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PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Mindfulness 101: Mindful of Our True Nature-- Moving into Summer

By Scott L. Rogers

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The practice of mindfulness is generally considered and taught as a sitting practice where one:

- 1 Sits in an upright and stable posture,
- 2 Rests attention on the breath, and,
- 3 When one realizes the mind has wandered,
- 4 Returns attention to the breath.

While this form of practice is easy to learn and useful, it is but one of many. Understanding a unifying quality that flows across all forms will deepen an understanding of mindfulness, enlarge the opportunities to practice, and clarify common misconceptions. In this month's column, I share a mindful movement practice drawn from the Taoist tradition known as QiGong (Chi Gong), which is grounded in the elements of nature. As summer approaches and you find yourself outdoors, this practice may be especially refreshing.



To be mindfully aware is to be attentive to present-moment experience in a manner that is engaged and unassuming. There is an alertness that persists such that the object of attention—be it a client sharing facts, a motion reviewed before filing, or the sun setting—is perceived with greater clarity and nuance, and with less distraction. In today’s fast-paced world, states of mindful awareness can be fleeting.

The Quality of Attention

Mindfulness exercises can be practiced while sitting, laying down, standing, and in motion, and the popular focused-attention exercise discussed above is but one of many forms. Regardless of the position of the body, or the specific practice instruction, one quality that runs across them all is the sustained engagement of attention. We can exercise this capacity by paying attention on purpose to an object, much like shining a flashlight on something of interest, and indeed this is the way much practice begins. Over time there is less of a need to “try to” focus attention, as this innate capacity is more readily deployed and sustained.

So that you may come to experience this more directly for yourself, below I share with you a practice that you may find refreshing, especially when you are outdoors. It is part of a program I developed called the *SoBe Mindful* method, a nod to the natural beauty of South Beach, where I live, and a reminder that mindfulness is more accessible than we tend to believe and that “if you want to be mindful, *so be mindful*.” Indeed, if you look at the above four-part instruction, all that is required is *being aware while sitting and breathing*. You already know how to sit, you can’t help but breathe and be aware, and even the thoughts that seemingly “get in the way” are not an impediment to practice; we just “think” they are. After all, even extended practice periods are but a series of moments strung together with awareness. The below instruction involves looking to the elements of nature to establish a more deliberate engagement in the moments of our life.

The SoBe Mindful Moment

As noted above, the body, breath, thoughts and feelings, and awareness are fundamental elements of mindfulness. Outdoors, we find these elements naturally expressed in trees (body), the wind (breath), the clouds (thoughts and feelings), and the sun (awareness). Given our natural and ongoing connection to the elements of nature, they can cue our waking up out of distracted thinking and emotional reactivity during the day. Below are short exercises you can draw on while walking outside. Begin by doing so deliberately, and before long you will find yourself naturally

waking up out of distraction and automatic pilot—moments of awareness that may help relax the body, settle anxious feelings, and bring greater clarity.

Tree: When you see a tree, adjust your body posture (stretch and relax your fingers) and bring your attention to the sensations arising in your body.

Wind: When you feel or sense the wind, take a slower, deeper breath, aware of the breath, and then observe your breathing resume its natural rhythm.

Clouds: When you see a cloud(s), turn your attention to your thoughts and feelings and observe the activity of the mind.

Sun: When you see the sun or feel its warmth, look around and observe all that is in your midst. Do so with a soft gaze and open heart.

It is helpful when practicing to pause for a few moments as you cultivate a deliberate engagement in the extraordinary world around you and within you. If you can't come to a complete stop, slow down your pace. After a few moments (breaths), carry on, or sit for a while and experience a longer period of practice. In time, you'll find that these moments of "punctuated practice" arise naturally and spontaneously, and the awareness you've cultivated carries forward.

I hope you find this discussion to be useful and that it deepens your understanding of mindfulness and its inherently simplicity. You can learn more by visiting sobemindful.com, where you can view videos demonstrating longer periods of practice with different movements, all drawing on the elements of nature.

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