

*Mindfulness*

Cultivation of mindfulness is central to a mature spirituality, which involves what we do during the day, how we do it, as well as insight into our attitude, motivation, emotion, speech, and action. It is concerned with the presence or focused attention of our total selves. Often, we are only half aware, physically present but far away in thought. Because attention wanders, mental preparation practices that enhance our capacity for deep thought...lead to new insights about oneself or the world. Silence, solitude, meditation, prayer, and self-reflection facilitate entrance into the realm of wisdom, where we work to cultivate compassion, humility, and nonviolence...Various mental techniques including observing and counting the breath, repetition of a mantra (sacred word), visualization, and energetic practices, expand one's consciousness and are instrumental in the development of clarity and inner stillness...Meditative techniques propel the attentive soul into a state of agile receptivity where the active divine influence can reach down to meet and illuminate the human intellect. The awakened heart awaits the presence of the beloved, keeping watch...Mindfulness is also taught to enhance daily living, as well as to reduce stress, anxiety, symptoms of depression, and other health-related issues. Contemplative practices have been adapted in schools, colleges, hospitals, prisons, corporations, and anywhere there is the intent toward a realized life...I provide a general synopsis of three stages or levels of mindfulness: ordering your life, active effort toward divine love, and mindfulness as mystical consciousness.

**Stage One**—ordering your life. Mindfulness implies seriousness and care in ordering your life according to spiritual principles; and a realization that it is a full-time occupation, not a part-time project that is squeezed in with everything else. Rather, spiritual awareness *is* your work, or vocation: a state of being that inhabits the center of your life. This full-time occupation of spiritual growth stabilizes your soul and allows disparate needs and longings to fall into place more easily, because you are now focused. When you lack inner order, it is easy to be overwhelmed by a multitude of possibilities, all of which compete for attention and time—and none of which achieve the desired peace. In this first stage of mindfulness, meditative practices are critical for observing feelings, desires, and needs. We learn to become aware of our emotional tone, and to avoid anger and undue passions. We also become sensitive to how heedless and negligent we often are. We are inattentive with our prayer. We are careless in the way we treat people. We rush around. We do not put proper attention on what we are doing...Mindfulness is an important tool that also makes us aware of how we forget...

**Stage two**—active effort toward divine love. The person who seeks a self-reflective manner of living recognizes the importance of striving to achieve divine love. This seeker devotes time and energy to exploring the capacity of love to empower the soul and to resolve painful or tense situations. Akin to other forces of nature such as gravity, love is held by many to be the greatest power in the cosmos, a living reality and a universal energy that governs all aspects of existence...The capacity to grow in love is assisted by spiritual community, a wise counsel that every monastic lineage has embraced...Living among or being associated with people who are also seeking truth is critical to self-transcendence. When we are not around people with whom

we can share our spiritual intention, it is hard to maintain focus...Another effort toward awareness of divine love is making provisions for solitude and for silence—to be disengaged from the demands of the world, and to be centered in one's inner hermitage...It is this intense commitment to do all in our power to grow closer to the divine—longing to know truth, to be holy—that continually inspires us to give up lesser pursuits and center our intention on the divine quest...Due to the absence of solitude and quiet in our daily lives, it is not always easy to decipher whether you are actually pursuing divine love or your own self-will...Discernment is a form of mindfulness that helps in distinguishing between interior happiness and material or superficial happiness. We are so habituated to seeking worldly success that we often dismiss spiritual fulfillment...We tend to think that mindfulness is something that we have to jam into our regular life. But it is not possible to expand our capacity for goodness-kindness, compassion, humility, etc.—and continue to be as busy, fragmented, and physically unmoored as we were before. Contemplative awareness is not supposed to be another thing added onto everything else we are doing. Rather, it is an experience of resting in and *within* all things, seeing the cosmos through the expansion of its Mystery.

**Stage Three**—mindfulness as mystical consciousness. The deepest state of mindfulness is mystical consciousness, what we might call pure contemplation in which our whole being is possessed and transfigured by the transcendent, in which word and thought take place within the inner life of the Divine...In this state of transformed consciousness, memory is not just the activity of retrieving information, as in the mind, but conveys the residual imprint of mystical presence. This is why prayer and meditation are so vital to the monastic life: they are the means of directly experiencing the sacred realm. In this state, your soul becomes a mirror of peace and love; your presence is healing. Your being becomes transformative for the consciousness of other beings because you have been touched by the holy light. Why have you experienced this? Because through ceaseless prayer or meditation, you have surrendered your self-will to God. Mindfulness as mystical consciousness is not something done with your will or mind. It is the upwelling of the Divine in your soul... Such mystical surrender finally leans to a theophanic consciousness—one that reveals the presence of God in the world; a path that leads us from the external and superficial to the depth of reality that elevates and informs everything. We step into the world of the Divine, and we look at this world from a holy perspective, which includes greater understanding and compassion. Here, not only is your awareness of the world raised, but your conscience...is raised. Those two things go together in the spiritual life. We have to raise our consciousness, but also our conscience—our moral fiber—everyday...Mindfulness is ultimately, a high state of mystical awareness, a sensitive attunement to the gentle mercy and precious gift of being born. It is inner discipline applied to daily events, which compels each person to discover the abundant, exuberant, noble, sublime freedom of being fully alive. **Teaching on Text from the Tradition:** by Christine Luna Munger

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- In general, what do you notice in your head, heart and senses from the text?
- What connections must be made between the practice of mindfulness and daily life activities?