

MINDFULNESS
BREAKS
YOUR PATH TO
AWAKENING

By Jerome Freedman, Ph. D.

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The author is not a physician and makes no claims about the potential usefulness of the subject matter herein to have any medical benefit. Please check with your doctor if you find something interesting that you would like to try.

His primary purpose is to introduce you to the possibility of employing *Mindfulness Breaks* in your life for healing, connection and deep peace.

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1. WHAT IS A MINDFULNESS BREAK?

If you work for a company, you possibly take a coffee break every hour. Or perhaps, you prefer tea. In either case, you are stopping work and doing something else. Many people, including myself, take their coffee or tea right at their desk and continue working. What kind of break is this?

You most likely take a lunch break. Do you eat this at your desk or do you go out by yourself or with friends? Is it something you look forward to every day you are at work? When I worked on a case in Palo Alto, California, we had such a good time eating lunch together, even though we only met once a week. Lunch was a time for laughs and discussion of “business” matters.

You may even take a cigarette break (at least, you will breathe deeply during this). Fortunately for those of us who don’t smoke, you would have to go outside or to a special place to have a cigarette break. If you work in Chicago in winter time, this could be a real pain, but the nicotine hit more than compensates for it – or does it?

You could also take a **mindfulness break**! You probably don’t even know what that is, do you? You could take a short mindfulness break before or after you coffee break or your tea break. You could also take a mindfulness break before or after lunch or you could take a mindfulness break instead of a cigarette break.

A **mindfulness break** is a period of mindfulness, a period of living life deeply in the present moment which can be practiced anywhere, anytime from a moment, to a minute, to ten minutes, to a couple of hours, to a weekend, to a week, to several months or years.

Mindfulness is bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction defines mindfulness as

“Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally”

My teacher, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) says,

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don't know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

A mindfulness break is a time for you to meditate in the privacy of your own home or workplace. Meditation can take many forms, and I will use meditation and mindfulness break interchangeably in this book, except in one context. When I refer to a **Mindfulness Break** in **bold** letters with initial capitals, I am referring to a specific class of thirty minute relaxing guided meditations sharing a similar process which is the primary motivation for this book. It will be described in a chapter all by itself. Ordinary mindfulness breaks are also called meditation practices.

An ordinary mindfulness break is equivalent to a period of meditation that can last anytime from a moment to several months in a monastery. I recommend beginners use one of the nine minute meditations described in the chapter on meditation. You can even try a one minute mindfulness break right now your computer or smart phone by going to <https://goo.gl/K7GWQx> to play a recording of a one minute mindfulness break. You can return there anytime you want a mindfulness break.

Ordinary mindfulness breaks can be practiced on the spur of the moment or within a time period that you set aside for them daily. The spur of the moment type brings you immediately back to your true home, the present moment. Thay says,

“If we really live in the moment, our worries and hardships will disappear and we will discover life with all its miracles.”

There are whole chapters on various kinds of ordinary mindfulness breaks. They are on an equal basis with the special **Mindfulness Breaks** that inspire this book. The features and benefits of ordinary and special mindfulness breaks are the same.

Consistent practice of any kind of mindfulness break leads to relaxation, inner peace, happiness, joy and many other positive qualities of heart and mind. There are also many physical benefits such as reduction of stress, regulation of blood pressure, improvement of mood and the general sense of well-being. Meditation suppresses the stress hormone, cortisol and increases the happiness hormones: oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins. It is good for your brain, as it activates new neural pathways and keeps your mind alert.

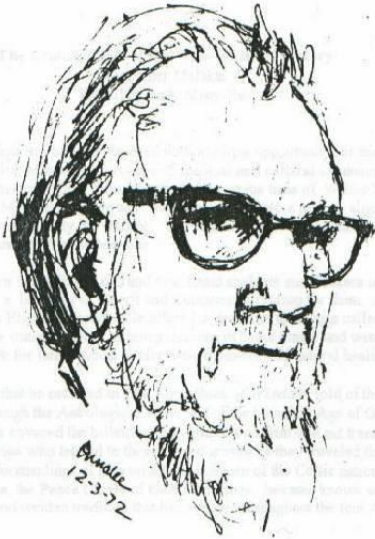
THE STORY

The story of my training to enable me to teach **Mindfulness Breaks** began in 1972. I was living in Evanston, IL and taught data processing at a local community college. I was also studying yoga and meditation with Swami Rama of the Himalayas and attended his ashram each Sunday for a day of practice. He or his closest disciple, Dr. Arya (who became Swami Veda Bharati) would give a talk and we'd have a lovely Indian meal together with his other disciples. Dr. Arya would lead us into a deep meditation using our mantra and I still use much of what he taught today, not only in my own meditation practice, but in teaching mindfulness breaks of most varieties.

One dark and stormy autumn night, I left my apartment for what I thought was a yoga talk at a spiritual bookstore a few blocks away on Howard Street. To my surprise, I had gotten there on the wrong night and a lovely man was talking about the philosophy and teachings of wise men and women throughout history. He was called "Father Eli." His stories were very interesting and his southern drawl was captivating. I learned that he would return monthly to continue telling stories of the wisdom teachings of all ages.

Father Eli was a large, roly-poly man whose smile told a thousand stories. He lived on a farm near Hattieville, AR and

travelled a lot to teach. He was already in his sixties when I met him. Rumor has it that he survived more than eight heart attacks using the methods he taught us.



THE TEACHER

Sometime in late winter of 1973, my first wife took our son and left Evanston to visit a friend in California. I was left alone in our apartment, teaching at the college and practicing yoga. During one of Eli's monthly lectures, he asked if anyone could provide temporary housing for Michael and Misty, who were the designated teachers for the Chicago area. I volunteered my home

and welcomed them to stay as long as they wanted.

It was around this time that I decided to investigate what they were trained to teach by Father Eli. This was a basic relaxing guided meditation session which became the basis for **Mindfulness Breaks** (of the special kind referred to above.) Misty did an outstanding job of training me.

When the May lecture came around, Father Eli invited me to join him in the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas for a summer long retreat to investigate further the wisdom traditions and for training in how to facilitate **Mindfulness Breaks**. The next month when school let out, I met ex and my son in St. Louis at my parent's house where we worked our separation. During this time, I consulted the I Ching for help in deciding whether to go to Arkansas with Father Eli. I came up with hexagram for "Perseverance Furthers." I took this as a sign to take the

opportunity to be on retreat with Father Eli for the whole summer.

I arrived on June 10 and the teachings began the next day. There was a group of about ten of us – all eager to learn what Father Eli was to teach. I had no idea what I was getting into, and didn't realize that I would be taught to train people to do the special **Mindfulness Breaks!** When this training began, I was especially moved and grateful to be in the presence of such wonderful teachings. Each morning, I would do yoga and meditation according to the teachings of Swami Rama and each afternoon, I would do a **Mindfulness Break.**

One morning during the first week on retreat, I sat in my Ford van on my zafu facing the front of the van. I was mentally repeating my mantra when I seemed to disappear into emptiness. I was empty of a separate existence from space and time. The feeling of it is really indescribable. There was no joy and no sorrow. There was no happiness and no sadness. I was one with the whole cosmos. This experience, I knew, was beyond achievement and non-achievement. When I came out of it, I knew it was a life-changing experience. It was similar to, but more intense than the experiences I had on three separate occasions when I was 19.

The first took place during a performance of the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. During the “Ode to Joy” movement, I lost myself into the sound of the singing and orchestra and while it played, I was filled with bliss. At that time, I was studying chemical engineering in university and was a complete and utter nerd – before the term was even invented. My circle consisted of my family and possibly one friend. On the whole, I was distraught from my first real girlfriend breaking up with me before school began. She was, in fact, with me at the symphony, even though we had broken up. To have such bliss in the midst of such a depressed state was totally unexpected and continued to confuse me for years.

The second experience came during Kol Nidre – the night before Yom Kippur. I was in the synagogue with my family and the singing triggered a similar response to the symphony. I

thought, “This must be God granting me a vision of peace!” Combining this experience with the symphony, however, did much to confuse me about God, religion, spirituality, happiness and peace.

The third experience came a week later the day before my sister was to go off to college. She was two years younger than me, but only one grade behind. I had been held back a half a year in fifth grade for being an underachiever, socially inept, not doing homework, and daydreaming. I was held back another half year in ninth grade because we moved out to the suburbs which did not offer second half of ninth grade in the fall. So, I was only a year ahead of my sister. We were all sitting around the family kitchen table, me with my back to the window. St. Louis can be miserably hot and humid in September. As we were all eating and talking, I slipped once again into the field of bliss and felt happy for a short while. This may have been the last time we were all together around that table without other family members.

This third event confused me even more. Was there a God? Did he exist? Was he telling me something? How do I understand these visits of bliss in an altogether unhappy life? What is the significance of the feeling of emptiness I had experienced?

The partial solution I came up with was to study physics in order to understand the nature of the universe and perhaps the nature of God. I wanted to make a contribution to science that would benefit mankind. I spent six years in graduate school on this course and decided that I had to pursue the spiritual path as well.

Returning to the Arkansas retreat, I had a vision a few days later that is still present in my today. I wrote in my diary,

In a deep trance at night before going to sleep, I became a point source of consciousness and drifted into a space where two guides met me and said, I should do the work of God and serve him under the name of Theandrigal. It was such a strong vision that I was shocked out of trance.

The next day, I asked Father Eli what the meaning of this

vision was. He told me he thought it meant, “He who walks on two feet and serves God.” He said I would be happy working with him or in the Jewish religion. Little did I know that I would become a Buddhist practitioner and serve “all that is!”

Last year, I finally made the connection between the *Zen Teachings of Father Eli* and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. I began reading my notes from 1973 and 1974, all carefully preserved in two three-inch binders. As I read my notes, it began to dawn on me that the two masters were teaching the same basic ideas on life, liberation and happiness. My notes span two three inch three ring binders. A third reverence was Father Eli’s book, *The Second Book of Wisdom*.

It is important to note that after World War II, Father Eli spent thirteen years in Japan under the guidance of the great Zen teacher, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki within the 1200 year old Zen temple at Kyoto Kamakura. After four years of study, he was honored as one of the first Americans to be granted the title of Zen Master. What he taught in the retreat was an Americanized version of his Zen training which he combined with his Native American and Scottish traditions.

After about three weeks of teachings on various subjects plus doing work around the retreat center, Father Eli began to teach us about relaxing people – the basis for a **Mindfulness Break**. This was our first hint of the hours of training that were to come. He warned us that we were not psychiatrists and should mess with psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, or mental blocks. So this was to be a simple relaxing guided meditation that we can use to treat others.

The next day we began the practical experience of relaxing people. Of course we were all familiar with the basic relaxing guided meditation but only Michael and Misty had experience in guiding others. It turned out that I had a certain knack for this process, possibly because of my prior yoga and meditation experience, and was asked to work with a couple of students who were having difficulties.

Towards the end of the retreat, we had a sesshin – and intense period of meditation that lasted a couple of days with breaks,

meals and sleeping in between. The format of the meditation periods was a kind of Zen meditation with a special type of Koan. The difference was that we were all outside in the orchard instead of being cloistered in a Zendo with tatami mats and cold walls to stare at. We sat there, repeating a phrase from *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll:

“Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.”

