Mindfulness & Meditation: Ending at the Beginning

Cameron L. Gordon, Ph.D.

Middle Tennessee State University
& Southeast Psych Nashville
615-373-9955
Homework

- Identify ways you have tried to protect yourself from the unsettling experience of being uncertain by creating “knowing”
  - explore how this sets the foundation for future suffering when your ideas are eventually threatened by an ever changing world
  - consider how any word or idea used to describe yourself makes you smaller than you actually are
  - encounter the fear of “not knowing” by sitting with it curiously and practice opening up to groundlessness

- And most importantly...
  - have fun, explore, be playful with your practice!
What We Have Begun to Learn

- Mindfulness is simple...
  - Present awareness, curiosity, and intention are all it takes
- Mindfulness is very difficult...
  - Present awareness, curiosity, and intention can feel impossible in challenging circumstances
- These are skills that get stronger with practice, and only with practice
  - You didn’t think you were done did you? 😊
  - Benefits will continue to develop only if you continue to practice
    - Like a diet or exercise program
    - “The intention to love is not yet love.” – Thich Nhat Hanh
Why Should I Bother?

This combination of three simple yet difficult skills, when applied to life, help us to...

- Suffer well, and thus reduce our suffering
- Awaken joy and experience more rich pleasure in simple things
- Come into direct contact with life by removing habits that distance us from our direct experience
  - Constant stream of thoughts, “time travel”, distraction
- Develop wisdom and understanding
- “Relax” into life challenges with freedom and grace
When We Are No Longer Practicing

- You may notice one day that you have stopped practicing
  - Life feels overwhelming
  - Old maladaptive habits have returned
  - It is more difficult to find our sense of self, peace, or equanimity

- When you discover you have strayed from your practice, don’t admonish yourself (you deserve kindness)
  - Invite yourself back warmly
    - “Life felt better when I was practicing...if I would like those benefits again, I could try resuming my practice and see what happens.”
  - The same as *gently* bringing your mind back to your breath when it wanders during a meditation
How to Continue at Home

- Create a mindful space in your home to stop and be
  - This space should have no other purpose (e.g., not your bed, your desk where you check email, etc.)
  - This is a place to pause the constant stream of doing and thinking and to come into contact with yourself and life
    - Simply decorated, free of tools we use to distract ourselves
    - Does not have to be soundproof or otherwise “perfect”
- Reminders to practice around the home
  - Create signs, notes, quotes, or place objects around the home that will invite you into moments of practice
    - Move these around and find ways to keep them novel to draw your attention or they will fade into the background
How to Continue in the World

- Create and use “bells of mindfulness”
  - Unpredictable reminders to stop and be
    - Kentucky license plates
    - Text messages or phone calls with a different tone
    - Chimes or bells that can be set to ring throughout the day

- Join or establish a group mindfulness practice
  - This is referred to as a sangha – look for them online or start one with friends
    - Our class has become a sangha – shake hands with the people around you and organize a time to get together again to meditate!
How to Continue in Life

- “Water the seeds” that will strengthen your practice frequently throughout the day
  - Practice informal meditation by being present and curious with intention when you brush your teeth, etc.
    - “It is easy to be mindful when you are a monk, it is hard when you are a busy mother”

- Read, study, and practice
  - There are many wonderful resources – I have provided a list on the OLLI website of some good places to start
    - Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron, etc.
  - I also recorded guided meditations for you available for download in the store at psychbytes.com

- Find a good teacher/therapist/mindfulness mentor
  - Cameron Gordon @ Southeast Psych (615-373-9955) 😊
Homework

- Live mindfully and enjoy your life!!!

Thank you so much for all you have given me throughout this class. I have personally gained so much from teaching you and I am deeply grateful to you for it!

drcamerongordon@gmail.com