

Mindlessness to Mindfulness

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The mind is inherently restless, more so with increasing external stimulation and distractions. It fluctuates and wavers while multitasking – picking up cues from the surroundings and making sense of sensory bombards while keeping up with internal interpretations and emotional reactions. Mind naturally drifts to irrelevances despite conscious effort.

The notion of multitasking is a myth. Doing more than one thing at a time leads to appreciation of neither. Science has proven that mind can do several things simultaneously but only focus on one at any given moment. This means, we gain little from mechanical multitasking and are perhaps losing the experience of that one activity that mind can process. Indeed, multitasking should be redefined as ‘an ability to avoid more than one thing at a time!’

Our ability to reduce wavering of mind is compromised by an urban fast paced techno lifestyle with sensory overdrive. We are connected with everything and everyone except those in the vicinity. To avoid sensory overwhelm, the mind compartmentalises information by characteristics and categories. So, when a similar thing or situation is perceived, we instantly process it using our resources. This aspect is beneficial but leads one to become judgmental and opinionated. The result is handling the information in an automated manner like a programmed robot without awareness. To put it simply – it is using our mind, but mindlessly.

Reducing this restless state by distraction, disassociation, focusing or an age-old method of **‘living in the moment with meditative practice’** has gained momentum. The need and benefits of internal stillness do not require scientific confirmation, but have to be experienced. The idea of letting your mind settle is there in every religion, spiritual practices, cultures, traditions and ways of life. We all need to look inside for reflection, in order

to make coherent sense of the world outside. Happiness is a journey, not a destination, and it must begin from within.

The idea of living in the moment is termed rightly as 'mindfulness'. It means that we need to redevelop some perspective of our actions and things around us, in order to reconnect and learn new ways to experience sensory materials. Importantly, appreciate every aspect of our being, and not just see the whole but also minute details of things.

Mindfulness is living in the moment, here and now, with full conscious awareness, without distraction. In such a state, mind is trained to commit and focus on the said activity. Example: begin with a simple 5- 10 minutes focus on breathing in a relaxed posture, ideally with eyes closed. See, feel and hear your breathing. Observe the mind waver and simply bring it back to the breath. Don't judge why and where mind drifts, your job is to bring it back! Notice how your senses heighten and

you begin to experience stillness within minutes. Do this twice a day everyday to reap lasting benefits.

The likes of Jon Kabat-Zinn with his seminal book 'Full Catastrophic Living' have brought to practice mindfulness and its application in clinical practice, especially in the western world. Notable health and well-being benefits seen across different ages, races, genders, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds are the reason for the shift from medication to meditation, albeit slow, but definitive.

Perhaps practice of reflection and mindfulness meditation should no longer be deemed as alternative therapy, but as a stand-alone first line intervention or as an equal contributor with medicine in management of emotional distress and ailments. Indeed, mindfulness should be embraced outside therapy settings and deemed as a lifestyle that will have preventative role for common ailments of the mind and enable a better and

satisfactory life.

We can make our perception an active act and see as we must with our eyes open. Mindlessness is learned and developed. We can unlearn it and move to a fuller existence. Mindfulness can be cultivated; all that is needed is a willing participant. It stands true that life should not be seen by the number of years we live but by the moments is those years.

One life one world. If not now then when, and if not here then where? These questions are often ignored but call for a change in the way we live and experience every moment. We ought to move from mindlessness to mindfulness.

Dale Carnegie quoted, 'Remember, today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.' This is a powerful quote worth contemplating. My interpretation reads as: 'appreciate, experience and enjoy the moments today, for tomorrow we shall look back and rejoice yesterday.'

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