might make you feel good in the moment (or taste delicious), but the feeling isn't lasting—and could be damaging in the long run. Self-love means giving yourself what your body, brain, and soul needs for the marathon that is life. It isn't hedonism and it isn't chasing a physical or emotional high. The practice of self-love is the practice of nourishing yourself.

a). Focus on being someone who loves.

If you're in a place today where you don't love yourself, it's hard to take a quantum leap and become someone who does. Just like when you're building muscles, self-love takes consistent practice.

Instead of loving yourself, focus on being someone who loves. That is, allow love to flow through you as often as possible. Focus on what you love about the people you meet. Focus on what you appreciate while going to the store, sitting in a meeting, or while speaking to someone. Simply, adjust your body to positive emotions by finding as many things to love and appreciate as possible.

b). Tap into what it looks and feels like to be loved.

It's easy to be loving toward ourselves when things go as planned, when we succeed and people like us. Not so much when stuff falls apart, we screw up or get rejected. When we struggle the most, that's also when we tend to be hardest on ourselves.

In those moments, ask yourself what someone who loves you deeply you would act. What would they say? What would they do? How would they behave? Odds are, they wouldn't criticize, judge, and berate you. They'd offer you kindness, compassion, and acceptance. If you can't think about a specific person or memory, imagine how the most loving human on this planet would be toward you. Then practice being that toward yourself.

c). Stop comparing yourself.

Comparison is a killer to self-love. And we aren't usually very nice when it comes to comparisons, right? Instead, we take our greatest flaws and compare them to someone else's greatest success. In short, you're doomed to fail.

Instead, realize that you write your story. Realize that you can't compare your life to someone else's because no matter how well you know them, you never know how they feel or how they perceive their life. Instead, spend your time and energy to nourish and build your path.

d). Take baby steps to create the life you long for.

Desires are powerful. And so, to take action turn those dreams into reality is to honour and care for yourself. By taking daily actions, you signal that you're worthy of living the life you desire.

It doesn't have to be big action—just small and consistent steps in the direction that stirs joy, care, and excitement. This demonstrates that you care and respect your dreams and thus yourself. Has there ever been a better time to do that than now?

e). Ask your guidance system for help.

Imagine that your emotions are guiding you. When you feel good about yourself, it means that what you're thinking is aligned with how your soul/higher self sees you. When you feel bad about yourself, it's a red flag telling you that a change of perspective is needed

If you think a thought such as "*I am [something you don't like about yourself]*," how does that feel? Probably not so good, right? Then it's a sign to think a different thought. Try to replace that with something kinder. For example, "*I'm just so lost and confused*" can be replaced with "*I'm doing the best I can to move forward.*"

f). Surround yourself with people you feel good with.

Oh, this is an important one! You may have heard Jim Rohn's famous quote before: "*You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.*" Think about who those people currently are. Do they inspire, fill you up, and want what's best for you?

Just because you've been friends doesn't mean you need to keep spending time together. Just because you're taking a break from someone, doesn't mean you won't be close again. Be picky about who you spend your time with—don't give it away in the spirit of mercy. (That's not nice, neither to you or the other person). Be there because you want to; otherwise, don't.

g). Be compassionate when sh*t hits the fan.

So many of us tend to beat ourselves down when we need our love the most. When we fail or screw up or someone rejects us, that's the time we often get even more down on ourselves. Beating someone who's lying down, sounds fair? Um, nope.

So instead, choose to be most loving and forgiving with yourself when things don't go as planned. When you stumble and fall. When you say the wrong things. When someone rejects you or a project fails. Ask yourself what you need and then spray that all over yourself.

h). Make room for healthy habits.

Yep yep! Start truly caring for yourself by mirroring that in what you eat, how you exercise, and what you spend time doing. Do stuff, not to “get it done” or because you “have to,” but because you care about you.

Don't feel like going to the gym? Then maybe put on a soul-soothing podcast and go for a walk. Create habits that are healthy, not just mentally but also emotionally.

i). Postpone your worry and negative thoughts.

Are you ready for a really great tip? If so, then get excited. A very powerful technique I recently discovered is called a “worry-free month” (named it myself). Think about how much of your worry that actually serves you. Sure, some of the worry has a purpose, as it tends to give us a little kick when we need to get our sh*t together and start acting.