Around August 4, 1973, I left the Ozarks to visit my ex-wife and son in California. I liked it so much here that I decided to use what I had learned from Father Eli to manifest a job in the Bay Area and take a leave of absence from my job back in Chicago.

I remember distinctly lying on the floor of my ex’s house and using the relaxation process to see myself teaching at the College of Marin in Kentfield, CA. It just so happened that a sabbatical replacement position in computer programming came up and I was the perfect candidate. I got the job and I attributed it to the **Mindfulness Break** process that I had been doing. I recognized the power of the process and made a mental note to watch out how I used it. I had to be careful what I wished for, because it might become true.

The academic year of 1973 was spent teaching computer programming at the College of Marin and teaching **Mindfulness Breaks** in my home in San Francisco. Over three hundred people studied with me and I trained them to take **Mindfulness Breaks** on their own for \$5 a pop! This was one of the happiest times in my life because I had a secure job and people coming through to learn from me. But the job ended and I was once again thrown into my insecure personality.

I can’t really tell you what happened, because I was asleep to my inner self. I had gone back to Arkansas and right away, I noticed that something was wrong. I couldn’t put my finger on it then and I still don’t know. I had a falling out with Father Eli and

returned to California to be with my son and earn some money. Thinking back on it now, I realize that financial security and my sense of duty to my son were the issues.

We have had several other stunning successes with **Mindfulness Breaks** that I'd like to tell you about while I'm in the story telling mood!

MICAH'S STORY

In 1976, my son, Micah, then age seven was stricken with a grade four, stage four metastatic Wilm's tumor (a cancer of the kidney common in young children) that had spread to his lungs. No one, probably, except me, thought he would survive. He is now turning 49 and quite a strong and healthy young man with a wife and home in Marin County.

The key to his survival may have been the use of some of the alternative medical treatments. His surgeon and oncologist had given him up for dead. Even my surgeon said, "We weren't saving many stage fours in those days."

We were totally surprised when his doctors allowed us to use relaxing guided meditation and other alternative medical treatments with him. Micah and I worked together on *mind stories*, a **Mindfulness Break** designed especially for children, from the first day he went into the hospital. Every other night I would spend in his hospital room sleeping on the floor and doing **Mindfulness Breaks** with my girlfriend. We worked together doing the practice and using mental power to see the end of his cancer.

After he got out of the hospital, there were still rounds of chemotherapy and radiation he had to go through. There was also the wonderful Dr. Sheldon Ruderman who continued to do mind stories with Micah for many months.

By the time he was nine the cancer was gone and we were living with Mala, the woman who was to become my second wife and mother of my two girls. I was working a regular software engineering job and Mala was absolutely wonderful in helping with Micah. When he was eleven, we were running him out to San Rafael for gymnastics and deep into San Francisco for the San

Francisco Boys Chorus. We asked Micah to choose gymnastics or the Boys Chorus. He chose music and that would shape his life. He went to The Branson School for high school and Stanford for university. Now he is a vice-president of a successful high-tech firm.

MINDFULNESS BREAKS ARE THE KEY TO MY SURVIVAL

Mala and I got married in 1981 and had two girls in 1982 and 1984. Instead of buying our own home, we opted to send the children to private school. The girls got all the benefits of a Montessori education from the age of two through eighth grade.

About six months after my second daughter was born, I connected with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and began practicing Zen meditation along with **Mindfulness Breaks**. My software engineering career was humming along but we were unable to afford a house of our own as well as educating our children.

In the early 1990's, I began studying the enneagram with Helen Palmer. These studies led to my first website, www.enneagram-instrument.org in 1994. My studies were interrupted in 1997 when I got cancer.

I remember clearly on January 25, the night before Super Bowl Sunday how I noticed that there was urine in my blood. I spent the whole night doing research on the web and was admitted to the hospital the next day. The diagnosis was bladder cancer. I was given one choice – the Gold Standard of treatment for bladder cancer: take out the bladder and replace it with an artificial bag to collect urine – a radical cystectomy.

I went into a deep **Mindfulness Break** and my guidance was to avoid a radical cystectomy. Through my channels of natural and traditional healers, I was lucky enough to find a bladder-sparing protocol used at the Massachusetts General Hospital by a Harvard professor, William U. Shipley, MD. I was able to convince my standard medical team to use this treatment with the guidance of Michael Broffman, L Ac., and founder of the Pine Street Clinic in San Anselmo. Michael is a multi-faceted genius with knowledge of eastern and western approaches to cancer. He

prescribed herbs and supplements that optimized my immune system for the stages of radiation and chemotherapy that were part of the bladder sparing protocol. I began my second website, www.yellowstream.org as a cancer diary (now you'll find it on www.mindfulnessinhealing.org.)

That summer, I attended a retreat with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh at the University of California – Santa Barbara. There I met Roshi Joan Halifax who had some wonderful ideas about healing cancer from within. I also had the support of my good friends, Martin Rossman, MD, Leslie Davenport, MFC, Roger Morrison, MD, and many other natural healers.

Since then, I have had five additional episodes of bladder cancer. Each episode was accompanied by **Mindfulness Breaks**, consultations with Michael Broffman, Marty Rossman and others, and the sense that it was important for me to continue to spare my bladder. One of the most recent episodes completed in April, 2017 with these words from my nurse, “No malignancy!” **Mindfulness Breaks** are the keys to my good health and happiness.

2. BEFORE YOU BEGIN

You may recall that we had several weeks of training at Father Eli's retreat center before we were taught how to facilitate **Mindfulness Breaks**. Now, I'm suggesting that you read over this and the next few chapters before diving in. This will give you the background and mindset that will help you progress towards liberation.

These insights have to do with the right mindset based on Father Eli's teachings on emotions, imagination and desire. The right approach to doing **Mindfulness Breaks** can make a huge difference on your success, whereas the wrong approach may bring unhappiness and harm you or someone else.

Please be aware that these components are offered as a model for doing **Mindfulness Breaks** and do not necessarily agree with current scientific research in these topics. There is no need for you to agree with them, but only to use them as tools to better your practice.

To illustrate this point, there is a story about two Zen monks who were walking in the woods. They came across a puddle and noticed a young and very beautiful woman trying to figure out how to get over the puddle without tarnishing her beautiful robes. Then, without a word, the senior monk picked up the woman, carried her across the puddle, placed her gently on the other side, and continued walking. The junior monk became perplexed by what had just happened. He rejoined his companion and didn't know what to say. A little while later, he could no longer control himself and uttered, "You know, as monks, we are not allowed to touch women. How could you pick her up and carry her over the puddle?" The senior monk looked at him and replied, "I set the woman down on the other side of the puddle. Why are you still carrying her?"

So, like the senior monk who left the woman on the other side of the puddle, we can choose to use the wisdom of Father Eli to advance our progress and then put down these components if they no longer carry meaning for us.

EMOTIONS

Father Eli divided emotions into two types – those that leave us relaxed and those that leave us tense. There is no need to put an evaluation of whether an emotion is good or bad. Ultimately, what we think of as good emotions are those that lead us towards the goals of righteousness, liberation, wisdom and compassion. These, in turn lead us to love of ourselves and others. Bad emotions, on the hand, lead us down the path of doing harm to ourselves or others. Like the Buddha before him, Father Eli taught that the definition of love is to relieve suffering and bring happiness. So this idea of love probably came from the fifteen years that Father Eli spent in Japan after World War II with D. T. Suzuki, from whom he was acknowledged to be a Zen master.

He classifies all the emotions under **love** as **relaxed emotions** or **good emotions**. He also classifies all the emotions under **hate** as **tense emotions** or **bad emotions**. This really is not too far off the track from the research of Dr. Paul Ekman in his study of emotions. Ekman studied facial expressions in cultures around the world and came up with the *Atlas of Emotions* (www.atlasofemotions.org.) Ekman classifies emotions into five distinct categories: anger, fear, disgust, sadness and enjoyment. Of these, Father Eli would say that enjoyment is the only relaxed emotion and that the rest of the bunch causes tension.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine what type an emotion is. To illustrate this point, he writes (in *The Second Book of Wisdom*):

For example, I may not know under what heading to put the emotion of worry. Under the old definition, worry might be considered good. Let us use our yardstick to see if worry goes under love. Do I tense or do I remain relaxed when I worry? I get tense. Worry comes under the heading of hate. Is it good or bad to feel sorry for a sick person? When I feel sorry for a person do I feel tense or do I stay relaxed? I stay relaxed, therefore sorrow comes under the heading of love.

When we participate in a **Mindfulness Break**, we want to be

relaxed. To help you relax, we suggest that you follow the two preparatory **Mindfulness Breaks** of *Mindfulness of Breathing* and *Clearing the Mind*, coming later. *Mindfulness of Breathing* helps us touch our breath and body and bring calmness to our minds. This may be practiced at any time, day or night. In fact, you can take a one minute mindfulness break by taking a few mindful breaths by sitting or standing erect and watching your in breath and your out breath with your full attention. *Clearing the Mind* eliminates emotional tensions which could interfere with our **Mindfulness Break**. You use a technique of reverie to examine the events of your day and replay them until all the tension is released.

THE THREE POISONS

Buddhist teachings on emotions are based on the idea that some emotions, called mental formations are positive, some are negative, and some are neutral. Positive emotions like love, compassion, kindness and joy give rise to happiness and inner peace. They lead us on the path to enlightenment, awakening and perfection of character. Negative emotions like lust, anger and fear destroy our peace of mind and lead us into sadness and depression. Neutral emotions leave us dangling in inaction like regret and sleepiness.

All these emotions, positive, negative or neutral are thought to be seeds in the *store consciousness* of the mind. The store consciousness can be likened to the subconscious mind and when the seeds of anger arise, they pop into the conscious mind, called *mind consciousness*. A good practitioner notices the negative seeds as they are popping up and does his or her best to encourage the seed to return to the store consciousness. In the Buddhist tradition there are 51 mental formations.

Three of the mental formations have been labeled *the three poisons*, because they contain the seeds for all other negative mental formation and they are the causes of most of our suffering. They come in various renditions, but the thinking behind them is the same. My personal choice is to talk about the three poisons as greed, aggression and delusion. Other people

talk about desire, hatred and ignorance; attraction, aversion and illusion and so on. These negative traits are dangerous toxins in our lives. Greed is the source of our unquenchable thirst for possessions, whether people, places or things, as well as our quests for money, sex and power. Somehow, greed is never satisfied by more. There is a never ending search for more fancy cars, vacation homes and life experiences. We never know when enough is enough. We forget that “to desire what you don’t have is to waste what you do have.” Just think of what is going on in Africa with the killing of elephants for their ivory. This atrocity is the result of greed, but is executed with aggression. As we shall see later, the desire for sex is really lust, which is one of the companions of greed.

Aggression is the poison with components of hatred, animosity and aversion and its substance is anger, which begins with annoyance, and increases to frustration, exasperation, argumentativeness, bitterness, vengefulness and fury. This poison causes us to commit all kinds of acts of violence against our fellow humans and other life forms. All racism is a form of aggression and separation of “us” and “them.” This is the poison which has the motivation of doing harm to other people, animals or the environment. Our aggression causes suffering to people, animals, plants and the earth.

