





1

The Need for Mindfulness

Many of us have become so entrenched in getting things done, worrying about the future, ruminating about the past, and making comparisons that we don't spend much time in this moment.

The late Alan Watts talked about the trick that is played on all of us from the time we are children.¹ We are bombarded with the idea that some great thing will be coming in the future. When you're old enough, you get to go to kindergarten – won't that be great? Then first grade, then second grade. You can look forward to middle school, then high school, then college! Along the way, you long for the day you will meet that special someone who will make your life feel more complete, and perhaps start a family. Eventually you get to enter the world of work, where you can make and save money to get those things you've always wanted to make you happy. You fight your way up the ladder, believing that things will be so much better after you get that next promotion. And once you get that nice house and reliable car and perfect partner, life will be so much easier. Finally your kids grow up and get lives of their own. When you get to retirement, too tired to enjoy it from the stress of working so hard all those years, you realize that your life is almost over, and you were absent from most of it. As the saying goes, life is what happened to you while you were busy making other plans.

Mindfulness: Living through Challenges and Enriching Your Life in This Moment, First Edition.
Richard W. Sears.
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*The Need for Mindfulness* 3

If we don't have much practice living in the moment we are in, how can we expect to enjoy that future we long for when it finally does arrive? Have you ever achieved a long sought-after goal, only to have the joy wear off after a few days, quickly setting your sights on your next future goal? If we are in the habit of always thinking of the next thing, we lose the skill of truly appreciating the present moment.

When we were young kids, the summers seemed to last forever, but as we grow older, time seems to slip away from us. The amount of time each of us has each day is the same as it has always been, but why does it feel like it moves so quickly? Why don't we have more time with all of the amazing technological advances we've made? With email and texting, I can now communicate with others instantly, anytime, anywhere. No longer do I have to write out a letter, walk to the post office, buy a stamp, and mail it. With instant access to databases on my computer and my phone, no longer do I have to spend hours researching information in a library on how to repair something in my house. With microwave ovens, I can cook my food in less time than it takes me to eat it.

How is it that our ancestors were able to sit on the porch every evening, watching the sunset, when they had to do things like prepare all their meals from scratch and wash their clothes by hand? Why does it feel like we seldom get a break from all the problems in our lives? Is it even possible to be more present, with all of our responsibilities, in the midst of all this modern chaos?

For many of us, it seems there is always "one more thing" to deal with, another problem to tackle, and we are waiting for things to calm down so we can start to live. Sometimes years can go by, and instead of the problems going away, they gradually wear us down, mentally and physically. It is difficult to accept that suffering is a natural part of life, and that how we relate to suffering makes all the difference. We get caught in vicious circles. We get stressed out that we are so stressed. We become anxious about our anxiety. We get scared of how afraid we feel. We feel depressed that we are so depressed all the time. We get angry about our anger. We hurt so much from our pain. We feel guilty about feeling so much guilt. We become addicted to our addictions. We are impatient with our impatience. We feel irritated about our irritability. We judge how judgmental we are. We rarely give ourselves permission to feel what we are truly feeling.

Though traumatic childhoods are all too common, most of us can remember how much easier it was to fully engage in our activities and relationships when we were younger. When we hurt, we cried and let it out, and usually felt better quickly. When we were happy, we could laugh from the very depths of our being. We explored with curiosity all the wonders in the world around us.

My preschooler notices the most ordinary things around her with amazement, things that most adults take for granted. My teenager, however,



4 *Mindfulness*



Kids enjoying the beach. © Richard Sears.

has become indoctrinated and hypnotized into the realm of thinking and judgments, where not having an Internet connection is worse than death, one instant message can make or ruin her day, and comparison with peers is constant. Kids are being pressured to grow up very quickly these days, and too often leave behind some of their best qualities.

Mindfulness, the ability to pay attention in the present moment, is a natural human process that we are all born with, but tends to diminish as we grow older and get caught up in the world of thoughts. While thinking is important, when our lives are spent anticipating the future, or living in the past, we miss the richness of the moment we are in now. Fostering mindfulness allows us to more consciously participate in our lives, breaking us out of the mindless routines we often fall into automatically. When facing challenges, we can learn to step out of old habits that make the situation worse, consciously responding rather than unconsciously reacting. We can allow our emotions to rise and fall without getting as stuck in them. We can also choose to notice more often the beauty in the world around us, to appreciate the sound of good music, and to savor the connection we feel when we look into the eyes of those we love.

