

Life Coaching for Mindfulness

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The Buddhist meditation practice of mindfulness sets the foundation for the cultivation of what is now-a-days called the "Law of Attraction". Without a profound ability to quiet the mind and let go of grasping, compulsive, negative thinking any positive results we hope for are going to be fruitless.

"We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world. Speak or act with an impure mind and trouble will follow you as the wheel follows the ox that drives the cart. Speak or act with a pure mind and happiness will follow you as your shadow: unshakable."

~ The Buddha (Dhammapada) ~

Ram Dass once said, "Give it all up and you can have it all." At first this sounds absurd but a deeper look illuminates the logic. If you don't know how to swim and you fall into deep water someone telling you to 'relax and float' will sound ludicrous because you're terrified of drowning. It takes absolute willingness to surrender, even die, in order to relax and float in the face of drowning. Having great faith in the universe, or God or whatever you want to call it, sounds ideal until you're put to the test. But the logic is there. To relax and float in deep water is what mindfulness is in the chaos of living. It's where our life is.

Mindfulness is one of the core practices of Buddhism. It is the seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path. The first six steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are in preparation for this step and at the same time they are strengthened by this step. The first two steps include Right Understanding and Right Thought. Generally these practices foster the common sense that to quiet the mind and choose your thoughts wisely leads to peace of mind. Our mind is like a garden with every imaginable type of seed always ready to sprout. We have the power to choose which seeds we water and which ones we ignore or weed out. When we choose to cultivate seeds of loving friendliness, compassion and forgiveness and let go of the seeds of anger, resentment and greed then we are more able to cultivate a pleasing and peaceful mind.

The next three steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. Again, these steps are in preparation for the next steps and at the same time are strengthened by the next steps. These three steps are about morality and integrity. A person who has nothing to worry about or feel guilty about is laying a more stable foundation for a calm mind. When we feel sure that we are doing the best we can do with what we have, then we are more able to let go of anxiety, compulsive and fearful thoughts. A shift in consciousness begins to take place which feels more expansive, more inclusive and embracing of everything and everyone around us. It fosters a feeling of love and an altruistic wish for others to experience the same.

The sixth step of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Effort. This is the practice of remembering and applying our commitment to cultivating a more peaceful mind. When we find ourselves in a situation where a decision must be made then we train ourselves to remember to choose wisely, with integrity, morality and compassion. We remember that although it may feel more tempting in the moment to react with anger, lust or greed, the end result will not empower us but rather weaken us. With this understanding we apply more intention to move toward our real goal; happiness rather than react out of habit to something that will cultivate unhappiness.

At last we come to the seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path; Right Mindfulness . Simply put, Mindfulness is the moment to moment awareness of that which is actually happening in the present moment regarding bodily sensations, feelings/emotions, impulses, thoughts and mental images. It is a state of silent curiosity and listening without the interference of the mind's effort to explain, label and rationalize things. This practice helps us to cultivate 'the witness'. It opens us up to new insights regarding the true characteristics of our self and things we are presently perceiving. This further awakens our potential to choose our thoughts and actions and design our life with more devout intention and skill.

It is through the practice of mindfulness that we are able to see more clearly when we are engaging in negative thoughts and producing ill effects in our body and in our relationships. When we can catch ourselves early on, before we spiral into compulsive and damaging thoughts, speech and behavior then we are more easily able to stop the process, let go of the suffering we are generating and relax again. Mindfulness is the practice of recognizing the tipping points that lead into spirals. It sets the foundation for letting go and the next step of allowing which teaches us how to float before learning how to swim.

The Law of Attraction has received much criticism and it is easy to see why. It simply doesn't work if we are not well practiced in the skill of mindfulness and the ability to let go of unhelpful thoughts. It takes practice and commitment. After all it is the seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path and the first six steps are all designed to help develop this practice. In the most profound sense it requires a willingness to die in the lap of the universe. Once you surrender you finally realize there is no finality, no absolute death, only transitions and cycles. The opposite of birth is death but there is no opposite of life which has no beginning and no end.

The other reason the Law of Attraction has attracted such criticism is because so much of the way it is taught aims at personal, material abundance rather than the real goal which is happiness. Reaching for a million dollars because you hate being poor just brings more poverty. Happiness must come first. When you are well established in a mind of allowance and gratitude despite your outer conditions then anything becomes possible and the funny thing is, it won't matter at that point if you get your million dollars or not.

You may be wondering what the eighth step is on the Noble Eightfold Path. It is Right Concentration. This is a powerful sitting meditation practice which takes us beyond the mind altogether and into the limitless, universal consciousness; the unmanifest essence of life and its creative potential. One could say, everything before this step is our 'dance with the universe', the small mind and the big Mind dancing together. The step of Right Concentration is where both dance partners – little mind and big Mind - actually merge into One and the dance rests.

Life coaching for mindfulness is not about studying Buddhism or the Law of Attraction. It's not about studying anything. In fact it's more about cultivating the ability - no matter how brief - to stop judging, stop analyzing, worrying and planning. It's about setting these things aside to allow ourselves to discover what we are without them. Indeed we have no idea what we are because what we are is beyond ideas. The only way to touch it is to be present. The past and future are just masses of synaptic constructions and re-constructions taking place in the little space between our ears effectively keeping us in a state of semi-consciousness. To quote Alfred Korzybski, "*The map is not the territory.*" Life is ever only happening in this present wellspring we call 'now' to which most of us are asleep most of the time.

Life coaching for mindfulness is having someone to remind you of what you are already aware of on some level. It helps you to recognize more often when your mind is spinning out. It may even show you the edge of where you think you just can't go. And, perhaps more importantly, coaching for mindfulness can support and help you balance what may seem like opposing inner and outer life influences. For most people, a lasting state of fully awakened consciousness doesn't happen suddenly. It more often happens in stages like peeling away the layers of an onion. For others there is a sudden, full awakening only to be lured back into semi-sleep and followed by multiple reawakenings of various degrees. Confusion may abound between moments of reawakening to presence and having a good Sangha (spiritually supportive friends and community) becomes increasingly important until balance is achieved. In today's world a true Sangha may not be available to provide the support we feel we need. Coaching for mindfulness helps to fill that need.

*“On a long journey, it is essential to go with Good companions;
Purify your eyes and ears again and again.
When you stay somewhere choose your company;
Listen to what you have not heard time and again.
This is the basis of the saying:
'It was my parents who bore me; it was my companions who raised me.' “
~ Kuei-shan Ling-yu (771-854)~*

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