Delusion in all of its forms is based on ignorance and illusion. For example, we think we are special because we are white skinned or brown skinned or yellow skinned. We fail to recognize that we are all humans, every one of us wanting happiness and avoiding suffering. We forget that we live on one planet in the solar system of what we call the sun in a teeny tiny corner of a huge galaxy with billions of other suns and innumerable planets around them in a universe of billions of galaxies! We are ignorant of the fact that once humanity extinguishes itself, the earth will still be around for another four or five billion years and life on earth will regenerate. We forget that we are nature, itself, learning about itself and that all life forms are interdependent on the earth, the sun, the clouds, the rain, the oxygen, and each other. As Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh says,

We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness.

To combat the three poisons, we need to practice their opposite: generosity, compassion and wisdom. Generosity motivates us to give of our time, energy and material resources to people, animals and the earth in whatever form is needed at a given time. Generosity includes being kind to our neighbors and people we pass on the street each day. It is in the act of giving that we receive. Remember, one way of doing good work is through giving. This brings happiness to the giver as well as the receiver, as long as it is done willingly and cheerfully. This type of giving is its own reward. Arthur J. Balfour once said,

"The best thing to give your enemies is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to your father, deference; to a mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; and to all men, love."

Compassion is the willingness and the capacity to experience another's pain and suffering. When we are compassionate, we only wish the pain and suffering of the other person be released. In our world today, compassion is mandatory. It is mandatory because there are so many diverse interests. Compassion is necessary for us to develop tolerance for different points of view. Compassion is mandatory in order for us to develop non-discrimination. Many people still harbor discrimination towards people who are not like them. There is a tremendous rise of antisemitism in many European countries today. There is tremendous animosity between Muslims and the rest of the world. There is tremendous unrest in Africa and other third world countries. The amount of discrimination has reached an intolerable level. The development of compassion is mandatory if we are to live together in peace and harmony in this only home we have – planet Earth! Otherwise, we are doomed to extinction. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) says,

May we keep our compassion alive by living in such a way that we reduce the suffering of living beings, preserve our planet, and reverse the process of global warming.

Compassion is something that can be trained and developed. At Stanford University, they have a Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) funded by the Dalai Lama and created by his primary English translator Thupten Jinpa, a former Tibetan monk and brilliant man. Thupten Jinpa says, compassion for other people is a true motivator to begin and continue a daily meditation practice. In my opinion, having compassion as part of my own daily practice has helped me be a better person and not neglect my practice.

One of the contributors to CCARE is Roshi Joan Halifax, founder of Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is a dharma teacher in Thay's tradition. She says,

“Compassion is comprised of that capacity to see clearly into the nature of suffering. It is that ability to really stand strong and to recognize that I'm not separate from this suffering... We actually aspire to transform suffering and if we are so blessed, we engage in activities that transform suffering... We cannot be attached to outcome.”

An important aspect of compassion is self-compassion. Kristen Neff, PhD, is the mistress of self-compassion. Dr. Neff is an Associate Professor of Human Development and Culture in the Educational Psychology Department of the University of Texas at Austin. She even wrote a book about it: *Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind*. She teaches that self-compassion is based on three components: self-kindness, our common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness is recognizing that it is OK not to be perfect and treating yourself with gentle kindness. Take a long, warm bath or a walk in nature to treat yourself with kindness. Understanding our common humanity is recognizing that all people everywhere have the same kinds of experiences that need to be treated with

compassion – no one is exempt from this kind of suffering. Mindfulness is recognizing the need for self-compassion when it arises.

When I feel down, one of the first things I do is to place my left hand on my solar plexus and my right hand on my heart and say to myself, “This is a moment of suffering.” I recognize my suffering and begin to accept it as a moment of suffering. I then think of how other people are doing with this kind of suffering and realize that I’m not the only one who suffers in this way. I have applied my mindfulness to bring my suffering down to a tolerable level.

Wisdom and compassion are the cornerstones of Buddha’s teachings. Wisdom includes the teaching of emptiness. Compassion includes the teaching of *interbeing* or interdependence and altruism based on the insight of interbeing. What do we mean by emptiness? When you say that something is empty, you must ask, “Empty of what?”

Take that mug on the kitchen counter. When you say that it is empty, you mean that it is empty of water or empty of tea or empty of something else. Even though the cup may be empty of water, empty of tea, and apparently empty of everything else, it is not empty of a separate existence. It is made up of only non-cup elements, like clay, paint, the potter’s work product, the oven it was fired in, the truck driver who brought it to the store where you bought it, and many other elements. So when we say, “empty,” we mean empty of a separate existence.

What do we mean by *interbeing*? This word was coined by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh to emphasize the interconnected nature of all reality. When you embrace the insight of interbeing, you recognize that your happiness depends a lot on the happiness of everyone around you – your family, friends, neighbors, and so forth. You feel compassion for your fellow human being and all life forms. As the Dalai Lama says, “Everyone wants happiness and to avoid suffering.” He writes (in *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajñāparamita Sutra*),

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud

floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. 'Interbeing' is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix 'inter' with the verb 'to be,' we have a new verb, inter-be. Without a cloud we cannot have paper, so we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are.

If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in the sheet of paper. The logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way, we see that without all these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist.

Looking even more deeply, we can see ourselves in this sheet of paper too. This is not difficult to see, because when we look at a sheet of paper, the sheet of paper is part of our perception. Your mind is in here and mine is also. So we can see that everything is in here with this sheet of paper. You cannot point out one thing that is not here—time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this paper. That is why I think the word interbe should be in the dictionary. 'To be' is to interbe. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.

Suppose we try to return one of the elements to its source. Suppose we return the sunshine to the sun. Do you think that this sheet of paper would be possible? No, without sunshine nothing can be. And if we return the logger to his mother, then

we have no sheet of paper either. The fact is that this sheet of paper is made up only of 'non-paper' elements. And if we return these non-paper elements to their sources, then there can be no paper at all. Without non-paper elements, like mind, logger, sunshine, and so on, there will be no paper. As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it.

These words of wisdom come from Matthieu Ricard, PhD, a molecular biologist turned monk and a very beloved one at that. I have admired his teachings for many years now. These words were said in the context of the question, "What if your intention is good, but the results are harmful?" by Tricycle magazine online.

The essence of Buddha's teaching is the union of compassion and wisdom, the view of interdependence and emptiness. An altruistic attitude is altruistic. It is not confused in itself. But without wisdom, we can act with obscured compassion or stupid compassion.

So we have seen that generosity can counter the effects of greed and attachment. Compassion is the antidote for aggression and anger. And wisdom is the solution to delusion and ignorance. Adopting these three antidotes can bring us a lot of inner peace and happiness.

IMAGINATION

Another useful component in **Mindfulness Breaks** is the use of imagination. The word, imagination, comes from the combination of the word, "imagine," and the suffix, "tion." To imagine means to create pictures of people, places or things or a combination of these. The suffix, "tion," means "the act of." So imagination is the act of imagining, i.e., creating pictures of people, places and things. We combine pictures of people, places and things that we have seen in our experience, recalled from memory, or put together in an image. So don't think of a pink elephant. What happened when you didn't?

The more you use your imagination, the better it will get and

the more intelligent you will become. You can improve your imagination by telling stories. When my son, Micah, was a child, I invented another child with the name of Hacim and would tell stories about Hacim. Hacim would play ball, meet with friends, pretend they were knights in shining armor, and he would have a lot of fun. Little did I know that he would later take up fencing and be invited to be on the Stanford University fencing team.

Another way to develop imagination is to read books containing very vivid descriptive matter. This enables us to combine the images that the writer is suggesting with pictures from our memory to create an interesting scene.

Then there are movies, video games and television. These media flood our imagination. Have you ever noticed that in a good movie the scene changes from a close up shot to a medium shot to a long range shot and shuffles between them? The cameras hold the close up shot for about eight or nine seconds and then pan out to a medium range shot. It holds this shot for eight or nine seconds and then either moves in for another close up shot or moves out for a long range shot. The time interval between shots is variable and that keeps the film interesting. Can you imagine what it would be like for a movie to keep the same scene without changing for the hour and a half of the whole movie? It certainly would be a boring movie if it was done like that. They continuously change the orientation of the scenes in order to make them seem real.

In our work with **Mindfulness Breaks**, we need to keep it real by following the mind's way of seeing things from close up, medium range and far away with close up shots, medium range shots and long range shots. This will help us see a clear path to what we desire in terms of property, experience or awakening.

DESIRE

This brings us to the third component of **Mindfulness Breaks**: desire. Desire has really gotten a bad rap! Even the Buddha said that desire was the root of our suffering, but I think this is the wrong translation. The proper word would be something like craving or attachment. Desire has a totally different connotation,

as you'll see what I mean in a moment.

Each of the emotions in the previous section has a certain amount of desire attached. For example, hate and anger have the desire to cause harm in the way of physical or mental pain and bring unhappiness. On the other hand, love has the desire to relieve pain and suffering and bring happiness. The tense emotions cause separation, while the relaxed emotions bring about the desire to approach. They all have desire attached, with different results.

Desire is what causes things to happen. For example, if there were no desire in anger, we would never curse someone or hit them. If there were no desire in love, we wouldn't want to bring happiness to people or reduce their suffering. It is desire itself that brings the final action, not the emotion underlying it. So, in the realm of **Mindfulness Breaks**, it is desire that is the activator which causes things to happen. Without desire, nothing happens.

A lot of people think of desire in terms of sexual attraction. However, lust is the correct word for sexual desire. Similarly, the correct word for the desire for possessions is greed. Both of these, lust and greed, have a desire attached as the activator or motivator for us to obtain what we want.

Emotions may be fleeting and impermanent, but desire remains longer than passing fancies. When an emotion persists for a longer period of time, it becomes a mood, and when a mood persists for a long period of time it becomes a state of mind. In the case of tense emotions such as anger or fear, we may have the desire to cause harm or flee. This causes the stress response and adrenalin and cortisol begin to flow in our blood stream. These chemicals remain in our blood stream even after the reason for anger or fear has dissipated. So the attached desire remains longer than the actual emotion.

This is also true for relaxed emotions. When we are relaxed, the relaxation response kicks in and oxytocin and serotonin kick in and keep the desire going. We can harness this desire to accomplish our goals in doing **Mindfulness Breaks**.

One of my favorite teachings from Helen Palmer is that "Energy follows attention!" Where we put our attention is where

our energy goes. If we put our attention on relaxing, beneficial people, places and things, we will feel happy and have some inner peace. If we put our attention on negative things, tension, worry, and discomfort follow. We go into the fight, flight or flee response, or just feel bad. “Energy flows where attention goes.” **Mindfulness Breaks** generate the relaxation response so our energy flows in a positive direction. The Buddha called this “yoniso manasikara” or appropriate attention. This corresponds to a statement by Father Eli (in *The Second Book of Wisdom*,)

“Happiness is a state of mind in which our thinking is pleasant a good share of the time. Notice that HAPPINESS IS NOT AN EMOTION – it is a state of mind.”