But, my guess is that 97 percent of it is useless. Whenever those thoughts enter your mind, tell them, “*Thanks, but I'll deal with this next month.*” By telling your mind that you'll deal with it later (plus saying when), you stop feeding negative thoughts and thus decrease its momentum. Then, you simply do this month after month.

j). Accept what you cannot love.

This might have been the greatest game-changer for me. Because let's face it: It's easy to love what you love about yourself and not so easy with the things you don't. So, instead of even aiming to love those parts, which will probably just make your mind go “*Are you kidding me?*”, focus on accepting them.

One thing I've had a hard time accepting about myself is that at times, and for no real reason, I can get very nervous. Simple things, such as going to the supermarket can feel very difficult. Instead of rejecting or trying to love this nervous side of myself, I'm reminding myself to accept it. When it happens, I'll tell myself something along the lines of “It's okay, I can be nervous going to the supermarket today. It's not the end of the world.”

You don't need to love everything about yourself to develop self-love; all you need is acceptance. Next time something happens that makes you want to get down on yourself, see this as your practice to accept what is.

Care for the World by Caring for Yourself

Life is full of ups and down. Health can transfer into disease. Successes can be turned into collapses. Romantic love can be transformed into coldness. But, no matter what happens on the outside, we can still have a solid foundation built on self-love.

Self-love isn't a luxury; it's a necessity in today's society. So, start implementing some of the practices above and most of all, have compassion with yourself when you fall short. Then simply brush yourself off and get back into it again. As they say, practice makes perfect.

Finally, realize that by caring for yourself, you care for this world. Your actions have a ripple effect on others.

Enhancing Relationships through Mindfulness Meditation

Have you ever had a problem understanding relationships? If so, you're not alone. Relationships are one of the most complex challenges of human existence. Whether these relationships are with family members, loved ones, friends, or in a professional context, conflicts in relationships can very quickly cost us our inner peace.

Many people spend their whole lives trying to figure out what has gone wrong in their relationships. But the truth is that once we gain wise understanding, we better appreciate that healthy relationship isn't as complicated to build as what we might otherwise think.

One common reason is that most people can't see beyond their selfish preferences. When we're dealing with someone who views the world from a perspective that's similar to our own, we might find ourselves in a constant power struggle with them in each of our attempts to 'be right'. Relationships that are managed in this way will often be filled with conflict, frustrations and misunderstanding.

Many people believe that to have a healthy relationship requires all relevant parties work on the relationship itself. While this might seem like common sense for most people, it's important to note that a relationship is an entity and people are people. It's crucial that in each significant relationship we have, we take full responsibility for working solely on ourselves. Most people need to learn how to become more loving, giving, compassionate, and understanding while also managing our innate fears, arrogances and insecurities.

Mindfulness practices can help us to make significant progress in enhancing our relationships. These are the four key elements of the mindfulness practice.

Key Element One: Deep Listening

Many of us don't listen carefully to other people are saying (or meaning) when they're communicating with us. We're usually more focused on how we're going to respond, or on how what the other person is saying is making us feel. We often have difficulty paying attention to other people because our mind wants to move on to the next person or thing.

When we do relationships in this careless way, we miss much of what people are telling us. This damages trust and intimacy. This is a primary reason why many people have difficulty remembering people's name during an initial introduction. It's not because our memory is bad, but more because we were focusing on something else when they told us their name.

When we're mindfully listening to what another person is saying (and sometimes not saying), we send a clear message to this other person that we value and appreciate what they have to say. Our attention to their detail demonstrates respect, appreciation, and that we fundamentally care. These factors build trust into a relationship and are the same factors that no relationship can survive without.

Practising deep listening is quite simple. Begin by looking into the other person's eyes when they're talking with you. Pay attention to understanding what they're saying, and resist the temptation to make assumptions or judgements.

If your mind wanders off for a moment, just be honest, there's nothing wrong with telling the other person that you missed something they said. Ask them to please repeat it. This shows that you at least engaged in what they are saying and that you also want to understand them. When someone feels that you genuinely want to know them, you'll be amazed at how quickly they open up to you, and the conversation goes deeper. Try it and see for yourself!

