

Mindfulness as Giving Room

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So, it feels a little bit settled. Maybe volume up a little bit. Let's see. Is that you hear me? Okay. So, one way of understanding mindfulness practice, one way of understanding what mindfulness can do or what it is, is that mindfulness is the act of giving space, room for what's happening so we can know it better. So by saying it that way, often people define mindfulness first and foremost by some kind of knowing, being aware, being present, being mindful of things. But here in this definition, it starts with giving space to things.

Right. I like the expression, breathing room. You give whatever is here, breathing room. And part of why this is so useful is that when you give something space, you're allowing it to be there. But in giving it space, you're also not condoning it, you're not getting involved in it, you're not picking it up, you're not attacking it. You're not maybe, you're not even doing the complicated thing of accepting it. You're just making room for it.

Okay, make room for this. Let me see what it is. Let it be there. And now let me know it. Let me know it in this spacious kind of way. So if we're going to be with our breathing, give breathing room to your breath.

Breathing needs room. So to sit maybe in a way that we're not getting crunched or bent over. There's room to breathe. So there's space for the breathing. But if there's a lot of thinking going on, it's possible in the same kind of contracted way in which you're thinking kind of think more about how terrible is to be thinking so much, and just adding fuel to the fire. But to be mindful of thinking is to give room for the thinking mind.

Make space for it. And now there's two things going on. There's the thinking and there's the space, the spaciousness, the room around it. And that makes it possible not to be so wedded to the thinking, not be so engaged in it and needing to fix it or participate in it. Just room. If there's a lot of emotion, make room for it.

Allow yourself to feel what you're feeling. If it's anger, make room for the anger, first and foremost. Just, okay, this is what's happening. So the task is to give it breathing room. Task is to make space for it, to get out of its way. Kind of allow it to be there.

So it can be known better. But known in a way that we're not participating in it. Known in a way we're not indulging in it or reacting to it or caught in some kind of reactivity. It's just, okay, let's make room. Let's make room. Let's make room.

And you've probably had experiences in your life where when you had a lot more room for something, it was easier to be with it. Some people go for long walks and in nature, in order to kind of somehow the space in nature just gives room for you. And that seems to make it easier to be with whatever you're feeling. But if you're kind of, you know, been at your computer all day and pile of books and activities and jobs to do and... Maybe you're lucky enough to have two computers. One has all your emails on it, and one has all your to-do lists on it, and a pile of books, and this and that.

You can't even get off your desk because it's too many papers on the floor, and you spend all day that way, and you have this emotional turmoil. It's not really the right place to kind of give space and room to your turmoil, unless you really close your eyes and take some deep breaths. But go for a walk in the park. Give yourself space, room, breathing room, for the sense of turmoil to have space and just be there. So the idea in meditation also, that's a place that gives lots of room. And one of the fascinating things that can happen in meditation is a shift from being preoccupied with our preoccupations, being preoccupied with some things, something that we're concerned with, some thoughts, some history, some memory, some fear, some... we're preoccupied and there's no room in there.

To now we focus instead on that, we focus on the space, the absence. It's easy for some people to come into a social situation and first and foremost focus on all the people. You know, who should I sit with, close to? Should I not so close to? Who's safe? Who's not safe?

Do I fit in here? Do I belong to these people? The people, people, people. That's okay, maybe. But there's also space. Something different happens when we look at the space, the space between people, the space between us.

Someone told me, I think yesterday, about a Buddhist teacher that when he meets with one-on-one with people, he pays attention to the space between them. That's a little bit different than focusing on the person. I don't think that means to ignore the person, but when there's focus on the space, it means maybe we're with the person in actually a better way because we're less likely to be with the person through the lens of our preoccupation. With the lens

of me, myself and mine. Let us through the lens of somehow the social dynamics is first and foremost and only thing that we're focusing on. We're making space.

And what that allows when you give room and space for whatever is happening, it allows for more of you to be in process with it, more of you to sense and feel what's going on. More of you is available to take it in and be smart and intelligent with it. When there's no space, not only are we claustrophobic or preoccupied, but we're actually limiting... our full intelligence, our full ability to process something because we've made it all kind of into a little tight bundle of concern. And so we make things room for things. It's easier for that thing to be there.

It's easier to know it and see what it is with clarity. But it also becomes easier for more of you to be part of it and to engage in it and to process it than if you're trying to solve it through your thinking. Thinking usually doesn't solve a lot of things, especially our emotional, social life. There's much deeper. We have whole inner ways in which the heart works, the heart heals, the heart. Our inner life processes things, that's so much richer than what's available by just simply thinking about things all the time.

And I know that well because there was a time where I did a lot of thinking. Thinking, thinking would solve my problems. And slowly I learned through this practice that there's a better way. And that is to give breathing room to what's here. Give space. So one definition of mindfulness is the practice of giving room, space, to what is happening so that we can know it better, know it more fully.

And in that process, know ourselves more fully in relationship to it. So may you give lots of space. It may a gift, may it be a gift you give to other people. Because if you don't give space for others to be themselves... then I think it kind of complicates the social world a lot. A lot of people can really, a lot of people can thrive if you just give them enough space to be themselves. So thank you.