3. A MINDFULNESS BREAK IN YOUR HOME

Now that you understand what a **Mindfulness Break** is, you can try it for yourself in your own home or workplace.

In your **Mindfulness Break** you may experience relaxation, healing, connection, well-being and a sense of deep peace right in your own home or workplace. This will help you cope better with the circumstances of your life and the situation in the world today with all the unrest and insecurity. With the current administration in the United States, with immigrants flowing into the EU and other countries and being rejected by the US, with the elephants in Africa being destroyed by poaching, with climate change raising the oceans and melting the glaciers, with more lies from the military / industrial complex, it is difficult to maintain a level of inner peace, happiness, and tranquility.

Mindfulness Breaks can help bring relief from these and other concerns by helping you to take it all in and finding peace in yourself, regardless of what is going on in the world around you. Whether you are a single mom or dad who works hard to keep your kids in school and getting good grades, a working family with two incomes, a senior citizen (like me) with time on your hands, or a single or married millennial with questions about your future, this guided meditation process is for you and your loved ones.

In the following section, you will be given the instructions for a basic **Mindfulness Break** in your home or workplace. In this approximately thirty minute process, you will be guided into a peaceful, restful state of mind and learn to return there whenever you wish. You can also purchase an audio recording to help you in the process or record your own voice to make the process a little easier.

During the session, you will learn to bring about the relaxation response to counteract any feelings of stress, anxiety or sorrow. The relaxation response was investigated by Harvard professor, Herbert Benson and it is just the opposite of the fight, flight or flee response which is the result of anxiety, stress, tension, and all sorts of other conditions. Anytime you do a **Mindfulness Break**, you are activating neural connections in your brain and

contributing to your own neuroplasticity. This process is not hypnotism because you will be totally aware of everything that goes on and you will be able to respond immediately to any emergency. Also, you are going to learn to do this yourself.

In a **Mindfulness Break** session you will learn

- How to breathe deeply from your abdomen.
- How to bring your attention into your breath, body and feelings.
- How to create a relaxing scene for you to return to at will.
- How to scan your body to achieve a state of total relaxation.
- How to set goals or work on any pressing personal issue that is bothering you so that you can reduce stress and achieve inner peace.

The **Mindfulness Break** session consists of several segments which include stretching and relaxing all the large muscles of the body; taking several deep, relaxing breaths; visiting a relaxing scene of your choice, whether real or imaginary – a beach, forest, or meadow; relaxing each part of your body; counting down to a deeper level of the mind; and looking deeply into the aspect of your life that you want to work on.

It is important to remember that just like physical exercise, mental exercise or meditation must be done consistently to produce results. If you stop your daily workouts, your muscles will eventually deteriorate until you start exercising again. The same is true for a **Mindfulness Break**. If you neglect to practice consistently, their effectiveness will wane. I always tell my students that consistent practice is much more important than rigorous time schedules or maintaining the same length of meditation each time you practice. Thus a nine minute **Mindfulness Break** done every day is better than an hour **Mindfulness Break** done once on the weekend.

BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS BREAKS

Mindfulness Breaks help you begin to experience peace within you and around you. Peace may not come all at once, but if you

practice for at least nine minutes a day for three weeks in a row without missing a day I bet you will find more peace in your life.

Next, you may experience your heart opening to the people you love and who love you and begin to enjoy the wonders of life around you. You may see more clearly how the earth we live on is really a wonderful place to be. You probably will find more enjoyment in flowers, birds, trees, animals, and other life forms, recognizing that they too want happiness and to avoid suffering.

Your own feelings about yourself may reach a point where you are happy most of the day. You may experience a glimpse of the beauty and radiance of your own true nature.

You may be able to answer such questions as, “Who am I”, or “What is my purpose in life?” In any case, the increased knowledge of your inner self will inspire you to keep on practicing for many years to come.

Many practitioners find that their health improves drastically as stress is reduced or eliminated from their lives. In my way of thinking, stress is the extra suffering we put on ourselves over and above the challenges that life brings. **Mindfulness Breaks** are the path to lessening the hold of the stress of our addictions and brings about increased wellness.

Quite often, practitioners experience a degree of happiness far above their normal state. This happiness comes from the freedom experienced during sitting quietly and recognizing that one can be content with one’s own life situation just as it is. This freedom provides an insight into taking life in the present moment, without putting anything extra on it in the way of stress or extra effort to get things accomplished.

Life seems to be experienced “in the now” – not just on the tennis court, for example, but also in playing, exercising, working, creating, loving, eating, sleeping, dreaming, and other aspects of the whole wondrous experience of living.

As you continue to practice, you may find that your addictions have less hold on your mind. Suppose you feel addicted to caffeine in one form or another, e. g., Starbucks or Peet’s coffee, chocolate, TV shows, and the like. In the past, you would not stop a moment to think about getting that extra cup of coffee or

having that additional piece of chocolate or watching that TV show. However, with **Mindfulness Breaks**, you start to become aware of these kinds of urges as seeds before they reach the level of mind consciousness causing you to act impulsively. You then notice, “My little coffee addiction – I know you are there and I am here for you. Please remain a seed for a little while longer and I will take care of you.”

A benefit that people experience out the gate is that of deep relaxation. **Mindfulness Breaks** bring on the relaxation response in most people, even the very first time they try it. The feeling of relaxation that comes with sitting silently can make you feel like you have slept peacefully for some length of time. You may come out of your session being quite refreshed and ready to take on your abundant life.

Another benefit that sitting quietly brings is the possibility of insight into various aspects of your life. Insight is the process of recognizing something important in just about any phase of existence. As you practice, sensations arise that give you a new understanding of your life situation.

Long time practitioners begin to notice a fondness and reverence for life. Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, they commit themselves to cultivating compassion and finding ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. They also try to minimize the amount of killing in the world and are themselves dedicated not to kill, even be it a tiny spider, or to let others kill.

Also, long-time practitioners become aware of the challenges caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, and they commit themselves to practicing generosity by sharing their time, energy, and material resources with those in need.

They cultivate loving kindness and compassion for all beings and respect their rights and property. Along the same lines, experienced practitioners regard the sanctity of sexual conduct of prime importance and experience sexual relationship in situations when there is love and a long-term commitment. They do everything possible to protect children from sexual abuse and try to keep couples and families together.

Experienced practitioners cultivate deep listening and loving speech. They listen with full attention and try not to judge what they hear. They speak their truth as much as possible in order to help resolve conflicts and protect their families and communities from harm.

Furthermore, experienced practitioners are mindful in what they consume. They avoid alcohol and other intoxicants and ensure their well-being by eating properly and not over-spending.

They work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in themselves and in their environment. There are several attitudes adopted by **Mindfulness Break** practitioners that trigger skillful behavior when it comes to life situations. These qualities of the heart, as they are known, include generosity, morality, patience, and determination, among others. These qualities provide incentives for mindfulness in daily life.

HOW TO USE MINDFULNESS BREAKS

You can use **Mindfulness Breaks** to combat stress and experience peace and tranquility for yourself. This peace will naturally spread to your family and friends and it will become contagious. Imagine having peace of mind in all the activities in your life!

You can also increase focus, insight and learning abilities by continuing to practice regularly. I know from my personal experience that **Mindfulness Breaks** have continued to allow me to focus on whatever project or activity that I am engaged in. I have already mentioned that when I wash the dishes, I only wash the dishes. I don't bring my problems to the sink and wish them to flow into the garbage disposal. I leave them at my desk and work on them when I return to them specifically. I used these skills to earn a good living as a software engineer for more than forty years.

Mindfulness Breaks allow you to achieve deep levels of meditation and bliss, and this experience will enhance your self-healing abilities, provide for enhanced neuroplasticity and improve your sleep. Your powerful healing hormones will become activated and more regulated. It will help you excel in sports and

recreation activities and you will enjoy them more than ever.

Mindfulness Breaks will deepen your spiritual connection, whatever that means to you. If you believe in God, you will feel a closer connection to divinity. If you don't believe in God but you do believe in a higher power, this connection will also deepen. In my case, I have found that being in touch with *all that is* has given me many spiritual insights that have sustained my life, even after 21 years of living with cancer.

It almost goes without saying that **Mindfulness Breaks** bring you back to experience the present moment. This moment to moment experience is called presence and it is the quality we admire in people who have it, whether we label it or not. Some being really present for us is a wonderful experience and you will be able to provide that for your family and friends. This being present for your family and friends will definitely improve your relationships.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR READING MINDFULNESS BREAKS

I recommend that you follow these instructions without judging them or thinking about them very much. They provide you with a step-by-step process to unlock the secrets of **Mindfulness Breaks** of all kinds.

Your experience will be unique to you and you should just follow them and take whatever you get. The most important advice I can give is to accept whatever happens, just as it is. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. You'll find my contact information in the chapter, "About The Author."

The format of the instructions for practice consists of statements, comments, and ellipses. Statements are in shaded normal text as in this sentence. Each statement should be thought of as something that I say directly to you in a calming voice as if we were in the same room together. The comments are in brackets ([]), which provide additional information to supplement the instruction. The ellipses (...) indicate a pause for the period of an in breath and an out breath or slightly more. Repeated ellipses (... ..) indicate a break of one to five minutes

or whatever you feel.

These instructions are virtually identical to instructions I give to clients who come to **Mindfulness In Healing** classes as well as private clients. When I train people I follow along with them. The words below are typical of what I say in public or private sessions.

I recommend you first read each step of the instructions all the way through, then read one statement at a time, and then you can proceed on your own pace. Do not worry if you don't think you are doing it right – there is really no right or wrong way to do it. With practice, your mindfulness will become a lot easier. Do not worry if you lose the sense or meaning of the current instruction because of thoughts, feelings, plans, memories, images, sounds, or emotions. Remember that these are just interruptions in meditation and are impermanent. Do not beat yourself up for them! It into that you were in one look at

THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

Here is a preliminary practice to a **Mindfulness Break** that is also part of it. It would benefit you to become familiar with Mindfulness of Breathing before you go on to the chapter on a basic **Mindfulness Break**. Remember that I had practiced yoga and meditation before I trained with Father Eli, and this practice prepared me to become a qualified teacher of **Mindfulness Breaks**.

The first meditation practice the Buddha ever taught was *Mindfulness of Breathing*. What is mindfulness of breathing?

It is actually quite simple but not easy. To be mindful of breathing you have to know when you are breathing in. You have to know when you are breathing out. You have to recognize a long breath as a long breath and you have to recognize a short breath as a short breath.

To practice mindfulness of breathing, find a comfortable position where you will not be disturbed for nine short minutes. This could be a cushion on the floor where you would sit with your back straight. You could also do the practice sitting in a comfortable chair or lying down in your bed or on the floor.

After a few weeks of practice of this nine-minute meditation, you can gradually begin to increase the length to twenty, thirty, or forty-five minutes, or whatever length is comfortable for you. I chose nine minutes because it is fairly short and you should be able to find nine minutes sometime during your busy day. If you wish, you can set a timer on your cell phone or other device. I use the “Insight Timer” app on my iPhone which you can download for free from the App Store. Although this is preferred at the beginning, you can do without it, especially if you are taking your nine-minute meditation break on a bus, ferry, or train on your way to work or in your workplace.

