

An Introduction
to
Mindfulness Meditation

Week 6
Mindfulness in Daily Life



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Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

by Portia Nelson

Chapter 1

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost...
I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in this same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in... it's a habit.
But, my eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.



The Journey

by Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.

"Mend my life!"

each voice cried.

But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.

But little by little,

as you left their voices behind,

the stars began to burn

through the sheets of clouds,

and there was a new voice

which you slowly

recognized as your own,

that kept you company

as you strode deeper and deeper

into the world,

determined to do

the only thing you could do--

determined to save

the only life you could save.



Turning Daily Routines into Spiritual Practice

by Joshua David O'Brien

Consider what makes some moments of our lives more meaningful than others.

Holidays

Take for example the Christmas season. In our predominantly Christian society, we place special importance on a particular day of a particular month to celebrate the birth of a particular person born over 2000 years ago. We decorate our homes, exchange gifts, send cards, gather with friends and family, and say things like "Happy Holidays," or "Merry Christmas." We even donate more to charity during this time of year. The date, however, that we celebrate the birth of Jesus is a matter of social convention. We're not really sure when Jesus was born. Depending on the source, Jesus was born on December 25th, October 2nd, September 29th, or April 6th! The significance we give to this time of year is completely arbitrary; strictly speaking, the reason for the season is a matter of debate.

Birthdays

Celebrating a birthday is a beautiful way to honor the anniversary of the day a human being came into this world, but what about leap year (day) babies? The way we keep track of time has evolved over thousands of years and the calendar has not always been the way it is now. Is it any less meaningful to celebrate their birthday on February 28th or March 1st during a non-leap year? It's not the date that's important, but the sentiment and feeling we bring to the date we choose to honor their birth.

"Time has no meaning in itself unless we choose to give it significance." ~ Leo F. Buscaglia

Songs and Symbolism

I have deeply patriotic friends who are moved when they salute the American flag and sing "The Star Spangled Banner" and I have devoutly Christian friends who are moved when they sing "Amazing Grace." The power of their experiences, however, are not in the songs themselves, but in the meaning the songs have for them individually.

Rituals around holidays, birthdays, special songs, or symbols are intended to infuse meaning and special feelings into daily life. But again, the quality of our ritual experiences lie not in the rituals themselves, but in how we relate to them. In other words, "the more significance you give the moment, the more the moment has the opportunity to be significant."

Daily Mindfulness Practices

In previous classes we've talked about the various ways we can integrate mindfulness into daily life. For example, our days are full of "transition moments," little fragments of time when we are moving from one chore to another, one place to another, or one activity to another, and we can use these little moments to stop doing and just "be" for a few seconds to break free of our habitual tendency to live on auto-pilot. When you're done brushing your teeth, when you've finished doing the dishes, when you get into your car, etc., just pause, feel yourself breathing, check in with your body, take in your senses, and really embody the present moment. When you drift off into thinking, come back to your senses if only for a few seconds.

Using Daily Routines to Support Mindfulness

"Transition Moments" invite us to be mindful in small pauses throughout the day. The use of Daily Routine invites us to be mindful in routine tasks, thus transforming the mundane into something meaningful. We learn to see that there are no ordinary moments in life; every moment is sacred and deeply spiritual if we are open to changing how we relate to those moments.

**"When every moment is rich with eternal significance,
there is neither the lingering clinging to the dead past,
nor a longing expectation for the future,
but an integral living in the eternal now."**

~ Meher Baba

Showering

Consider that much of the world's population doesn't have access to clean water, let alone clean HOT water on demand. We don't have to walk to a water source and carry water back home. We don't even need to heat it. All we have to do is turn a knob. It's truly a miracle and something to be thankful for every day.

Our morning shower is how we care for our body and keep it clean and healthy. We're among a privileged few in the world who can do so. Taking a shower helps to keep our body free of diseases, infections, and infestations. As you shower, be mindful of these facts, slow down just a little, pay attention to how it feels to care for your body and thank your body for taking care of you.

Getting Dressed

In the big picture of things, there is really no difference between getting dressed for your inauguration as President of the United States, getting dressed for work, or getting dressed for a day of chores. The difference only exists in the meaning we attribute to the occasion, not in the act of getting dressed itself. Slow down. Turn getting dressed into a sacred ceremony once in a while. Whether you're donning a tux/elegant gown or an old pair of jeans, imagine you are getting dressed for a momentous occasion – you really are – today is the only moment you have and it's a miracle that you have it.