Although an ancient practice in many cultures, mindfulness is supported by hundreds of modern research studies that demonstrate amazing benefits



The Need for Mindfulness 5

for our mental and physical health. Medical imaging even shows growth in important areas of the brain after only eight weeks of practicing a mindfulness program like the one outlined in Chapter 7.

Of all the people I have met, one of the individuals who most embodies mindfulness is the Dalai Lama. Despite the many horrors he faced during the invasion of his native Tibet, resulting in the death of one million of its six million inhabitants, he captures everyone he speaks to with his genuine presence and his smile. When he stops to look and talk with you, you can sense that he is not thinking about other things. You feel as if you are the most important thing in the world at that moment.

The first time I met him, I was assisting Stephen K. Hayes with a security detail for a public presentation the Dalai Lama was giving. Mr. Hayes kindly assigned me to be backstage when His Holiness arrived. Another young woman waited beside me. Through my radio earpiece, I knew when he arrived, but still felt some surprise when he came in through the backstage entrance by himself. I immediately put my hands together in a gesture of respect, which he did also. He walked toward me, beaming with sparkling eyes. His translator walked in close behind, and I didn't understand what they were saying. All I could make out was the word "ninja," which His Holiness repeated with raised eyebrows and a questioning smile. For a moment which felt frozen in time, he looked at me as if nothing else mattered, despite the thousands of people waiting for him. He then gave both of us hugs before walking onto the stage to a cheering audience. I briefly shared a gaze of amazement with the woman beside me, then I followed him out to stand beside the stage and watch the crowd as he spoke to them.

Mindful awareness is a counter to our pervasive state of mindlessness. Have you ever found yourself pulling into your driveway at the end of the day, not really remembering how you got there? Perhaps you were deep in thought, or having an important phone conversation. It's likely you were driving safely, stopping at red lights, and avoiding the other cars, but you did not notice what you were doing with your conscious attention. We spend much of our lives in this "automatic pilot" mode.

Doing things automatically is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it is a wonderful time saver. If I am driving down the road and an animal jumps out in front of me, and I stop to consciously think, "Let's see now, how do I stop this car? Oh yeah, one of the pedals down here. Now which one was it?," it will of course be too late.

However, if we continuously operate on automatic pilot, we can get ourselves into trouble. My friend David Allison would say "My brain has a mind of its own!" whenever he found himself doing something he hadn't intended to do. I once was driving a friend home, and we got into a rich conversation. As I pulled into my own driveway, I remembered, "Oh yeah, I was supposed to take you home!"



6 *Mindfulness*

The hardest automatic patterns to catch are those of thinking and feeling. Many years ago, a coworker walked by me, and I said, “Hey, good job on that project you did yesterday.”

He stopped and glared at me for a moment, then said, “What do you mean by that?”

Confused for a moment, I simply repeated “I just thought you did a nice job on the work you did.”

His stare intensified, and he looked angry. “What are you saying?”

I was perplexed for a moment, because he was not normally argumentative like this. I suddenly remembered that he had told me he was going through a divorce. It dawned on me that he probably had become accustomed to a lot of sarcasm from his soon to be ex-wife, so he assumed I was being sarcastic. I felt comfortable enough to say this to him, and he was able to laugh at himself and admit it was true.

You can imagine what would have happened had I not caught this. I could have thought, or heaven forbid, said out loud, “Excuse me, you jerk, I was just trying to give you a compliment!,” thereby bringing to life the very thing he was defending against. Our friendship could have been strained or even ended due to a misunderstanding. Of course, it’s often easier to catch the automatic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others, and harder to notice our own.

When I was a psychology trainee at a children’s hospital, I worked with a young child who was very confused about why his mother brought him to this stranger to be given a lot of questions. I was able to engage him enough to get through the psychological testing, but every now and then, he would suddenly stop and look up at me with wide eyes, and ask in a loud voice, “What’s going on?!”

Though this young boy was asking out of anxiety, we can learn to ask ourselves what we are experiencing right now as a way of getting more in touch with this moment. If we continuously forget to do this, we may just be engaging in outdated habits, or following along with what everyone else expects of us, without question. We can still choose to do what we were going to do automatically, but we can notice if it is moving us toward or away from the person we want to be and the life we want to live. In my psychotherapy practice, it is very common to hear someone stare off sadly and say, “I just don’t know how my life ended up like this.”