Key Element Two: Mindful Speech

Historically, how many of your past conflicts have been the result of incorrect assumptions or a misunderstanding? Somebody misjudged what your intentions were when you said what you said, and things went south very quickly from there.

Whenever we're engaged in a conversation, we often (and mindlessly) say the first thing that comes to mind. We rarely stop to carefully consider how our words will be interpreted by another person. Most people assume that others will fully understand what we mean when we say whatever we say. Wrong ... this is the reason why such a high percentage of today's marriages end in divorce.

Though we can't control how other people are going to react, respond to or interpret our words, we can certainly reduce the likelihood of being misinterpreted or misunderstood.

To practice mindful speech, we begin by resisting the urge to mindlessly (and immediately) react to the things that other people say and do to us. In the same that we can be guilty of saying the 'wrong thing' at times, other people can be equally as guilty, and this isn't always because other people mean us harm, it just that none of us are perfect communicators.

Pause, reflect and choose your words wisely. Be sure to say what you mean and mean what you say. Opt to communicate words that are loving, compassionate, and respectful, and use a tone that is calm and non-threatening. Also, remember that it isn't always necessary to give voice to your opinion. Sometimes no response is better than an emotionally led response.

Key Element Three: Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is at the core of our mindfulness practice. If we want to understand how relationships work fully, then we need to appreciate how our thoughts and actions impact our relationships. Mindfulness meditation (and active consideration) will not only help us to understand our relationships more accurately, but it will also help us gain the inner strength we need to resist our insecurities.

Mindfulness meditation isn't complicated. Just find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed for 5 minutes. Sit in a chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor, and hands in a comfortable

position. Close your eyes, and observe your breath. When your mind wanders off, just bring your attention back to your breath (remember when we discussed self-regulation in an earlier section).

Your mind will keep wandering off. That's normal, so don't expect perfection. Just bring it back. After a few minutes, your mind will settle down. If you are new to meditation, you can start with about 10-15 minute sessions each day or every second day. Then increase this once you feel more comfortable doing so.

Meditation quietens down the excess chatter in our mind, which helps us to steady our emotions so that we don't react unreasonably (or inappropriately) to other people's words and actions. Meditation and practising mindfulness also helps us to view the world with greater clarity and accuracy.

We all long to have better relationships with the people in our lives, but many of us are uncertain about how to accomplish this. These three simple practices can improve your relationships significantly in a very short space of time.

These three simple practices are the foundation of mindfulness practice; they will help you to better understand your relationships so you can cultivate more inner peace and a more profound depth of connection with everyone you encounter. Small changes in your day-to-day life can bring about massive changes that will lead to a more rewarding and fulfilling life not just for yourself, but also for those who you care about the most.

Key Element four: Mindful Listening

Mindfulness is the practice of paying purposeful attention to the present moment, without making any judgments. It encourages one to be aware of the present and let go of worries or anxieties, along with any physical or emotional reactions you may have to outside influences.

Listening in this way requires you to give your full focus to the person who is talking, and to use your senses to understand their words and emotions. You must do this while being open-minded, and show that you are taking interest in what the other person is saying. Without being mindful, you may become distracted and fail to hear what someone else is doing or saying.

Studies have suggested that the average person only remembers 25% of what someone has told them only a few minutes prior to being asked. The goal of mindful listening is to stop your running thoughts so you can hear the message that is being shared with you, and so the speaker can feel understood. It is important to allow yourself to have the time to absorb everything the other person is saying.

Benefits of Mindful Listening

“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.”

Personal Benefits of Mindful Listening

1. Mindful listening helps increase your empathy.

Empathy refers to the ability to understand another person and share what they are feeling. When you are practicing mindful listening, you will increase your empathy because you will be taking the time and energy to put yourself in someone else's position, and really listen to what they are saying and their motivations behind engaging in the conversation with you.

2. Mindful listening further develops self-awareness.

Mindful listening will allow you to be conscious of your physical and mental presence throughout the conversation. It may also help you uncover some unknown biases that you have when listening to someone else's perspective or point of view. Self-awareness is a critical part of being mindful because it allows you to always be in the present moment.