If you would prefer to be guided in this practice, please visit the “First Mindfulness Meditation Practice” on the **Meditation Practices** website (www.mountainsangha.org) right under the “Mindfulness” menu item. There are five other guided meditations there, as well. You can listen to them on your smartphone or tablet using your web browser. Ear phones are recommended.

The Practice of Mindfulness of Breathing

Step 1:

We begin by taking six deep breaths. When you breathe in..., breathe in completely and deeply..., filling your chest and abdomen as fully as possible... When you breathe out..., simply let go of all the air and the tensions you are holding... [Repeat a minimum of six times.]

Breathe in completely and deeply... Hold your breath for a count of three... Let go and release all the air in your lungs...

Breathe in deeply again... Hold for a count of three... Let go...

Breathe in again to your full capacity... Hold for a count of three... Breathe out and release...

In... in... in... One... Two... Three... Out... out... out...

Breathe in deeply again... Hold for a count of three... Let go...

Breathe in again to your full capacity... Hold for a count of three... Breathe out and release...

Now discontinue breathing deeply... and allow your breath to naturally return to normal... Take your time... Take it easy...

Step 2:

Now that your breathing has become normal... Withdraw yourself... into yourself... Become aware of your meditation seat... Open your senses... Taste inside your mouth and on your lips... The smell of air coming in your nostrils... Notice the ambient sounds... But don't become attached to them... Let them go... And sight... Eyes resting, but insight opening... And touch... Notice your feet and legs... Notice your hips and pelvis... Notice your abdomen and lower back... Notice your rib cage and middle back... Notice your chest and upper back... Be aware of your shoulders... On down to your arms, hands and fingers... Notice your neck and the back of your head... Notice your face...

Continue to breathe naturally...

[Now continue being aware of your body until you are ready to move on.]

Be aware... of no other spaces... but these spaces...

Be aware... of no other times... but these times...

Be here... Be now... Be here, now...

Step 3:

Now settle back into your breathing...

When you breathe in..., know that you are breathing in...

When you breathe out..., know that you are breathing out...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself..., "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself..., "Breathing out, I know I am breathing out"...

Try this several times...

"Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in... Breathing out, I know I'm breathing out..."

If a thought comes into your mind..., just acknowledge it and return to your breath...

You can shorten these, if you want...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself, "In"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself, "Out"...

Continue to pay attention to your breathing...

“In... [in breath] Out...” [out breath]

If a feeling comes into your body..., just allow it to be there..., and return to awareness of breathing...

“In... Out...”

If a sensation grabs your attention..., feel it..., accept it..., and return to your breathing...

“In... Out...”

If that errand you need to run... keeps cycling through your mind... let it be there for a while..., and then in your own time..., return to your breathing...

“In... “Out...”

If you notice a disturbing feeling... coming into your awareness..., acknowledge it..., and return to your breathing....

[Continue this practice for at least five minutes, letting go of thoughts, feelings, etc., as above. You will most likely begin to notice that your in breath becomes deeper and your out breath becomes slower. Remember to handle interruptions and distractions by noticing them and letting them go. Notice what comes up for you. Allow it to be there for a while. Then return to your awareness of breathing.]

[When the bell on your timer rings, or you learn that your nine-minute meditation period is over, slowly open your eyes and return to your normal daily activities. It may be a good idea to write down any thoughts or insights that you have experienced during your meditation session. Keeping a diary of this sort can be very beneficial.]

Step 4:

Now it is time to begin to return to the room... Once again..., bring your attention to your body... And in your own time..., come back to the room... Open your eyes...and say to yourself: May the merits of our practice benefit all beings and bring peace!

Notes:

You may feel your breath mostly in your abdomen, chest, throat, windpipe, or nostrils. You can chose whichever place you want to focus on, as long as it feels natural to you.

Instead of using “In,” when you breathe in, and “Out,” when you breathe out, you can actually choose your own set of word triggers, based on your experience. For example, ever since I have had cancer, I have used “Healthy” on the in breath and “Free” on the outbreath. If you experience your breath deeply in your abdomen, you can use a very old technique of repeating “Rising” when you breathe in and “Falling” when you breathe out.

In Zen practice, they teach counting the inhalations or the exhalations from one to ten, repeatedly. If you use this technique and lose the count, simply begin again.

Speaking of losing the count, there undoubtedly will be times when your mind is flooded with “shoulds” and “have tos” and you are distracted from your breathing. When this happens, simply bring your mind back to your breathing and place whatever crossed your mind into the back of your mind to be attended to later. Let these kinds of thoughts go as if they were white clouds drifting across the clear blue sky or the sound of a bird flying past your window.

Distractions happen frequently, even for the most experienced meditators. They have learned to let them go and return to their object of meditation, in this case, their breathing in and out, without further ado. Don’t let it worry you or give you the feeling of failure if your session is full of thoughts and distractions. Consider them part of your learning process

Please remember that it is more important to meditate than to worry about improving your meditation skills. Consistency is more important than technique when you are first beginning to meditate.

For more details, and for guided meditation practices of this type of meditation, please visit the **Meditation Practices** website and visit each of the mindfulness meditation practices under the menu, “*Mindfulness*,” just below the banner.

For a detailed online meditation course, try **9 Minute Meditation** (www.2wellbeing.org), where you will learn more than a dozen different meditation practices to try out at your own pace. Not all of the information is available when you sign up. Lessons are made available at the rate of three or four a week.

4. CLEARING THE MIND

Mindfulness of Breathing is just one of several preliminary practices you can do to prepare yourself for a basic **Mindfulness Break**. Clearing the Mind is another. This process was taught to me by Father Eli in 1973 and I've used it since then.

If you sit down or lie down to take a **Mindfulness Break** and your mind is full of tense or unpleasant emotions, your practice may not be very successful. These tense emotions are difficult to control and are not easily suppressed by willpower alone. Upsetting things may have happened during the day and some residual emotion remains in the mind. You are still connected to these emotions, whether or not you recognize it. It is best to use this process to clear the tense emotions from your mind before you take your **Mindfulness Break**.

For example, if someone made you angry or sad during the day, you may carry these tense emotions into your session. You don't want the anger or sadness to interfere with your ability to concentrate and they may cause more harm than you think. It is best to clear the mind of these emotions before you begin your practice. There will be more to say about tense emotions in subsequent chapters, so please try this practice and determine its validity for you.

Father Eli called this method, "reverie." It begins exactly like *Mindfulness of Breathing* with Steps 1 and 2.

Step 1:

[Follow the instructions for Steps 1 and 2 from the above *Mindfulness of Breathing* practice. When you are ready, proceed to Step 2.]

Step 2:

Picture an event, person or thing that happened today that caused you to experience a tense emotion... Begin with events that happened in the early morning... What was the first thing you did today...? Does that memory cause you any irritation or anger of any kind...? If not, repeat this step until you experience some degree of tension...

Step 3:

If you experience any anger, worry, fear, irritation, anxiety, or stress, stop and relive this experience... Go over it as many times as necessary until you no longer feel any tension as you picture it... When the tension is gone... picture the next event as in Step 2...

Step 4:

[Continue processing the events of the day until you have cleared your mind of all tense memories for the entire day. Now you are ready to take your **Mindfulness Break** without any lingering tension for the day's activities.]

How do you feel? Did your mind feel clear? Were you able to get past the experiences that caused you tension earlier today? Did you have any insights that will continue to help you in your life? If so, write them down so you will remember them.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

A similar practice can be used to go back over your life and consider the causes and conditions that led you to this moment in time. Count your blessings by bringing to mind all the beautiful events in your life that brought you happy thoughts. Recognize that these events brought you to this moment in your life and be grateful for what you have been given.

For more information about gratitude, please see Chapter 6.

5. YOUR FIRST MINDFULNESS BREAK

Now that you have a little experience under your belt, it is time for your first **Mindfulness Break** as I was taught by Father Eli. The following process has been slightly modified for the medium of paper and the lack of one-on-one guidance. There are several things that are much better done in a private setting. You can learn more about them at www.mindfulnessbreaks.com where you can sign up for a private session in person or over Skype.

The **Mindfulness Break** consists of several steps, like in the previous example. Please be sure to read all of the steps through at least once before you begin. Although each step is important, some may be skipped, depending on your time and circumstances.

It is helpful if you can choose some type of relaxing scene to visualize in this process. For example, you might think of a nice beach that you like anywhere in the world. Or you could think of a meadow with freshly mown grass and trees scattered around here and there. You could also think of a forest, a mountain top, a fresh water lake, or even the chaise lounge in your own back yard. Pick something where you know you will feel happy! In the process below, I'm going to use a white sandy beach like the one on this page of the **Mindfulness Breaks** website: <https://wp.me/p8pEGQ-7g>.

If you prefer to be guided, you can visit the "**Mindfulness Break Collection**" on www.mindfulnessbreaks.com and order the one of your choice. You can also record the text on your smart phone or tape recorder and play it back for yourself.

Ready? Let's begin!

THE BASIC MINDFULNESS BREAK PRACTICE

Find a comfortable position in a quiet place such that you won't be disturbed for approximately thirty minutes. This could be lying down on your bed or floor or sitting upright in a comfortable chair. After you have become accustomed to this process, you can practice certain parts of it sitting cross-legged on the floor or on a stool with little or no back support. You can even practice some of it while standing or walking!

During the session, you will have time to be by yourself for a little while. You may want to pick out a topic that you want to work on while you are relaxed. You may choose a goal you want to reach or a problem you want to solve. You can also choose to send loving kindness to someone who you know is suffering or who needs some healing energy.

You may want to have a notebook handy to write down any insights you may have during the process. You can also use a smart phone, tablet or computer to capture your notes. This helps your memory and allows you to continue to work on your topic and possibly return to it in a later **Mindfulness Break**.

It is a good idea to silence your cell phone and put it on “Do not disturb.” Similarly, make sure your land line is not going to shock you out of a deep process by shutting off the ringer.

Step 1: Stretching and Relaxing

We begin by stretching and relaxing all the large muscles of the body... Stretch out your legs and feet... Point your toes towards the ground and give them a good stretch... Now just let them go...

Now stretch out your arms and hands as far as they can go... Bring them up and out... and be sure to separate your fingers as much as possible... Now let them fall back to where they were...

Now arch you back as much as you can without straining yourself... And let it fall back naturally to a comfortable position...

Now roll your head from side to side to give your neck and head a little stretch... Good... Let your neck and head come to their natural positions...

Step 2: Deep Breathing

Up until now, we’ve stretched and relaxed all of the large muscles of the body except for the chest muscles... To stretch and relax the chest muscles, I’m going to have you take six deep breaths... Each breath should go deep into your abdomen... and should be as full as possible... When I say the word, “relax,” I want you to breathe in as completely and deeply as you can... When I say the words, “relax now,”... I want you to exhale quickly and

completely with a letting go type of breath...

[Hold each breath for a count of 3.]

Relax... Relax now... Relax... Relax now... Relax... Relax now...
Relax... Relax now... Relax... Relax now... Relax... Relax now...

Now allow your breathing to become normal... Let it be free and easy... Let it be natural... Don't try to control it at all... Now that your breathing has become normal... Withdraw yourself... into yourself... Become aware of your meditation seat...

