

Mindfulness Daily

Introduction to the 40-Day Mindfulness Daily program

Tara: Welcome to “Mindfulness Daily.” I’m Tara Brach, and with Jack Kornfield, we’ve brought our many decades of teaching experience together to create a powerful 40-day program designed to help you develop a lasting meditation practice in less than 15 minutes a day. Decades of science and clinical research has shown that these mindfulness practices can dramatically and positively impact your physical health, emotional resilience, mental clarity and enjoyment of life. Here’s the first lesson from Jack and it’s called “Pausing for Presence.” I hope you enjoy.

Jack: Welcome to “Mindfulness Daily.” In this first section, which we call “Mindful Basics,” we will introduce the key skills you will need as a foundation for mindfulness training. We begin by exploring the first step in mindfulness, pausing to become present. We live in a stressful time. For many of us in the midst of all the demands of our lives in the fast pace of our culture, we can easily lose connection to ourselves and to what matters most. We can be like a character in James Joyce’s story who lived a short distance from his body. We’re not here in the present where our lives are actually taking place.

Whether you are a parent, a healer, a manager or a student, you’ve been drawn to mindfulness training to make your life better. Maybe you want to enhance your mental clarity and performance. Maybe you're looking for a way to feel more relaxed and balanced or you might feel trapped in habits that aren’t serving your relationships at work or at home. The way to change begins with arriving in the present moment with awareness. Mindfulness practice addresses a longing we all share; a desire to be centered, to feel at home with ourselves and others, to be comfortable in our own skin.

A certain hospice worker talked about accompanying hundreds of people

in their dying process, and one of the greatest regrets she heard expressed over and over by those on their deathbed was that they had not lived true to themselves. We can spend a whole lifetime trying to meet the expectations and standards of ourselves and others and end up never having lived our own lives. The Persian poet Rumi asked a question that remains relevant today: do you make regular visits to yourself?

Using smartphones, a couple of Harvard researchers tracked the thoughts and activities of several thousand volunteers. What they found is that almost half the time our thoughts are not related to the activity we are engaged in. In other words, our minds are wandering. We're not present. But the amazing thing that they were able to see is that we're happiest when we are present and focused on exactly what we're doing, whether that's having a conversation, walking down the street, or doing the dishes. As *Scientific American* has suggested, a regular and dedicated meditation practice is a way to train the mind to wander less.

Mindfulness is paying attention to what is happening inside and outside you in the present moment. This begins with something that is incredibly simple, a pause. Imagine being in a movie theater immersed in a fast-paced thriller. Suddenly, the screen freezes. No longer swept away in the action, you become aware of where you are, the people around you; aware of the pulsing tension in your body, of what you're thinking and feeling. You are in the midst of a pause. Learning to pause in the midst of your life brings you back to what's actually happening. You're not caught up in the movie, and in that space, you can see more clearly what you are thinking and feeling and what is going on around you.

So, imagine for a moment, you get stuck in traffic, your laptop crashes and you lose valuable work, your boss or your partner criticizes you, your child has a temper tantrum. With mindfulness, it's possible to pause, breathe and find a space of more clarity and empathy. You can then remember what's really important and respond in a wise, kind, and balanced way. The pause frees you from repeating old patterns that no longer serve your well-being. These are the words of poet Martha

Postlewaite, “Do not try to save the whole world or do anything grandiose. Instead create a clearing in the dense forest of your life and wait there patiently until the song that is your life falls into your own cupped hands.”

With even a short pause, you can begin to sense more aliveness, clarity and heart. So, let’s begin our practice. Find a posture that allows you to be comfortably at rest, sitting upright to help you stay alert but also relaxed. You may sit in a chair or on the floor. If you're in a chair, it’s ideal to sit a little forward rather than leaning against the back. Allow your hands to rest easily on your knees or on your lap. Let your eyes closed gently, or if you prefer, leave them open with a soft, receptive gaze. While in this and future practices we will refer to sitting, if for some reason you're unable to sit, it is fine to stand, arms relaxed by your side, or to lie down, arms and legs uncrossed, though you will want to make sure you stay awake.

As you come into stillness, sense that you're pausing, arriving in presence. With a gentle attention, notice the state of your body right now. Take a full, deep breath and release it slowly; slowly enough that you could feel the sensations of the exhale as your breath moves through your chest, your throat, your nostrils. Now, allow your breath to resume its natural rhythm and sense that you can relax, feeling gravity and how the earth is supporting you. Notice in this simple presence, without judgement, the state of your body just now; warm, cool, ease or tension. Notice too the state of your mind and heart just as it is, racing or quiet – joyful or sad.

Let mindfulness hold it all. Simply be aware that you are here – feeling the grounded sensations of being seated, present in this moment. Notice that you can become present in the midst of whatever is going on for you – whether it’s pleasant or whether there's pain or tension or worry. Mindfulness notices and relaxes around it all with a spacious and kind presence. Notice whatever is present just now and take a minute to relax with it all. Feel the benefit of simply being present and know that you

can return to this again and again. A sounding of the bell will close this mindfulness practice. Let your intention be to carry this simple presence with you as you enter your next activity.

Tara: Thanks for listening to the first session of “Mindfulness Daily.” Our goal is to support you in developing a daily practice that calms your mind and opens your heart; a practice that will enrich your life and the lives of all you touch. As so many have discovered, your mindfulness practice will support you in every domain from home life to work, sports to creative pursuits. Please join us and thousands of others on this 40-day journey. Let’s practice together.

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