When we check into this moment, we often find more space for a wider range of conscious choices. The advice is often given that if you receive an email that really upsets you, you should wait at least 24 hours before responding. Have you ever responded to something hastily, only to regret what you said the next day? Perhaps someone was rude to you, but how you responded made it look like you were the one who was overly emotional and irrational.

*The Need for Mindfulness* 7

I once worked with a student who did not follow this advice. I emailed him some feedback about a project he was working on, and he immediately fired back a five-page litany about all the things he didn't like about me and our agency. My immediate urge was to "counterattack," expressing how ungrateful he was for the time it took me to develop that feedback, all the years of support I had given him, and so on. However, sensing how strong my feelings were, I decided to sit with it and talk to colleagues. It actually took me days before I was ready to put the effort into composing a response that was professional and helpful, rather than venting to make myself feel better.

Even habits that we have worked hard to develop in the past can get in the way if they are done unconsciously. One of my therapy clients recently told me that his wife grabbed his arm, and he automatically thrust his thumb into one of her pressure points. Thankfully she was not hurt, but the man had said it was due to his military combat training.

Many years ago, when I was a new martial arts instructor, I too had worked hard to develop some automatic responses, but discovered I had to move beyond that, and always notice the situation as it is first. My school was on the corner of an intersection, with only a sidewalk between it and a busy highway. The all-glass construction made it easy for passersby to see what we were doing inside, which seemed good for marketing when I leased the place. One day, after class, I was standing in the lobby chatting with a friend and student named Phillip. I then began tidying up, when I heard a loud banging sound. I looked up, and a car was coming directly at me at high speed – it had been hit and pushed by another car running a red light. I turned away and ran across the floor of the school as quickly as I could. I then heard the sound of glass shattering behind me as the car smashed through the lobby doors. I turned around, and watched helplessly as Phillip was backing up and stumbling with the car headed right for him. Luckily, the car had been slowed somewhat by the door frames, and as Phillip reached the opposite wall and could go no further, the car came to a stop only inches away from him.

Amazingly, no one had been hurt. Tim, one of my other students, an Emergency Medical Technician, took charge of the scene until help arrived. What haunted me for weeks after that was the image of my friend backing away from the car. It could have turned out much differently. It was good that I had been able to save myself, but I had not given any thought to my friend in that moment. My training took on a whole new level when I realized that I had only been learning to protect myself, rather than keeping a broader awareness of the entire situation. Eventually, I became better at pausing, even for a fraction of a second, to prevent reacting in ways that could make things worse. I have learned that I can often process a situation more wisely without taking the time to think everything through in words.

Being in the present moment is very simple, though not necessarily easy. Many of us get inculcated by society into thinking that our sense of



8 *Mindfulness*

self-esteem rests on what we achieve or accomplish. Our lives can become more about “doing” rather than “being.” As Alan Watts observed,² most of our activities are about getting something. We drive to get somewhere. We learn things so we can get a better job. We work to get money. We might even take time for ourselves because it will help us relax so that we can work better afterwards. However, most of us do recognize some exceptions, such as music and dancing. When you listen to music, you don’t play it fast to get it over with. You enjoy the sounds. When you dance, you don’t aim to arrive at a particular spot on the floor. You enjoy the dancing itself. When we realize that all we truly have is just this very moment, we can dance no matter what we are doing.

Is your life a march or a dance? Are you enjoying the journey, or only thinking about the “destination”? Being in touch with this moment fosters a sense of being, even in the midst of busy doing. As Kierkegaard said, life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved.

When our goal is to get something out of life, we always feel like we need more time. Despite research demonstrating that you can actually get more done if you focus on one thing at a time, we habitually multitask in the hope that we can “save” time and hence we are never fully present in what we are doing. Even having a nice conversation with a friend, there may be constant distractions of “dings” from text messages. Whenever you have “a free moment,” you may immediately feel compelled to check your phone and email messages.

Being in a state of chronic busyness, or even crisis, is sometimes compelling and addictive – when I’ve got fires to put out, I don’t have time to figure out what life is all about. Technology and busyness can become a way to avoid unpleasant feelings. Now that we can be “online” 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, if a little loneliness creeps up, we can text someone or check our social networking site. We never fully feel sad, and therefore never fully feel happy. We feel increasingly estranged from ourselves, from others, and from the world we live in.

