

THE POWER AND PEACE OF AWARENESS

Awareness, mindfulness and observing are words referring to the same experience. There is a profound difference between being immersed in white-water rapids, tumbling downstream, out of control, with all kinds of debris, and then spotting a tree branch hanging over the water, grabbing the branch, pulling yourself out and sitting on the bank, watching it all go by.

When we enter the state of awareness or mindfulness, we create a necessary space between the observing Self and what happens around and inside us. We are no longer at the mercy of what is inside us nor of what is happening around us. We step back to sit on the bank, just noticing. In this state, stress levels automatically reduce and we are poised to make better decisions or, simply, to experience the peace of being in the present moment. It is one of the best stress reducers I know.

As passive as it sounds, it is also quite a powerful antidote to being tossed about by what happens around us, by the moods, reactions and behaviors of others, or by the mental and emotional demons that tend to run rampant inside us.

Try this:

AWARENESS OF WHAT IS “OUTSIDE”

- Begin by noticing everything around you that comes into your awareness **visually**. See if anything “grabs your attention”, e.g., an object, shape, color.
- Do the same with **auditory sensations**.
- **And with tactile experience** (clothing against your skin, air movement, chair against your legs and back, hand sensations).
- Notice if there is any **scent or smell** that enters awareness.
- Take sixty seconds to be aware of any sensory input—just where you are!
- Repeat as often as you can throughout the day, wherever, whenever.

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Then this:

AWARENESS OF WHAT IS “INSIDE”

- Notice your **breathing**, where it enters and leaves the body, and all the sensations connected with it. Be aware of the pauses, the still points, at the peak of each inbreath and the end of each outbreath.
- Then shift the lens of your awareness to your **body**. Scan it from the top of your head to the tips of your fingers and toes, noting any sensations, pleasurable or not. Do all of this without changing anything.
- Next attend to your **thoughts**. This can be tricky, but do your best to watch them, rather than getting caught up in them. It sometimes helps to name them: worry thoughts, busy thoughts, planning thoughts, attack thoughts, etc.
- Notice any **feelings or emotions** that might be active. Observe where they are taking place in your body. Notice if there is any name that goes with that feeling: sadness, anger, etc.
- Finally, be still and allow your awareness to watch for **whatever** comes onto the stage of your inner perception for the next sixty seconds. It might also be **images or memories** that are asking for attention.

This practice can take as long as 15 to 20 minutes or as little as 60 seconds. It is a wonderful way to begin the day, before our minds and hearts are invaded by daily living. It is a marvelous oasis in the middle of the day, a return to something akin to “praying without ceasing”, to a still point inside. It can also help to quiet us down before sleep.

In the workplace I often suggest a 60-second break on an hourly basis or before each time you change your activity. In that short space of time, you can attend to what is happening in your mind, emotions, and body and, just through the power of observing and noticing, bring about stress reduction so that you don’t return home with headaches, upset stomachs or irritability.

And when you notice nothing but silence, attend to that precious moment between thoughts, feelings or body sensations. You are close to Home.