Open your senses... Taste inside your mouth and on your lips... The smell of air coming in your nostrils... Notice the ambient sounds... But don't become attached to them... Let them go... And sight... Seeing and looking resting... but insight opening... And touch... Notice your feet and legs... Notice your hips and pelvis... Notice your abdomen and lower back... Notice your rib cage and middle back... Notice your chest and upper back... Be aware of your shoulders... On down to your arms, hands and fingers... Notice your neck and the back of your head... Notice your face...

Continue to breathe naturally...

[Now continue being aware of your body until you are ready to move on.]

Be aware... of no other spaces... but these spaces...

Be aware... of no other times... but these times...

Be here... Be now... Be here, now...

Step 3: Relaxing Scene

Imagine yourself lying on a beach of soft, white sand... The sand is so soft and so white that you really enjoy lying there... You could spend hours listening to the waves coming into the shore... You can almost taste the salt of the ocean... You certainly can smell it... You're just lying there, as comfortable as you can be... It's a nice warm day and the sun is shining brightly... You are surrounded by sand and sea in just about every direction... You begin to think how comfortable you are, lying there in the sand...

Nearby, a little yellow bird is dining on the insects in the sand... You watch him eat his fill... He eats something and then looks around to make sure he is safe... You realize how safe you are just lying there on the beach... You watch the bird for a while

and notice that he begins to fly... Up and up he goes – flying into the sky... The clear blue sky... He flies so high that you can no longer see him...

And all you can see now is the blue sky... – the clear blue sky... Then you notice a large white cloud beginning to come into view... a single white cloud, drifting across the sky... The gentle breeze is nudging the cloud gently across the sky... The same gentle breeze is rolling across your body... And you gently realize that your arms are getting very, very heavy... And you notice that your feet and legs are starting to feel very, very heavy... Your hands and arms feel like they are sinking into the sand... And you notice that your feet and legs feel like they are sinking deeper into the sand... Your hands and arm and your feet and legs are getting very, very heavy... and sinking into the sand... And this feeling of heaviness is beginning to spread throughout your whole body... And you are beginning to feel very relaxed... The gentle breeze is bringing the aroma of the ocean into your nostrils... and you are feeling more relaxed... And the gentle breeze is bringing a lovely wave to the shore... and you are feeling relaxed...

Step 4: Body Scan

And this feeling of relaxation is now spreading to the rest of your body... to the top of your head... Invite the top of your head to relax... and your forehead... Invite your eye brows..., eye lids... and eyes to relax... Every muscle and every nerve... Relax your cheeks... and nostrils... Every muscle and every nerve... Relax your lip, chin and jowls... Never worry if you are relaxed enough or if you could relax more deeply... Just let the relaxation be natural...

Relax your neck ... all the way around... Relax your shoulders from the inside... every muscle and every nerve..., every muscle and every nerve... Relax your upper arms... and elbows... Relax your forearms... and wrists... Relax your hands... fingers... and finger tips... Relax... let go... release...

Invite your chest to relax... and notice how your internal organs feel... Relax your abdomen and all the abdominal muscles... Every muscle and every nerve..., every muscle and every

nerve...

Invite your pelvis and hips to relax... Relax... Let go... Release... Relax your thighs... your knees... Relax your calves... and ankles... Relax your feet... relax your toes... and relax the tips of your toes...

Now your whole body is deeply and completely relaxed from the tips of your toes to the top of your head... and from the top of your head down to the tips of your toes... And you are completely and deeply relaxed...

Step 5: Count Down

Now that you are deeply and completely relaxed, I'm going to help you relax even more deeply... I'm going to count down from ten to one... With each count, you will become even more relaxed...

Ten... nine... Feel going deeper... Eight... seven... six... Deeper and deeper... Five... four... three... Deeper, deeper and still deeper... two... one...

Now you are at a deeper level of the mind... deeper than before... and much deeper than when we first began... Just notice how good you feel now... Relaxed deeply... at peace... Note that your breathing has become deeper... Notice that your breathing has become slower...

Step 6: Coaching

This feeling of relaxation can last up to four or five days...

Every time you relax yourself like this, it will become deeper and more pleasant... While you have been relaxing every muscle and every nerve in your whole body has been resting... When you awake, you'll feel better than before... perhaps better than you've ever felt before... Feeling like you are rested and content...

Step 7: Contemplation

Now take a few minutes at this level of the mind... to enjoy your state of relaxation... You may think about the goal or project that you thought of before being relaxed... You may wish to think about people you love... and who love you... and feel the love... You may think about people and animals who are not as blessed

as you are... and show kindness towards them... You may want to think about what you are grateful for...

[Now comes a short period of silence. In a private session, more instruction will be given at this relaxed state of mind.]

Step 8: Awakening

Now it is time to bring you out of this relaxation... I'll count slowly from one to five... At the count of five, you'll open your eyes... feeling wide awake... feeling fine and in perfect health... feeling as if you have had a good night's sleep... One... two... coming up slowly now... three... at the count of five you will open your eyes, feeling fine, wide awake and in perfect health... feeling better than before... feeling the way you feel when you get a good night's sleep... four... five...

[Louder] Eyes open! Wide awake, feeling fine and in perfect health, feeling better than before!

How do you feel? Write down your feelings in your notebook. Note any insights or ah ha's you had during the session. What did it feel like to be so completely relaxed? Did you make progress on your goal or topic? If so, what progress did you make? What thoughts and feelings do you want to remember from your experience?

Did you have any difficulties? What were they? If you have any questions, please free to contact me and I'll try to answer them. You'll find my contact information in the "About the Author" section towards the end of the book.

Remember that you can practice this **Mindfulness Break** whenever you want. A good time to practice is in the morning when you wake up. Another good time to practice is in the evening before you go to bed. You can also practice when you get home from work before dinner. Note that anytime you do this practice is a good time to do it!

After you have been practicing for a while, you will begin to learn some short cuts to make your sessions take less time if you want. This should only be done after twenty-one days of practice each day so that you are familiar with each step.

VARIATIONS ON MINDFULNESS BREAKS

The basic **Mindfulness Break** of the previous section should be practiced daily **as is** for at least 21 days. Once you have the technique down, you add in some of these variations to suit your environment and life circumstances. This all takes place either at the end of Deep Breathing (**Step 2**) or in Contemplation (**Step 7**.) No matter which of these variations you decide to use if any, make sure that you are at some level of relaxation to insure that they will be effective.

In my own practice, I do an abbreviated version of stretching and most often employ the deep breaths. At this point, I almost always do the gratitude practice (chapter 6,) and often to loving kindness practice (chapter 7.) By then, I am very relaxed and rarely do the body scan or count down. I move right into the contemplation section or simply follow my breathing.

Several varieties of the basic **Mindfulness Breaks** will be treated in subsequent chapters. For example, there are chapter on goals, anger, stress, sleep, weight normalization, and self-healing, as well as chapters on gratitude, forgiveness, loving kindness, inner peace and happiness. Each chapter contains general instructions on what to do in the contemplation section, rather than instructions you can record and play back for yourself. There are also a set of contemplations that enhance your life though the development of wisdom and compassion. After you have read the whole book, you can then zero in on the teachings that resonate for you and your life situation.

6. GRATITUDE

Of all the teachings of Father Eli and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh I think that the teachings on gratitude had the most significant effect on my life. Ever since I started practicing gratitude, my life has become better and happier. I began to have a feeling of inner peace and equanimity. Appreciating what I have has given me the freedom from desiring possessions which only take up space and cost money.

When my daughters were young, their desires were inexhaustible. They wanted Barbie Dolls, play houses, stuffed animals, coloring pencils and paper, you name it. My wife used to say to them, “To desire what you don’t have is to waste what you do have.” This worked most of the time and yet when the older one went off to college in 2001, I was taught a remarkable lesson. Already in my sixties, I trudged up the dormitory steps with bundles and bundles of clothes and school supplies. We fit everything into her closet and bins under her bed, which was on one foot risers. Then I looked around her room and the room of the girls next door. What I saw shocked me. The amount of clothes Rachael had was greater than the total of the amount of clothes her roommate and her two closest neighbors had. “Where did all this come from,” I wondered. I never got a good answer, but I know that she had been very grateful as a child. Last year she is traveled around the world with only a backpack full of clothes. Her closets at home, however, are still full.

A couple of years ago she, realized just how blessed her childhood had been and she texted us a beautiful message about how grateful she was for having parents like us. You can believe that this thank-you note was one of the items for my gratitude practice that night and the next morning.

Research has shown that the practice of gratitude can increase your happiness by a considerable amount – as much as 25 percent! They say that you can develop a stronger immune system and lower your blood pressure. You will feel more states of pleasant and relaxed emotions, have more joy, optimism, and happiness, and feel more generous and compassionate. Practicing gratitude will also reduce your feelings of loneliness and

isolation.

The practice of gratitude in daily life takes the form of thanking people for what they do for you. It also involves taking the time to be kind and courteous to other people. This helps to spread gratitude to more people, and it sets up a “pay it forward” situation. It will help you strengthen your social ties that will increase your feeling of being interconnected.

Gratitude is also a very potent antidote to depression. This is because we realize that the world is not devoid of goodness, love, and kindness. Gratitude takes us out of ourselves. C. W. Huntington, Jr. wrote, “Love is not about getting what we want. Love is about how we live with what we are given.”

Along the same lines, Pema Chodron, an eminent Buddhist teacher living in Nova Scotia, says,

Joy has to do with seeing how big, how completely unobstructed and how precious things are. We can get so caught up in our own personal pain or worries that we don't notice that the wind has come up or that somebody has put flowers on the dining room table or that when we walked out in the morning, the flags weren't up, and that when we came back, they were flying.

- Pema Chodron

There are many ways to express gratitude in addition to the **Mindfulness Break** outlined below. One idea is to keep a gratitude journal. Make it a habit to write down or share with a loved one your thoughts about the gifts you've received each day.

Another idea is to write a thank-you note. You can make yourself happier and nurture your relationship with another person by writing a thank-you letter expressing your enjoyment and appreciation of that person's impact on your life. Send it, or better yet, deliver and read it in person if possible. Make a habit of sending at least one gratitude letter a month. Once in a while, write one to yourself. If you find that you don't have time to write or visit your friend, it may help to think about that person and mentally thank them for being nice to you.

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is always teaching us that happiness can only be found in the present moment and that we have everything we need to be happy here and now. He says that we can feel the warmth of the sun, the beauty of the flowers, the fragrance of the trees, the power of the mountains, and the peaceful calm of the mountain lake, reflecting the light of the moon. He calls these “the wonders of life.” We can all be grateful for these wonders of life and find many more that appeal to us.

Ifé Sanchez Mora, a Nichiren Buddhist Singer, writes,

I think for every human being, appreciation in daily life is key. Through having appreciation for everything, you're able to expand so much as a human being, with your heart and your spirit and your mind.

Father Eli taught that gratitude is a means of preparing yourself for an excellent **Mindfulness Break**. He taught us to think about the things that we are grateful for and recommended that we make a list. He taught us to go over the events of the day when we reached the state of relaxation in our daily practice and find three things we were grateful for that day. When we count our blessings, we tune into our higher selves and come in contact with our inner knowing.