Meals

As you prepare a meal and as you serve the food slow down and really notice the process. Be physically present with the moment and connect with heartfelt gratitude. Engage your senses. Imagine that you are taking part in a sacred ceremony from the Native American, Japanese, or Hindu cultures. It's fun, completely refreshing, and transformative.

Entering your Home or Your Meditation Room

There are a wide variety of rituals for entering a room, home, or sacred place from nearly every major religious and cultural background. Even in our Western culture it is common to wipe your feet before entering someone's home. You can do this mindfully and you might enjoy adding one of the following traditions to your daily routine:

Stop and bow as you cross the threshold into your home or your meditation room.

Mindfully remove your shoes before entering your home or meditation room.

Offer a short blessing as you enter your home such as, "Peace to everyone who finds shelter in these walls."

Meditation Rituals

Before you sit to meditate, dim the lighting, light a candle and some incense, offer a blessing or prayer, and ring a bell before you start and when you're finished.

"The Sabbath was Made for Man, Not Man for the Sabbath" ~ Jesus

Remember that rituals are just tools to help you stay present in the moment and connected to the significance of each moment. If you find yourself just going through the motions, refresh your intention to be mindful by coming to your senses and connecting with your body and heart.



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Mindful Speech

Have you noticed how challenging it is to stay mindful of speech?

Suzuki Roshi was asked: "What do you think of all these American Students?"

He responded: "You are all enlightened until you open your mouth."

The way we speak and the way we listen has deep implications in our lives. Our speech not only affects our relationships with others, but also our relationship with ourselves. Expressing our anger to the customer service person, is not only hurtful to them, but is hurtful to our own peace of mind.

Many of us have unhelpful habits of speech. During conversation it can be difficult to stay mindful; it can be helpful to have some guidelines:

Pause and Relax

- Pause briefly before speaking and reconnect with your body and feelings and relax. Notice your intention.

Listen Deeply

- Try to let go of your own thoughts and agenda, and pay attention to what the other person is saying. Notice any judgments and let them go, staying receptive. This doesn't mean you agree with what is being said, but rather you are giving your full presence and attention.
- Notice their tone of voice, and if they are in front of you, notice their posture and facial expression. Not to judge, but to respond to the entire communication, not just the words.
- Notice any tendency you may have to rush to respond or to cut them off.
- Allow a small amount of your attention to rest in your body, note if any areas are tensing, and gently relax what you can relax. Paying attention to having a "soft belly" can be helpful.
- When the other person is done speaking, pause before responding, giving some space for what they have said to settle.

Guidelines for Skillful Speech: If unsure, consider the following:

- Is it true?
- Is it kind?
- Does it harm anyone?
 - Even if you disagree, it can be said kindly.
 - Even if what you say is unpleasant, it can be said with a kind intention.
- Is it helpful?
- Is this the right time to say it?

Speech to Refrain From: For some of us it's easier to focus on what type of speech to stay away from.

- Refrain from lying.
- Refrain from "malicious" speech.
 - Speech that might encourage discord in relationships.
 - When talking about someone: are you representing the person with dignity?
- Refrain from "harsh" speech.
 - This includes: tone of voice; scolding, condemning, or reproving someone angrily; using bitter words, cursing – insulting someone, being sarcastic.
- Refrain from "idle chatter."
 - This refers to speaking without connecting, without purpose, talking for the sake of talking.
 - Sometimes even forgetting there is someone else listening to you.
 - Sometimes you may want to "break the ice", and though the topic may seem trivial, the purpose is to connect, so then it would be skillful speech.

Support Quotes

Week 6 – Mindfulness in Daily Life

"Life is not lost by dying; life is lost minute by minute, day by dragging day, in all the small uncaring ways." ~ Stephen Vincent Benet

"The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently." ~ Pema Chödrön

"The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is nothing we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds." ~ R.D. Laing

"The habit of ignoring our present moments in favor of others yet to come leads directly to a pervasive lack of awareness of the web of life in which we are embedded. This includes a lack of awareness and understanding of our own mind and how it influences our perceptions and our actions. It severely limits our perspective on what it means to be a person and how we are connected to each other and the world around us. Religion has traditionally been the domain of such fundamental inquiries within a spiritual framework, but mindfulness has little to do with religion, except in the most fundamental meaning of the word, as an attempt to appreciate the deep mystery of being alive and to acknowledge being vitally connected to all that exists." ~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

"Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't)." ~ James Baraz

"If you are only free when you are comfortable, you're not really free." ~ Gil Fronsdal

"We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us, that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet." ~ W. B. Yeats

