

Mindfulness

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"Living in mindful awareness means to live in the present moment, your mind and body dwelling in the very here and now."

*From "Old Path White Clouds, Walking in the footsteps of the Buddha"
by Thich Nhat Hanh*

Have you ever had the experience of "coming to" in the middle of a classroom or audience and suddenly realizing you have no idea what happened for the last five minutes? I certainly have, and it's always a challenge trying to reconstruct in my mind what happened during those blank periods.

In this day and age - I call it the Instant Messaging Generation - it becomes harder and harder to eliminate the "noise" and just focus on what's in front of us. There is always some background noise going on, there are often 2 or 3 voices coming to us at the same time, and we have a hard time settling down and relaxing. Everyone seems to be clamoring for attention, and no one is listening!

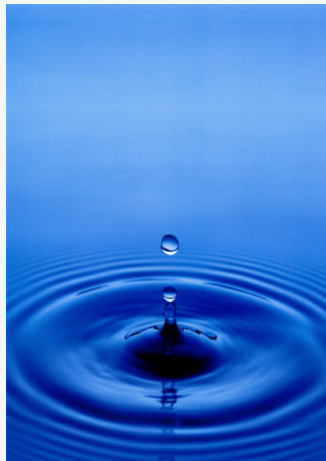
Today's article addresses this common problem, and suggests some solutions. Read on...

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LISTEN TO THE NOW

Before you can listen, you must first be aware.

In the simplest terms, if you aren't there, you can't listen to what's going on. If there was a great conversation inside of a room, and you weren't in that room, you would not be aware of what occurred. If you never attended any of your university classes, it is doubtful you would have graduated because you simply weren't there to begin with. Generally speaking, if you aren't there, you won't be able to grasp anything that occurred.

Of course, there are thousands of conflicting definitions for "you." Some call you the ego, some identify you as a spirit or soul, some call you a mind or a brain, some refer to you as a body. Some refer to you as part of a greater whole, such as God, Allah, or Theta. For our purposes, let's agree upon a simple and pragmatic view of this word:

When I refer to YOU, I mean the consciousness or awareness that you identify as yourself or "I."

Whenever you think of "me" or "I" or "myself" you are referring to a conscious living awareness. That consciousness is the You we are referring to. You are the awareness source that is looking at things (objective reality, other people, mental images or memories), and you are distinct from whatever you are looking at. If I ask you to find and look at a cat, you are NOT the cat, you are the person looking. In similar fashion, if I ask you to look at a mental picture of a cat, or a memory of a cat, you are the awareness point. You're the subject, not the object.

If we take "You" out of the equation, there won't be an event. Therefore, in order to become a superior listener, you must learn to become fully present, fully conscious and aware of what is happening in the present moment. Lord Guatama Siddharta, the original Enlightened One, the Buddha, refers to this as "mindfulness." The present moment is defined as the "Here and Now."

The opposite of "Here and Now" would be "There and Then", which is where most homo sapiens are currently living. Most people spend over 90% of their time dwelling in the past, mostly living in painful experiences or memories. The other 8% is generally spent worrying about the future, mulling over imagined problems or difficulties, or getting all wrapped up in potential threats to survival.

MINDFULNESS VS. MINDLESSNESS

The average human spends, as a generous estimate, about 2% of their time in the present. Of course, their human body rides along in present time (it can't do anything else!), but the awareness unit, the consciousness of the person, can be scattered across different times or locations. Your body can be sitting in a room, but your mind can be a thousand miles away. And, since you are nowhere near present reality, you don't have even a vague possibility of listening effectively. Since you are in and out of the present, your memory of what happened will also be in and out. In short, there will be huge gaps in your understanding.



Thus, the core problem which exists PRIOR to poor listening skills is the inability to pay attention to the present, the complete lack of discipline required to focus on the here and now. Mindfulness has been replaced with Mindlessness! In conventional language, "No one is home!"

How then, do we learn to focus our awareness on present reality, on the here and now? What can we do to extract our awareness from the past or the imagined future, and to get ourselves focused on the present? What steps should we take that will lead us into the now?

We've already given you part of the solution in this article. The moment you become aware that you HAVEN'T been paying attention, your focus automatically shifts into the "here and now." When you realize that you've been in a trance, so to speak, the trance is broken. Most of us go through life on autopilot, just doing things mechanically without paying attention, and life just sort of happens to us. As soon as we become aware of this sad fact, we receive enough of a jolt that our awareness slams into present reality and we suddenly wake up!

In our next article, we'll explore several proven techniques to gather your awareness and focus on the present. You'll be interested to know that some of these techniques are over 4,000 years old!

Stay tuned.

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What better way to write a book than to get thousands of friends to contribute their thoughts and ideas?

As many of you know, I have started to write my 3rd book, on the topics of paying attention and listening. Along the way, I'll weave into the mix the best ideas from today's thought leaders, as well as ancient lessons from spiritual masters of the ages. It turns out that Buddha, Confucius, Lao-Tze, Christ, and many others had some profound thoughts about "being there" and listening.

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Until next month,



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