I am certainly not suggesting that we give up technology, only that we need to learn how to use it wisely rather than having it use us. I am in awe that I have written most of this book on a computer tablet smaller than a piece of paper, and thinner than the width of my pinky nail. My phone can pay my bills and balance my checkbook, find my exact global coordinates, create spreadsheets and documents, and tune my guitar.

We can even use technology to enhance our relationships. The bulk of my work with students and colleagues is done online. When I am traveling, my youngest daughter and I can see each other while I read bedtime stories to her. Through social networking sites, I have been able to stay connected to childhood friends I had almost forgotten. I have tens of thousands of emails in my inbox, from people all over the world (yeah, I need to delete some).

*The Need for Mindfulness* 9

But technology can create shallow, unfulfilling relationships, especially if we overly rely on it, and don't spend enough time in direct face-to-face contact with others. Have you ever seen teens sitting at a table and texting without looking at each other? What about the literally thousands of "friends" many have on their social networking sites? When she was 13, my daughter could not understand why I was concerned that she was spending hours on video calls with a 25-year-old-man in Brazil that she had never met in person.

This constant distraction, push for productivity, and lack of fulfilling relationships produces a serious strain on our stress response system. What was meant to be a short-term burst to help us survive a threat from a wild animal becomes a continuous bath of stress chemicals that causes long-term damage to our bodies.

Even when we are sleeping, our minds don't get much rest. Sleep is vital to our health, but whether you remember them or not, our nights are full of dreams. When I was a teenager, I read about lucid dreaming, and became fascinated. If I could consciously participate in or control my dreams, I would get so much more accomplished! For many of us, our sleep is a deep blank, and when we wake up the next day, we remember little if anything about our dreams. Following the advice of some books I had read, I got in the habit of keeping a dream journal, though early on there were many entries which said, "I do not remember any dreams this morning." Over the course of a year, I found that I could easily write many pages about my dreams each morning, and just didn't have the time to write them all down. It was an odd feeling to recognize that my mind never got a break! Even while asleep, I was continuously having all kinds of strange adventures, working hard to solve unimportant problems, and having a multitude of interactions with nonexistent people. While we are dreaming, we take what we are doing so seriously, but when we wake up, we realize it was all in our minds.

Incidentally, I was able to lucid dream several times. In the dreams, I felt just as awake as I do now, but slipped back into regular dreaming after a few minutes. I then wondered, was I dreaming that I was awake? Am I really awake now? The wisdom traditions say that much of our lives are spent in a sort of sleepwalking state.

As Woody Allen keenly observed, "Ninety percent of life is showing up." Yet we are often absent from our own lives. When we are talking with someone, we might be thinking about what we are going to say next instead of listening. While we are eating, we might be ruminating about something that happened yesterday. We can get lost in our daydreams, and get worked up over things that are only taking place in our heads.

Have you ever had the experience of talking on the phone, and suddenly stopping to ask, "Hello? Are you there?" You may not have even consciously known why you stopped to ask that, you just had a sense that they were not



10 *Mindfulness*

really there. They may have said, “Yeah, I’m here,” but you just knew they must have been checking their email or something. Have you ever had a healthcare provider who barely made eye contact, and dismissed your questions before you even finished asking them? Research shows that providers who make a conscious effort to practice mindfulness, or to be more present in their interactions, not only reduce their own stress, but produce better outcomes for their patients.³

We have all experienced being fully present, though it usually happens in extraordinary circumstances. You break out of old routines when traveling in exotic places, having a new experience, enjoying yourself in an amusement park, or holding hands with someone you love while watching shooting stars under the summer sky. Our brains are also designed to pay attention to and remember things that could be dangerous. If you’ve ever been in a car accident, you know that you can become so present that things seem to be happening in slow motion. You are also much more aware of your surroundings the next time you drive.

Of course, we have all experienced many other, less dramatic moments in which we felt fully present and alive. Watching a child smile and say, “I love you,” listening to a song that gives you goose bumps, enjoying the taste of a good meal. Practicing mindfulness helps us more consistently notice the richness in our lives, and helps us navigate more wisely through the tough times.

Mindfulness is like falling in love with the moment, over and over again. Just being with the person you love is enough – you don’t have to get something from them. When you look in their eyes, you feel as if you have all the time in the world, for you can sense eternity in that moment. And just as going through tough times brings you closer to the ones you love, staying present when things are difficult builds a sense of intimacy with all of our fellow human beings and the world around us, though we may not appreciate it at the time.

