Mindfulness & Meditation: What is Mindfulness?

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Research on Mindfulness

- **Benefits physical health**
  - Pain
  - Cancer
  - Heart disease and hypertension
  - Epilepsy
  - Arthritis
    - Through improved sleep and coping with stress

- **Benefits mental health**
  - Substance abuse
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Marriage & family functioning (parenting)
So, What is Mindfulness?

- **Awareness**
  - Intentionally focused
  - Oriented toward the present moment
  - Curious (some use the term “nonjudgmental”)

- **Mindfulness Meditation**
  - The formal practice of developing mindfulness skills
    - NOT stopping the flow of thoughts, emptying your mind, or demanding that you relax
    - Rather, focusing all of attention on one thing and noticing when it wanders
    - Coming into awareness of what is here now with open curiosity
The Power of Awareness

- Awareness Test: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSQJP4oPcGI
- What we pay attention to, and how we pay attention to it, has a huge impact on our overall experience

- Barriers to mindfulness:
  - Brain built to process massive amounts of data very rapidly
  - Society encourages multi-tasking and divided attention
  - However, many studies have now shown that we can train ourselves to be mindful with practice
The Present Moment

Why so much fuss about the present moment?
- It is the only moment we actually have!
  - Yet we spend most of our time in the past or future
  - This causes us to lose much of our actual life
  - This is also the cause of repetitive and fruitless suffering
The Present Moment

- Your mind’s tendency to wander lays the foundation for your training in “gentle persistence”
  - When mind wanders, simply notice and bring it back
  - Moment by moment, over and over, gently but persistently bring your attention back to the present
    - Remember, it is *gentle* persistence – be on the lookout for struggle/violence/forcing your mind to submit and practice gently leading mind back to intention instead
  - Why should I?
    - This will strengthen patience, resilience, equanimity, etc., while creating a deeper contact with life!
What does it mean to be curious in our practice of mindfulness?
- Remain open
- Approach experience without pre-determined impressions
- Observing rather than trying to change the experience to be something
  - Think of mindfulness as a microscope - it is a tool to help you see things, not to intervene with them
- Expectations set up a wrestling match with actual experience
  - Being curious gets you out of that battle
- Why should I?
  - This promotes peace, insight, wisdom, creativity, etc.
Homework

- Practice mindfulness meditation daily
  - Set your duration (how long you wish to meditate) and your intention (what you intend to focus upon) before beginning
  - Intentionally incorporate present awareness and curiosity
    - Eating, breathing, listening, watching, sensations in body, etc.
- Start with brief (5 minute) exercises
- When mind wanders, gently and persistently bring it back
  - Remember, you ARE NOT trying to hold your mind still or produce deep relaxation – we are training in skills of awareness, curiosity, and gentle persistence – and that is all!
Thank you!

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