3. Mindful listening helps deepen relationships.

Part of being mindful is being able to know yourself well enough to be able to create deep relationships with other people. If you are able to give someone your full attention by listening in a mindful way, you will be able to get to know them on a level that you otherwise would miss. The more you are able to understand someone, and vice versa, the deeper your relationship will be.

4. Mindful listening improves your focus and attention.

Practicing your focus while you are in a conversation will spill over to other aspects of your life. You will be able to gradually learn how to quiet your busy mind and pay attention only to what is being said to you.

Professional Rewards of Mindful Listening

1. Mindful listening improves your communication with colleagues, encouraging collaboration and initiative.

As a mindful listener, you will be able to improve your work with your colleagues. With proper communication, you and your colleagues will be able to listen to each other to learn about each other's ideas and thoughts about possible projects. Working together as a conducive team will allow you to better your work.

2. Mindful listening helps you make stronger connections.

With mindful listening, you are able to connect to the person to whom you are talking by taking the time to fully understand what they are saying and why they are sharing it with you. This will help to build a stronger connection because you can relate to what they are saying.

3. Mindful listening increases productivity because people are actually listening.

When people take the time to listen, they will also be able to engage in the conversation and add in their own thoughts to build off what the other person is saying. This can help people stay productive because it leaves little time to get off track or to put off short-term goals.

4. Mindful listening boosts workplace morale because employees feel they are appreciated and listened to.

When people feel like they are being listened to, they feel as if they are a part of the group. This is important in feeling valued as an employee. Also, employees who feel heard in their company are more likely to remain loyal employees than those who feel as if their opinions do not matter.

5. Mindful listening improves observational skills, allowing leaders to choose the best persons for projects or to delegate tasks to.

When you are listening closely to someone, you may pick up on some subtle things that you would not otherwise notice. For example, you might notice that one employee has a great attention to detail when it comes to numbers or some aspect of a project that will be really important. If you are trying to get to know someone, it is vital to practice mindful listening.

Mindfulness@Work

The moment we talk about Mindfulness@work most people feel that Mindfulness and work don't go hand in hand. In fact, Mindfulness is perceived to be something which is more for personal benefits than professional.

However, a lot of people have experienced and would second to the fact that work is the origin of most of the stress in our life and if we are mindful about things at work in terms of awareness and what can be controlled by us vs. what can't be controlled, most of our stress will reduce in no time.

Mindfulness is a proven therapy for moment-by-moment awareness – a set of practices that helps us to change the way we all think and feel about our life and work experiences by just creating attentiveness to the now - to the present. We know that Most of the problems have either existed in the past or will come in the future. However, the Present is where we are in a perfect state of mind and complete. Just concentrating on the present will radically change our work life and life in general. Though most people know this fact, they don't know how to achieve it and mindfulness is the answer to that How.

In today's world Corporates and organizations are going through a lot as markets are volatile, clients are becoming more and more demanding and organizations are trying to achieve more with less resources in the name of cost cutting. In fact, the corporate floors are not lively, full of corporate politics, cafeteria back biting, Water cooler blame games and people who have just forgot to smile. Now to add to all this corporate are going through the corona situation where there is too much of uncertainty.

Mindfulness enables employees to strengthen their ability to adapt quickly. It creates mental agility and helps people look inward to find answers which people have been seeking for ages.

According to a poll done with our Participants in Indian Leadership Academy, three of the most important issues where Mindfulness comes very handy in the corporate world are:

- 1) Ability to Perform Complex Tasks as there are too many tasks to complete
- 2) How to stop overthinking
- 3) How to stay Open for new ideas and suggestions as almost everyone is following a routine

Not just the above three but there has been a lot of other areas at work where Mindfulness has been giving results:

Productivity improvement at work:

In a typical corporate scenario life is too much transactional. The most usual pattern is people maintain their 'to be done (TBD)' task list everyday but most of the tasks just remain undone. Mindfulness helps you to be aware and connect you with the bigger picture related to those tasks.

That way you appreciate the journey to accomplish those tasks and hence we can focus better and enjoy the process.

Positive ambience and employee satisfaction:

Mindfulness is also important in improving employee behaviour in general and hence people develop a lot of patience in connecting with people and understanding diverse perspectives. This quickly improves the enthusiasm levels on the floor.