Sometimes when I talk about the benefits of mindfulness, I feel like a snake oil seller, stereotypically featured in Hollywood movies about the Old West. Wagons traveled through small towns and sold their healing “elixirs” (often simply containing mineral oil, alcohol, and traces of odds and ends) for exorbitant sums of money. Claims were made that the elixirs could cure everything from bunions to snake bites. The wagons then mysteriously vanished the next morning before their customers could give feedback on the effectiveness of the treatment.

Mindfulness has also been touted to help an amazing range of problems, like stress, addictions, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, cancer, eating disorders, heart disease, irritable bowel syndrome, stuttering, post-traumatic stress disorder, psoriasis, and psychosis, to name a few. And did I mention

*The Need for Mindfulness* 11

that mindfulness also increases positive emotions like happiness, empathy, and self-compassion?

How can this possibly be? Is mindfulness some kind of hypnosis where people think they're better? Is it all placebo effect?

The placebo effect is a very real phenomenon. Our bodies sometimes have the seemingly miraculous capacity to get better just because we think we can get better. Drug manufacturers who are testing new products must also secretly give some of the test subjects a pill containing plain sugar, or some other inert substance, and they often get better too. A popular cartoon shows a patient shopping at a pharmacy, trying to choose between bottles labeled "placebo" and "extra-strength placebo."

Yet, in hundreds of high-quality, randomized studies that control for the placebo effect, mindfulness still shows significant improvements not only for mental and physical problems like those listed above, but for such things as relationships and quality of life as well. This is not snake oil. It is not placebo effect. We can measure significant positive changes in the lives of those who practice mindfulness, and even see growth in important parts of their brains using medical scanners.

It seems that more effectively managing our emotions, especially the stress response, is one of the key reasons why mindfulness helps in so many areas. Up to 90 percent of problems that bring someone to a primary care physician have at least some stress-related component. Of course, stress alone does not cause a disease like bubonic plague to spring up out of nowhere. But it does two serious things – it can make you more vulnerable to getting diseases, and it can make any current conditions worse by interfering with your body's ability to defend and heal itself. If we experience too much ongoing stress, it will manifest in different ways for different people, sometimes physical, sometimes mental, sometimes both.

A friend of mine's father, a very practical and conservative man, at times would feel so overwhelmed by his stress that he would say, "Time to move to Tahiti and paint nudes." But most of us can't escape our work and family responsibilities.

The good news is that we can begin having a richer, more fulfilling life starting right now, even in the midst of a busy life. A theme of this book is how to develop mindful awareness as an integral part of our everyday lives. If this becomes another "thing to do," it produces more stress than it solves. By letting go of old habits, we can shift from surviving to living, from doing to being.

I will be sharing material transmitted for thousands of years from person to person, in addition to the latest scientific evidence for how and why mindfulness works. To make these concepts useful and practical, I will share classic examples as well as stories from my own life and from the



12 *Mindfulness*

lives of those whose journeys I have been privileged to share through my clinical work.

As a young teenager, I read books about the ninja with fascination. Stephen K. Hayes was the first Westerner to venture to Japan in the 1970s to train with the last living ninja grandmaster. As a nerdy kid who had been picked on, I wanted to learn to protect myself and others, and was fortunate to be able to train regularly with Mr. Hayes. His brilliant modern adaptation, *To-Shin Do*, emphasizes the self-development aspects of the ninja arts. Though the techniques themselves are very useful from a practical point of view, they also serve as models for coming to a deeper understanding of how struggle happens, how we get in our own way, and how resistance can make things worse. It is about developing sophisticated strategies for achieving goals, and about understanding relationships and interpersonal dynamics. Most of all, the art of the ninja is about the human mind.

Our minds are far more powerful than any physical techniques, and can also do far more damage to ourselves and others than any external attacker. Though I considered some of the teachings of the Asian wisdom traditions strange at first, once I delved into them I found them fascinatingly profound. I was fortunate enough to find teachers who could separate out the deeply interwoven cultural aspects from the universal principles of the teachings. Without really intending it, I was ordained into a 2,500-year-old lineage when I was only 21 years old, the age I also received a black belt in our 900-year-old ninja art.

Once I was perceived as a teacher, I felt that my meditation training had not prepared me adequately to work effectively with many of the problems of modern society. Students would sometimes pay me for private lessons, but spend much of the time talking to me about their personal problems and relationships.

