

Mindfulness

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For my own purposes, I find the here and now to be overrated and I don't spend a great deal of time concentrating on it. I have studied and practiced several forms of meditation and found them to be difficult and uncomfortable. I do understand the attraction of others to what is often called *mindfulness* and I recognize its therapeutic value for all manner of emotional and cognitive distress. I often recommend meditation to my clients when they appear to be wrapped around some axle or another and I use it myself when anxiety or depression alerts me to the fact that I have thought my way into a corner that I cannot yet recognize. Mostly though, I prefer to be lost in thought or conversation, where I find no end of exhilaration and reward.

The popular notion of mindfulness involves a voluntary restriction of consciousness in order to exclude thinking in favor of immediate sensory experience, and as little of that as possible without falling asleep. "*Concentrate on your breath and let any thoughts that come into your head float gently away.*" In my view, this is therapeutic because the things that trouble us almost always play out over a long period of time. Anxiety is the fear that something bad will happen in the future and depression is rooted in the belief that life will continue to suck indefinitely. Anxiety and depression both project themselves into the future and therefore neither makes any sense in the immediate present. Standing on the solid foundation of your own real-time respiration, with the feel of the wind in your hair and your butt in the chair, has the potential to help us see that the story each of us constructs about the world is really a special kind of fiction and therefore subject to editorial review. Some call this enlightenment. I call it insight.

Once you have a solid handle on this insight it can be applied directly, within the realm of thought and action, rather than indirectly through a retreat into immediate sensory awareness. Mindfulness is undoubtedly an important instrument for both psychotherapy and for spiritual development, but when it seems appropriate I am likely to refer you to a yoga, martial arts, or meditation master. I prefer to work in the realm of vigorous thought and action.

Relief, Recovery, Resolution

*Primarily for men and adolescent males in transition and in crisis,
and for women who want to understand them better*

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