Being a Mindful Leader:

we certainly need more leaders at the workplace. However, most of us know that leadership is not about a title. It's about being in the situation, working with the team. facilitate solutions, being involved in a regular basis. To achieve this style of leadership where you are serving your team, you need to be extremely mindful about situations, client expectations and strengths and improvement areas of your team members. you need to be mindful that both organization and people should develop together and we need to leverage each other strengths. That's the only way a win-win culture can be created and we can achieve outstanding outcomes.

Developing Resilience:

Being mindful can help you do a well-balanced self-introspection where you not just have guilt or you repent or blame each other.

It reminds you that this is just a phase and good times will come soon. you become resilient in life, and this power of bouncing back is a great boost for your professional life. Especially Mindfulness has helped a lot of employees who re-join office after a long break and they have straightaway started delivering results.

Job Satisfaction:

Most of us do jobs without Job satisfaction. There is no other choice as we need money, we need fame, we need a social status. However, if we can develop a mind-set where our existing job can be more encouraging, help to develop ourselves and most importantly help to meet our passion and purpose in life then the same job all of a sudden becomes more satisfying. At Indian Leadership academy, we meet a lot of Leaders, Business owners, trainers and coaches and most of them don't like their jobs irrespective of the fact that it's their passion. we know that sounds interesting but it's a fact and only by being mindful on how your job is directly or indirectly influencing people, you will get the broader picture on how you are creating jobs, transforming people and ultimately changing lives.

Stress and Burnout:

Time and again mindfulness techniques have been proven to reduce stress and anxiety, improve clarity and focus and increase the possibility for a richer more vivid existence.

Coping with Covid:

There is a lot of stress, anxiety and negativity created due to the COVID-19 crisis and we need to work with our employees so that they can cope up with COVID. Your employees will remember for a long time how they were treated during this crisis. Nothing drives employee loyalty and engagement more than knowing “my boss and my organization cares about me as a human being. The caring can be developed by being mindful about the situation. Though we all work from home, people are over stretching themselves as the work timings are getting stretched and it’s very hard to work from home sometimes as there is a lot of stuff happening around you at home. Not just this but the work culture has changed because everything is virtual and as senior management, managers, and employees, business owners we need to extremely mindful about it.

To Summarize what we have seen with our mindfulness mentors and practitioners at Indian Leadership Academy is:

Mindfulness@ work is necessary in today's world as most of the pain and suffering (so called pain points) at work is unnecessary and most of the so called problems are illusions in our mind and the so called Truth is within you. So be mindful at work and make your work life amazing.

CONCLUSION

Mindfulness practices are like the key to a golden life. The life expectancy, work output and emotional fulfilment of the practitioner and the people coming to their vicinity increases by several manifolds. Practices when incorporated into life in general, become habits. Habits when repeated over a long period of time, get pre-programmed and hard wired into the brain. Hardwiring mindfulness is like signing up for a life time of success, prosperity and goodwill. The brain is a radar for accepting and receiving information. It is the most wonderful equipment that God has adorned us with. Just like a smart phone, when multiple tabs are open, the system lags. Even with a smooth connection, the buffer will go round and round and the results will take uber long hours to show up. At times it might even happen that the system hangs and crashes completely. The same concepts can be applied to our mind as well. In order to keep the mind healthy and the results qualitative, it is very much essential to keep the mind engrossed and engaged in a single task. This will not only improve the mental efficiency but it has been proven that it increases accuracy and is time-effective as well. Committing to mindfulness practices is investing in self enhancement, it might not show the effects immediately but it will surely and definitely give abundant results in the long run. If not results, it will improve, enhance and maintain both the physical and mental health. The body and mind both are the part of the same system. The brain is the software to the hardware that we name as our body.

The journey of mindfulness is never ending and infinite. The most wonderful part of it is, it doesn't need any particular context to be implemented to. It can be a part of each and every genre and facet of your life. The only thing needed is to look within and dive deep. It is better to invest and take trial and tested benefits, than to not invest and incur irreparable losses. Let's join hands and create a chain of mindful individuals for the greater benefit of all.

Indian Leadership Academy - Workshops



INDIAN LEADERS - GLOBAL AUDIENCE

Have a wonderful Mindfulness Journey. See you soon!