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- Mindfulness in Everyday Life -

Hi everyone, hope you are off to a good start to 2008.

Over the coming months I would like to focus on the concept of mindfulness. Most of you already know I teach Mindfulness Meditation and commonly use Mindfulness concepts in my practice and have found it very useful.

There has been much interest in the concept of mindfulness over the last few years due to some favorable research done on the topic. However there are some common misconceptions about the approach and it can be difficult to integrate the concepts in to your daily life without guidance. This will be the focus of the next 4 newsletters.

In this edition I would like to focus on the history of Mindfulness, a brief overview of Mindfulness and the concept of stability of mind.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is something we all do naturally everyday. Kabat-Zinn, (1994) explains "mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally". Sounds good doesn't it!

Even though this is a natural state that we all use every day, we don't use it much and rarely when we need it the most.

Mindfulness training teaches us to cultivate this present centeredness and non-judgmental attitude with amazing benefits to our psychological functioning. Michael Anderson (Psychologist and Mindfulness expert) suggests Mindfulness training can achieve the following;

"Mindfulness. Imagine being able to experience your emotions fully without saying something hurtful. Imagine enjoying the food you eat without being excessive. Imagine being free from the bondage of your old habits and destructive patterns of relating to others and the world around you. Mindfulness can help make these imaginings become a reality. Mindfulness has the potential to assist many people in achieving a more fulfilling life regardless of their external circumstances." (taken from). The best ways to cultivate the psychological skill of mindfulness is by practicing mindfulness meditation and applying it in daily life.

History

The concept of mindfulness has been around for thousands of years with varying degrees of popularity. It has mostly been associated with spiritual traditions and spiritual practice, however I believe it can be best understood as a practice that is designed to increase awareness and help balance your head, heart and body.

At present it is experiencing a surge in popularity due to recent research that has found mindfulness training very valuable in helping people with depression, anxiety, addictions, eating disorders, stress and helping people live a more rewarding life.



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I don't think it is overstating the case to say that mindfulness training is as important for the healthy functioning of the mind as water, food and exercise are to the body!

Stability of Mind

In his book "Mindfulness Meditation" Michael Anderson suggests there are 4 core psychological skills obtained from cultivating mindfulness in your life. In this newsletter I want to focus on one of these "stability of mind".

This refers to one's ability to cope with the various mental states that we are faced with. The result of being able to cope with the many states we can experience is feeling predominantly stable in your mind.

A stable mind is one that is balanced, meaning the mind is pliable, alert and yet relaxed and free of tension. This also means the mind can function more efficiently and adapt to change by retraining more easily.

Stability of mind can often be understood on the following continuum;

Mindfulness

Agitated Mind ----- Dull Mind

Agitated mind here refers to any of those highly aroused and agitated states that most of us find ourselves in daily due to the demands and stress in modern day life (including anxiety, anger, agitation, stress etc). While the dull mind is a more relaxed less agitated state. However it also includes a vague dull state we sometimes go into when we cannot cope with what is going on around us.

Obviously both these states can be useful at times. However they mostly have a negative impact on our functioning in day to day life. The more mindful we are the more we can support our mind to stay in the middle ground allowing us to function more effectively.

Over the coming week pay attention to how much of your life you are spending in either the agitated or dull mind and how useful it may be to be more mindful!

Enjoy

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