

Guide to Awakening Your Mindful Self

Are you living in the present?

I encourage you to set a timer for two minutes and grab something to write with. Write every thought that arises. After the timer ends, please take a moment to label each thought as P(ast), N(ow), F(uture).¹ Does one time frame dominate?

There are many ways to approach mindfulness and begin to live more in the present moment. Breathing is one of the most accessible pathways as the breath is always with you and can only exist in the present moment.

I invite you to pause and follow your breath as you read this paragraph. Notice the speed and temperature of the air as it enters your body. Do you breathe deeply into your belly or does the breath stop at your chest? What is the texture of the air as you exhale?



Please resist the urge to judge or change your breathing in any way; simply notice how it feels to devote your attention to this life-giving act.

Did you learn anything new about yourself and your body? Was it challenging to focus? Do you feel different as a result of this brief exercise?

“Ask yourself: Where am I? Answer: Here.
Ask yourself: What time is it? Answer: Now.
Say it until you can hear it.”

Ram Dass

How long should I meditate?

While most experts agree that a 15-20 minute daily practice is best, your body can shift from the sympathetic nervous system (fight, flight, freeze, flee, fawn) to the parasympathetic nervous system (rest, digest) in as little as a minute.

Try it for yourself. The next time you feel stressed, change your physical perspective by taking a few deep breaths, focusing on a sound or image in the distance, stretching, or any other movement that feels natural.

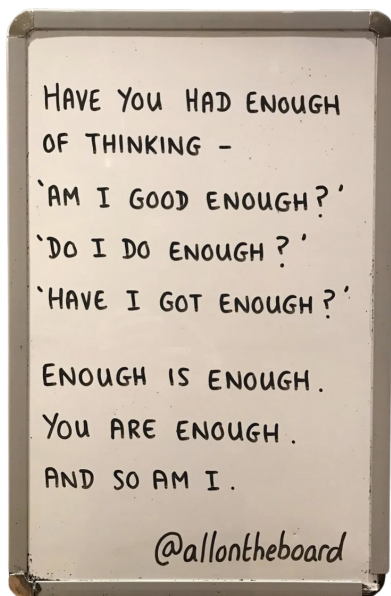


“Meditation is the ultimate mobile device; you can use it anywhere, anytime, unobtrusively.”

Sharon Salzberg

Yoga, meditation, walking, journaling, and exploring the five senses are other popular mindfulness practices that foster compassion and strengthen the mind-body connection.

Micro Practices to Consider:²



At each bus stop or traffic light, make a note of how many different colors are in your surrounding environment.



Before bed, mentally scan each part of the body by shifting your attention from head to toe. Pause at each part to explore any thoughts or sensations that arise.



During your next meal, observe the taste, texture, and temperature of your food or beverage.

Have a bit longer to practice?

The loving-kindness meditation is one way to experience the compassionate benefits of mindfulness.³



First, make yourself as comfortable as possible. Then, begin to think about individuals and groups in your life.



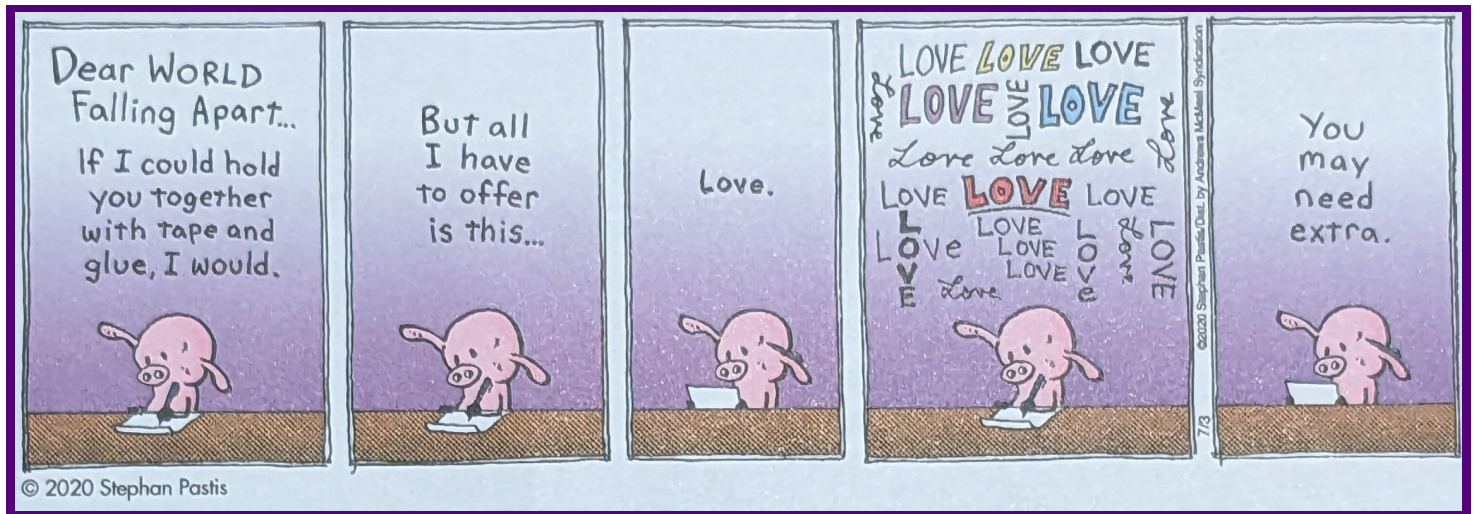
Visualize sending each person a message of wellbeing. Common phrases used are, "May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you experience peace." Feel free to make it your own.



Most importantly, be sure offer kindness to yourself as part of the meditation ("May I be happy..."). Notably, this self-compassion includes forgiving yourself if your practice looks different than you intend or is otherwise challenging in any way.



Remember, it's a mindfulness practice, not a mindfulness perfect.



"If we're going to evolve into more caring, compassionate, connected creatures, [mindfulness] seems pretty key."

Nancy Bardacke

Footnotes

1. P(ast), N(ow), F(uture) - adapted from Daniela Hess Grant of Inspired Living and Yoga Farm Ithaca.
2. Mindfulness and Meditation Micro Practices - adapted from Camille Maurine and Dr. Lorin Roche's Instinctive Meditation © teachings.
3. Loving Kindness Meditation - derived from Buddhist Metta prayer.

Some Favorite Resources

Types of Meditation Practices

- Mindful.org
- University of California Berkeley's <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

Mindfulness for Self-Compassion

- Dr. Kristin Neff

More on Metta (Loving Kindness)

- Dr. Sharon Salzberg

Recommended Books

- "A Walk in the Wood: Meditations on Mindfulness with a Bear Named Pooh" by Dr. Joseph Parent and Nancy Parent
- "A Mindful Year: Daily Meditations: Reduce Stress, Manage Anxiety, and Find Happiness in Everyday Life" by Dr. Aria Campbell-Danesh and Seth Gillihan

Disclaimer: Mindfulness practices are not a replacement for medical care. Please consult your doctor before beginning any wellness practice.