



## ***When do we feel***

When do you feel? Have you every thought about that. Many times we are asked how we feel. It is an illumating experiment when you listen to the answer you receive when you ask that question. Almost without fail the response will be related to how we physically feel and not how we emotionally feel. I think this is a profound commentary on how little we pay attention to emotions. What we are really feeling. Not those pat answers like "Not bad", "Getting by", "Fine", and the other assortment of answers we have stored on the shelves of our subconscious from which we hap hazardly pick one when presented with the query. The more I grow and develop on this journey called "life" the more I'm realizing that emotions are a foundational key through which we can either open, or seal, the doorway through which our futures lie.

Reverting back to my opening sentence of "When do you feel?" I propose a small experiment. Read these next sentences a few times so you have the process memorized and then try this experiment. Get comfortable, close your eyes, and take some nice deep breaths. Remember to breathe with your abdomen so allow you stomach to extend a little bit to allow you to fill your lungs completely with air and then relax and allow the air to release through your nose and mouth. Allow your mind to float back to an event in your past that has an emotional impact. It could be positive or negative. If it happens to be a negative one don't feel you have to allow yourself to be overwhelmed by it. The point here is to allow yourself to noticeably feel an emotion.

Now ask yourself a question. "When am I feeling this emotion". Herein lies the key. Even though the event you are remembering could have happened ten days or ten years ago you can only feel an emotion in the present moment (now). You cannot feel in the past or even in the future. You can only feel right here, right now. So, what does this mean to us and why do we care.

Our memories and our emotions are not intrinsically connected. The memory is a trigger which causes us to feel the emotion that was felt when the initial event happened in the present moment.

Now, here comes the bad news and the good news. The bad news is we cannot change the past. Right, wrong, or otherwise what has happened has happened. We also cannot control the future. After all it hasn't even happened yet. The emotions we feel when we think of events in our future are simply responses to a trigger. Not different than the past just in opposite directions. The only thing we can change is what we are feeling in the present moment. The good news is all we have to do is change what we are feeling in the present moment. We don't have to magically undo the past or circumvent events in our future. What we have the amazing opportunity



to do is change the emotions we are feeling in the present moment which are triggered by the event.

The point is to dissolve our reactions to disturbing emotions, being careful not to reject the emotion itself.

Mindfulness is a meditative awareness that cultivates the capacity to see things just as they are from moment to moment.

When our minds are cluttered with thoughts and caught up in reactivity, we are pulled from the present, unable to see the open quality of our mind's natural state.

Mindfulness gives us the power to be with any moment as though for the first time.

Staying in a mindful state requires that we let go of any and all thoughts as they come and go.

In our "normal state" of awareness we have stronger emotional reaction than we do when we become mindful. As we shift into a mindful mode, the brain shifts too. We start to regulate an upsetting emotion the moment we become aware of it.

Sometimes people confuse the concept of letting go of a thought or feeling, noticing it arises in our awareness but not pursuing it, with pushing a painful feeling away by trying to suppress it. But suppression is not mindfulness.

Often the very thing that makes us resist experiencing emotions is our habitual reaction to them.

This quality of investigative awareness goes beyond the level of just thinking about what's going on, to a deep inner listening that observes thoughts and feeling as they come and go.

Simply observing our reactions without identifying with them.

Becoming mindful allows us to interrupt the flow of our habitual thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

A path to healing lies in uncovering and exploring those uncomfortable truths, when we can bring into the light of day what lurks beneath the surface.

In fact, less than one percent of all the information the mind takes in actually reaches our awareness.



Mindful attention is fresh and alert rather than operating on automatic. It can notice much of what the mind ordinarily tunes out.

Mindful awareness creates a kind of workspace, a place in the mind where we can see and deal with our automatic habits.

We are not born with such habits, they have all been learned.

Early inner scientists saw that differing mental states jostle with each other to capture the top position in an ever-shifting hierarchy. As one or another rises to the top, it sets the tone for our entire state of mind, whether it is anger, equanimity, or joy.

Sub-conscious strategies take root because they helped us adapt in some way. We develop them because they were at least a partial solution to an early life problem, working extra hard to please a hypercritical partner. For example, becoming particularly gregarious to avoid feeling left out by other kids, through they helped us cope at the time we acquired them, they do not work so well for us now.

Such Sub-conscious strategies are hard solutions to life's perennial dilemmas, habitual ways we've learned to deal with issues that come up over and over again in life, like the need for close relationships or for love. As partial solutions to pressing problems such coping strategies ease the pain a bit, though they never really resolve the predicament.

This remains a crucial distinction; Sub-conscious responses are overreactions, not appropriate responses to difficult situations.

There is far more right with us than wrong with us.

We temporarily minimize our emotional pain.

Every coping strategy is in some way a useful solution to a life problem. They all have, or once had, desirable aspects.

Our sub-conscious twists our perceptions and bends our response to suit its warped version of reality. They convince us that their twisted version of reality is how things actually are.

Sub-conscious gives us a single way of seeing, thinking, and feeling about things and one habitual way to react to them. And that reaction not only confirms how the Sub-conscious tells us things are, but drastically limits our options.



It's important first to understand how the person experiences and interprets a situation, and empathize with his symbolic reality.

Once we are willing to empathize with our Sub-conscious feelings we are less motivated to be overly rational or to engage in emotion distancing. It's not that we need to stay only at the feeling level, but it's important that we not resist and avoid it.

When problems arise, instead of being seen as purely threats, they become learning situations, opportunities to find out more about one's own mind and to continue on one's journey.

Feelings aren't so scary when you stop avoiding them.

The point is to be with our experience in an open accepting way, so that whatever is happening, and however it changes, we will stay present with a sustained gaze.

The challenge is to maintain our equanimity while we are upset or as soon as possible after the peak of the disturbance.

The idea is neither to suppress such feelings nor to act on them, but simple to be aware of them.

Mindfulness shifts our attention from being immersed in an emotional reaction, say, anger, to becoming aware of the relationship between our mind state and what it is perceiving. Rather than being lost in anger and all the thoughts and feelings that of with it, we can see that what we feel is anger.

Whenever our reaction to an emotionally charged situation emanates from a deeply ingrained habit, it narrows our freedom of choice in the moment. Even if that habitual reaction has shown itself to be ultimately self-defeating, resulting in the opposite of what we hoped for, we are doomed to repeat it, unless we can notice when it is about to capture us and dictate how we behave once again. That's the power of shifting into a mindful awareness.

Being with the emotions instead of acting from them, they change.

The only permanent about our behaviors is the belief that it is so.