Father Eli writes the old saying, “I felt bad because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.” Probably the man who had no feet felt bad until he met a man who had no arms or legs and lived in a basket. Perhaps the man in the basket then could compare himself to the man dying in extreme pain and say, “At least I'm comfortable in my basket.” (*Second Book of Wisdom, Lesson 18.*)

Eli said that there is always something to be grateful for. One of the most important things is the opportunity to work towards perfection in this life. This corresponds to the Buddhist ideal of following the eight-fold path to awakening. When you tell someone you are thankful for what they did, they tend to do more for us. He gives the example of a child. You bring a child a gift and he shows his gratitude with thanks and kisses and the

next time you see him, you'll bring another toy. But if he is not grateful, you are not likely to bring a gift the next time you see him.

One more thing about gratitude: two days after 9/11, we went to a dharma talk (read public speech) of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) in Berkeley. A friend approached me to help start a *sangha* – a meditation group in the Plum Village (where Thay lives) tradition. Participating in this group led me to aspire to become a member of Thay's Order of Interbeing – a group of almost 10,000 monks, nuns, lay men and lay women committed to practice what Thay calls the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. These trainings are guiding principles for living a peaceful life and include such teachings as "Reverence for Life." They are based on the precepts from the teachings of the Buddha – not to kill, not to steal, not to abuse sexuality, not to lie, and not to get intoxicated. They have been clarified over a period of many years to fit our modern times. You can read about them on www.plumvillage.org. My training to become an Order of Interbeing member began in 2004 and I was ordained a member in 2008.

Our *sangha* began after Thay's talk and lasted until around the end of 2008. At that time, I had a great job and was feeling grateful that my cancer was in remission since 2003. I began to think what more I could do express my gratitude to my medical practitioners – mainstream and alternative as well as the community that supported my healing well-being. I had been serving on the Community Council of the Institute for Health and Healing and on the Board of Directors of the Marin AIDS Project.

I approached Pine Street Clinic to see if they would be interested in a **Mindfulness In Healing** support group to take place in the clinic once a week. The idea was to offer compassionate listening and loving speech as well as guided meditations to the clients of Pine Street and the general public to support their healing process. I invited Carolyn de Fay, LCSW, a fellow Order of Interbeing member, to share the responsibility of the group with me. We have been meeting at Pine Street since the summer solstice of 2009 and continue to offer meditation

practices and support without discrimination. The teachings are offered for free and donations are accepted for the clinic. You can read more at www.mindfulnessinhealing.org/sangha.

GRATITUDE MINDFULNESS BREAK

The gratitude mindfulness break can be combined with the loving kindness mindfulness break or precede or follow the mindfulness of breathing meditation practice. It can also be done quite alone and often during the day as things are happening in your life.

I do this practice before I go to sleep, and when I awake. Also, many times during the day, I take note of something that I am grateful for.

The stand-alone practice begins with taking a comfortable position on a chair or cushion or lying down. If you are lying down, try not to fall asleep! This practice can be done after the completion of *Deep Breathing* from the basic **Mindfulness Break**.

Step 1:

[Prepare yourself by practicing at least the *Deep Breathing* (**Step 2**) from the Basic **Mindfulness Break** above.]

Step 2:

Bring to mind an event, object, or experience that happened today that you are truly grateful for... If you can't think of one, look back in your life and find something that you are truly grateful for...

It may be something as simple as a smile you received from someone while you were walking to or from work... or the friendliness of a clerk that checked out your groceries... If you take notice of these kinds of acts of kindness..., you will soon find yourself "paying it forward"...

Now acknowledge your gratitude... and feel the joy you had when the event, object, or experience took place...

Step 3:

[Repeat the above at least two more times or as many times as you want. Do this every day for maximum benefit.]

How do you feel? What are you grateful for? Write down any insights you have had during this process so that you can remember them. Who in your life do you appreciate? Who in your life appreciates you? It is good to keep these in mind, especially when you are out of sorts.

TOUCHING THE EARTH

There is another gratitude practice based on the teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh that I want to share with you briefly. This is the practice of Touching the Earth. I have adapted this practice to my own lifestyle and it deviates considerably from what Thay and his companion, Sister Chan Khong have taught and written about. I incorporate it as part of my morning exercise.

After I do a set of standing exercises, I practice touching the earth. I lie on the floor face down with my hands under my forehead for each of three touchings of the earth. The first touching is for my family – my wife, children, and their spouses, and myself. I feel gratitude for us all and offer loving kindness as well. I picture each one separately as I think about them and feel how grateful I am to be in their lives and have them in my life.

The second touching is for my root teachers, Father Eli, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, Swami Rama and Swami Veda Bharati, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Gabrielle Roth, Helen Palmer and Anna Halprin. Each of these teachers has made a deep impact on my life and I offer my gratitude to each one in turn or as a group.

The third teaching is to offer gratitude to the land ancestors who made my life where I live in Marin County, California possible. These are the people that crossed the Great Barrier Reef and moved down the Pacific Coast. These are the coastal Indian tribes of the Miworks and Ohlones. I really don't know that much about them, but I am grateful that they paved the way for me and my family to enjoy this beautiful, peaceful spot on earth.

Along these same lines, Dorianne Laux writes, expanding on

the ideas of “the wonders of life,”

Whatever I've been through in my life cannot compare to the gift of life. Against unfathomable odds, I was conceived and born. Against even greater odds, I have lived and continue to live. It is the greatest gift to wake up every morning into a swirling world and to be given air to breathe, water to drink, a sun and a moon, stars, rivers, trees, birds flitting and singing, ants making their homes beneath the sidewalks, a summer storm ... I don't know, who could not want to fall to their knees in gratitude?

For more information about this type of meditation, please visit **Meditation Practices** and search for “*gratitude.*”

7. LOVING KINDNESS

When thousands of people were asked, “What do you want in a relationship,” the vast majority said they want kindness – loving kindness.

I know very well what it feels like to receive true loving kindness. My wife, Mala, is an expert at giving it. You can see it in the way she treats our children. You can see it in the way she treats her many “best” friends. You can see it in the way she addresses strangers.

Loving kindness is one of the four “immeasurable minds” or “*Brahma Viharas*” – divine abodes or graces that the Buddha taught 2,600 years ago. A *vihara* is a dwelling place or divine abode in Sanskrit. These are the four elements of true love.

The word for loving kindness in Sanskrit is *maitri*, while in Pali, the language the Buddhist scriptures are written in, the word for loving kindness is *metta*. The reason I bring this up is that loving kindness meditation is often referred to as *metta* meditation.

The other divine abodes are compassion (*karuna* in both Pali and Sanskrit), sympathetic joy (*mudita* in both Pali and Sanskrit) and equanimity (*upeksha* in Sanskrit and *upekkha* in Pali). Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh often speaks of inclusiveness on an equal basis with equanimity. I have come to connect inner peace with equanimity – they may actually be the same.

The teaching is that developing one of these graces is tied directly to developing all of them. If you have loving kindness, it is possible to manifest compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. If you have sympathetic joy, you can manifest loving kindness, compassion and equanimity. And so forth.

They are called “immeasurable” because practicing them will bring you immeasurable happiness and eventually you will be able to embrace the whole world. People around you will notice your happiness and they will become happier also.

When I first began to practice these graces, I noticed that it was relatively easy for me to develop sympathetic joy, especially for and with my children. I would experience waves of joy and happiness when they reported good things that were happening

in their lives. I believe that one of the first times this occurred with the four immeasurable minds as a conscious practice was when one of my daughters was playing on her high school tennis team. I was filled with joy that she was participating in something I love. This happened more than twenty years ago!

It didn't take me long to connect the dots and begin to have a regular *metta* practice. Once this began, I realized that compassion and equanimity and also inner peace were just around the corner. And, they too, began to arise often in my life.

One time in 2009, I was invited to speak at my niece's wedding celebration in Israel. I proceeded to speak about how the newlyweds could enhance their love life by practicing the four immeasurable minds. They now have two young girls and a newborn son, who I am sure, give them many opportunities for loving kindness, happiness and joy.

THE LOVING KINDNESS MINDFULNESS BREAK

The scriptures tell us that for someone to develop loving kindness for others; they must first develop loving kindness for themselves. This may not be as easy as it seems, as several people told me of their difficulties with this.

These kinds of people have low self-esteem and need the benefits of a qualified teacher. However, if they begin with the first loving kindness meditation practice and stick with it persistently, eventually things will begin to clear up and they will begin to develop compassion, joy, and equanimity.

The traditional way of doing loving kindness meditation is to shower the loving kindness blessings (coming soon) on yourself. This is because people often have difficulty loving others if they can't love themselves. This may be continued on its own for several weeks or months until you feel really comfortable moving on.

This is usually followed by bringing to mind someone close to you. It could be your spouse, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, or close friend. You'll see below that you can also pick a group, such as your immediate family members. Then you shower the loving kindness blessings on that person or group.

Following this, you choose someone you have difficulty with, whether it is a spouse, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, friend, acquaintance or stranger. Then you shower the loving kindness blessings on that person.

Next, in the traditional method, you shower loving kindness blessing on strangers, like the people who serve you in the grocery store or shopping center. Then proceed to shower loving kindness blessings of all sentient beings and planet Earth.

Like the traditional method, we begin by showing loving kindness blessings on ourselves.

Step 1:

[Prepare yourself by practicing at least the *Deep Breathing (Step 2)* from the Basic **Mindfulness Break** above.]

Step 2:

Now bring your attention to the place in your body where you feel most yourself... This could be your heart center or anywhere else that pleases you... Shower these loving kindness blessings on yourself:

May I be safe from internal and external harm...

May I have a calm, clear mind and a peaceful, loving heart...

May I be physically strong, healthy and vital...

May I experience love,... joy,... wonder... and wisdom in this life, **just as it is...**

Sit with each of these blessings for a while... Let them penetrate through the barriers of fear, uncertainty, and doubt... Let them bring a feeling of deep well-being into your heart-mind... Remember that you are enough...

[You are welcome to repeat them as many times as necessary to feel comfortable in yourself. I often repeat them three times.]

Step 3:

When you are ready, bring to mind the most important people in your life... your spouse, your children, your grandchildren,

your parents, your grandparents, your significant other, or any others that you choose... You can include your siblings and their families... and your closest friends... if you wish...

When you have brought each person to mind that you want at this time, shower these loving kindness blessings on them:

May you be safe from internal and external harm...

May you have a calm, clear mind and a peaceful, loving heart...

May you be physically strong, healthy and vital...

May you experience love,... joy,... wonder... and wisdom in this life, **just as it is...**

Sit with each of these blessings for a while... and let them spread out to the universe... and reach your loved ones in a special way.

Step 4 [optional, use the blessings from Step 3]:

When you are ready, call to mind your siblings, their families, and your truest friends... Shower the loving kindness blessings on this group of people that you also love with all your heart... Be sure to sit for a moment with any feelings that arise...

Step 5: [optional, use the blessings from Step 3]

When you are ready, bring to mind people you know who are suffering from illness,... disappointment, loss, despair, sadness, grief, fear, and so forth... You don't even have to know these people very well... They can even be people from the previous blessings... They can even be friends of friends or perfect strangers... that you heard were experiencing a lot of difficulty... It is perfectly all right to include yourself in this group...