Having always been fascinated by science, I eventually chose to get a doctorate in clinical psychology, as it was more socially acceptable at the time than “meditation instructor.” I had also found therapy very helpful when I had gone through some tough times. In graduate school, I eagerly studied the wealth of research about how the brain and the mind work. Interestingly, even the most concrete, scientific findings began to confirm for me many of the things I had learned from the Asian wisdom traditions.

To my delight, solid research began pouring out on the effectiveness of mindfulness. Having a depth of experience and training in both mindfulness and psychology, I could integrate them in a synergistic way, and I have greatly enjoyed sharing the principles I have learned with others.

How about you? How did you come to be reading this book? What are you hoping to get? What do you want to bring into your life? What is important to you? I challenge you to be more than a passive reader – I hope you can use this material to enrich your own life, starting right now.

*The Need for Mindfulness* 13

You don't have to go on faith. There is plenty of scientific evidence to support giving it a try, and your own experiences and results will be reinforcement enough.

Mindfulness is often used as a spiritual practice, and you can certainly apply the principles in this book toward that end. Because there are many other books written from that perspective, I will focus on the secular and practical applications. However, you may come to experience a broadening of your personal spirituality, in the sense of finding more meaning, and of having a greater feeling of connection to the world we live in. Even a deep study of physics and of the brain can lead to profound realizations about the nature of the universe, who we are, and how we and everything are interconnected. As Carl Sagan noted, "We are made of star stuff."⁴ The minerals in our blood and bones were literally created by the stars. We need air, water, earth, and other people just as much as we need our hearts, brains, and skin. By paying attention, we can more often notice and internalize the insight that our very existence is due to the contributions of countless other beings and processes. We are so much bigger than we realize.

Such insights are hard to come by, however, when we are feeling overwhelmed by life stressors. Sometimes mindfulness is presented as all rainbows and light, and therefore alienates people who are truly suffering and have very difficult life circumstances. These are the people I work with the most, so throughout this book I will give very concrete and practical suggestions for using this material to get through tough times, in addition to discussing the positive benefits of living life more fully.

It is easy to talk about being in the moment if you are a monastic in a beautiful, serene setting. But is it possible to learn and practice in the full swing of modern urban technological busyness? Can it be done while working 80 hours per week, trying to pay all the bills, raising children, dealing with a relative with schizophrenia, and managing a teen with addiction problems? I am here to tell you that it is possible, and urgently needed. I myself have these things in my life, and I and other therapists work with a broad variety of people with problems that would make soap operas look boring.

I have done work in hospitals, clinics, prisons, office buildings, homes, universities, morgues, cornfields, factories, and temples. I have worked with thousands of individuals, and have seen literally every disorder in the diagnostic manual. I have worked with police and security officers, members of all branches of the military, veterans of wars, and high level business executives, in addition to "ordinary" people. I find that most people don't realize how extraordinary they really are.

I have welcomed children into this world, and watched loved ones die in front of me. I have had guns pointed at me, and have survived physical attacks. I have narrowly escaped my own death a few times, and have been able to save a few lives.



14 *Mindfulness*

I say these things not to impress you, but to let you know that I am not approaching this material from a naive or purely theoretical perspective. The challenges in your life cannot be easily dismissed, and I will not give pithy platitudes as if those things alone could transform your suffering.

The older I get, the less need I have for extreme experiences, and the more I enjoy all the little moments that constitute my life. My typical days now consist of work and child care, but I find it vivid and fascinating, and feel blessed to have a career that both engages me and helps others. I find it magical to feel the wind on my face, to hear the sound of the laughter of my daughter, and to feel heartbeats when I hold the person I love in my arms.

While my life is far from perfect, practicing mindfulness has made it richer than I would have previously thought possible. I have learned to more fully embrace the joy, the sadness, the good fortune, and the tragedies. I increasingly appreciate that without the horrible things I have experienced, I would not so treasure the wonders and love I have also experienced.

Practicing mindfulness does not make all of your problems go away, and it will certainly not “cure” all of your ills, but it can help you be more clear about what is actually happening moment-to-moment. With increased awareness, you can make more conscious choices about how to respond instead of falling back into old, unhelpful patterns. Of course, it will take some dedication and work to undo a lifetime of engaging in habits that may no longer serve you.

Tell me, if you became a little more present in your life right now, if you suffered just a little less, if your relationships deepened just a little, if you moved just a little closer to the things you value in life, wouldn't it be worth a little effort?

In the next chapter, we will explore more about what mindfulness is. The practice is very simple, but very rich in how it can transform our moments.