Bring each person in this group to your heart-mind and shower the above loving kindness blessings on them... Take your time and sit with each of these people as you recite the blessings...

Step 6:

Now imagine our planet Earth..., floating like a jewel in the

vast emptiness of space... Picture the snow-capped mountains..., the vast deserts..., the green forests and croplands..., and the blue oceans, rivers and lakes.... Take your time to visualize sentient beings living in cities and in rural areas... Take you time to consider the animals that roam the forests and grasslands..., and all the fish and life in the deep blue sea... Consider, also the plant life on earth...

Now shower these loving kindness blessings on all sentient beings:

May we be safe from internal and external harm...

May we have a calm, clear mind and a peaceful, loving heart...

May we be physically strong, healthy and vital...

May we experience love, joy, wonder and wisdom in this life,
just as it is...

Remember what Carl Sagan said,

The surface of the Earth is the shore of the cosmic ocean. On this shore, we've learned most of what we know. Recently, we've waded a little way out, maybe ankle-deep, and the water seems inviting. Some part of our being knows this is where we came from. We long to return, and we can, because the cosmos is also within us. We're made of star stuff. We are a way for the cosmos to know itself..

Consider again that [pale blue] dot [Earth]. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there - on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

How do you feel? When you are finished with the loving kindness blessings, spend a few moments thinking about what you have just done before carrying on with the rest of your day or evening. You may even wish to write about your experience in your journal.

These loving kindness blessings are recited by members of the Marin Sangha, led by Philip Moffitt. I enjoyed them so much I wanted to share them with you.

ALTERNATIVE LOVING KINDNESS BLESSINGS

You can use the verses in the previous section, or you can make up your own. Here is another set of verses you may want to use from time to time.

May you be at peace.

May your heart remain open.

May you know the beauty and the radiance of your own true nature.

May you be healthy.

May you be free and happy, truly happy.

This was the second set of verses for loving kindness blessings that I learned back in 1990.

The traditional set of verses goes like this:

May you be happy.

May you be well.

May you be safe.

May you be peaceful and at ease.

The first set of verses that I learned were the traditional ones the rabbis would say at the end of services on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays:

May the Lord bless you and keep you;

May the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

May the Lord's face lift towards you and place upon you peace.

While we are on the subject of loving kindness meditation I want to share with you a beautiful song a friend of my shared with me for healing, relaxation, and inner peace. The song is sung by Ashana in an album called *All is Forgiven*. It goes like this:

*Loving kindness
For All Beings
From the ONE beyond the stars
Through the darkness
Into the light
We behold the gift of peace*

This song moves me every time I listen to it. I used it exclusively when I was undergoing my recent cancer treatments.

For more information about this type of meditation, please visit **Meditation Practices**⁴ and search for “*loving kindness*.”

GIVING AND RECEIVING

Giving and receiving is a Tibetan Buddhist practice known as *tonglen*. In this practice, one breathes in the pain of another and breathes on out their love. It is in the taking of the pain of the other person that the receiving takes place. And it is in the breathing on out the love that one is giving.

I first became aware of *tonglen* through the revered Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron from her book, *Good Medicine* (I think). This is one of her core teachings and there is plenty of information about this on YouTube. This particular practice is based on her teachings.

TONGLÉN MINDFULNESS BREAK

The Tonglen Mindfulness Break begins the same way as the Loving Kindness **Mindfulness Break**, above. It is also necessary to choose an object of concern. This could be a loved one who is ill, a person going through a rough time at her or his job, a group

of people experiencing the effects of climate change or political upheaval or the current unrest in the US and around the world. For instance, if we know of a mother suffering from cancer with two young children (as I did yesterday), then we could *tonglen* for her. We would breathe in the mother's pain with the wish to relieve it. Then, when we breathe out, happiness, joy, healing, relaxation or whatever we think would benefit the mother. This is obviously a very difficult situation, but we can offer our willingness to help.

Another example is doing *tonglen* for our own suffering. We may have difficulty coming to terms with our own suffering, but when we practice this for a while, it gets easier. We shift the emphasis from someone else and tune into our own needs for self-compassion. We begin to do *tonglen* for what we are experiencing by recognizing that millions of people all over the world are having the same situation, the same suffering, the same misery. We don't even have to name our pain to recognize that it is a universal human experience. So we breathe in for all the people experiencing this kind of pain, and we breathe out whatever relief and compassion we can muster.

Step 1:

[Prepare yourself by practicing at least the *Deep Breathing (Step 2)* from the Basic **Mindfulness Break** above.]

Step 2:

Bring to mind the person or situation that is your object of *tonglen*... Allow yourself to feel the pain,... suffering... and agony of the situation..., especially if your object is yourself... Sit with the situation for a few moments...

Step 3:

Now proceed to breathe in the pain and suffering with every in breath... and send out your love, compassion, kindness other relaxing thoughts with your out breath.

How do you feel? When you are finished with the *tonglen*

practice, spend a few moments thinking about what you have just done before carrying on with the rest of your day or evening. You may even wish to write about your experience in your journal.

You may even begin to do *tonglen* on the spot while you are watching a movie or TV, or see something happening in the street. There is no limit to how or when you do this practice. It doesn't require a formal **Mindfulness Break** to be effective.

8. FORGIVENESS

Along with loving kindness, compassion and gratitude, forgiveness is another quality that can help us to experience happiness and love. I know that forgiveness is a difficult thing for many people, but I encourage you to investigate how well it could work for you.

When we are filled with anger, resentment and fear of another person and blame them for what they did to us, we are feeling unpleasant, tense emotions and these limit our happiness. Holding onto grudges can make us unhappy for our whole lives. Arthur J. Balfour said;

"The best thing to give your enemies is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to your father, deference; to a mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; and to all men, love."

When you practice the Forgiveness **Mindfulness Break**, you learn to forget what happened and go on with your life. You learn to relax and let go of anything that is bothering you.

Forgiveness is the complementary practice to gratitude. This is because it is often more difficult to forgive someone than to be grateful for something someone else has done. Also, if you have not forgiven yourself or another person, you will find it difficult to shower them with loving kindness blessings.

Often, the difficulty arises because you have not forgiven yourself for your past thoughts, words, and actions and you are holding onto them, perhaps because you feel undeserving. Just remember that **you are enough** and you can learn to forgive yourself with practice.

But take this to heart. The act of forgiving yourself can free you from a lot of suffering. The past is already gone and you can do nothing about it. The future has not yet come so you cannot do anything about it either. We only have the present moment in which to experience the wonders of life.

So part of the forgiveness practice is to first of all, forgive

ourselves. I know this may sound hard to do, but with diligence and effort, it is totally possible.

They say that time heals all wounds, but the only time we have is right now. Therefore, forgiveness and the happiness that comes from it are all available in the present moment.

In the words of Jack Kornfield, an eminent meditation teacher, author, and co-founder of the Spirit Rock Meditation Center, “Forgiveness is giving up all hope of a better past!”

Sometimes, it is very difficult to forgive, especially ourselves or someone close to us. We often forget that the act that someone else did to us that we have not yet forgiven was done from a place of fear or anger or both. The action could have come from the other person as a cry for help. The act may have been done from an experience of suffering.

Perhaps it makes sense to forgive the person and not forgive the act. For example, if someone knows that their partner has been unfaithful, they can learn to forgive their partner, but not their infidelity.

Sometimes, a prayer of forgiveness comes spontaneously into your heart as it did in mine on August 5, 2012 in Central Park, New York City. I was walking with my son, his mother Linda, and his girlfriend and now wife, Ashley when we got the idea to remember my mother’s passing by going to a Jewish deli for dinner. The previous night, we remembered Linda’s father in a different Jewish deli.

I called my sister to get the exact date of my mother’s passing in August of 1987. When she shocked me with the news that my brother was in the hospital in Santa Monica, California, I had to sit down to absorb her statement. Without any further thought, I prayed for my brother’s rapid recovery and dropped all the resentment I had been carrying for ‘umteen’ years. I spontaneously forgave him for the money he lost and everything else. We are talking again as he continues to recover from a serious illness, and he even came to visit me in April, 2014. From then on, he became one of the people that I showered loving kindness blessings on. I keep in touch with his healing progress with frequent telephone calls.

FORGIVENESS MINDFULNESS BREAK

The forgiveness **Mindfulness Break** has three components. The first component is to ask for forgiveness from people we may have harmed. The second component is to forgive ourselves. The third component is to forgive others.

It is important to note that if we are not comfortable with any of the components or all of them, we do not have to force ourselves to do the practice. For example, if we feel we cannot forgive ourselves, we can sit quietly and look deeply to see if there is a tiny element of forgiveness that we can muster for something we did in our lives. We can look for a tiny spark that can open our hearts for forgiveness.

Similarly, if we find that we cannot forgive a certain other person, because “what they did to us” was so unforgivable, we can sit quietly and look for a tiny opening in our heart to that person. Maybe we can find a small morsel of forgiveness and forgive them for small part of their actions.

Maybe, with practice, these tiny sparks and these tiny openings can blossom into a full-fledged heart opening and we can truly begin to forgive. Perhaps, there is a small offense that you no longer wish to hold onto and can use that as a lever to pry open your heart. These small little openings can lead to full-on forgiveness if we are diligent and practice with enough patience to allow them to flower.

This **Mindfulness Break** also begins with taking a comfortable position on a chair or cushion or lying down after completing *Deep Breathing*. If you are lying down, try not to fall asleep! If you are uncomfortable with one of the components of forgiveness, skip it until you are ready to deal with it. For example, if there is someone you cannot possibly forgive right now, use another person or situation. If you can't think of anyone to forgive, begin by forgiving yourself.

Step 1:

[Prepare yourself by practicing at least the *Deep Breathing* (Step 2) from the Basic **Mindfulness Break** above.]

Step 2:

As your breathing becomes normal,... begin to feel what it feels like to have your heart closed to forgiving yourself or others... Now, as you are sitting or lying there feeling all of this emotion..., recall a time when you felt that you had harmed someone in ways that were hurtful and not necessarily intentional...

As you recall this time... allow yourself to visualize the way you hurt that person... Feel the pain that you inflicted due to your own confusion and suffering...

Now simply ask for forgiveness by saying to that person..., "Please forgive me... Please release me... I'm sorry that I caused you pain..."

Alternatively, you can use these more elaborate phrases for asking for forgiveness from others:

There are many ways I have harmed you..., knowingly and unknowingly... - betrayed you..., abandoned you..., caused you pain so many times... I remember these now and feel the sorrows I still carry...

In the many ways I have hurt or harmed you..., betrayed you..., caused you suffering..., out of my own fear and confusion..., out of my own pain..., anger and hurt and misunderstanding..., in this moment..., I ask your forgiveness... I ask your forgiveness... Please forgive me... Please forgive me... May I be forgiven...

[If the situation that you are recalling is too difficult for you to confront at this time, be sure to forgive yourself for not being able to let it go right now. You can also choose someone that is much easier to forgive and then build up to forgiving the difficult person.]

Step 3:

[Take another deep breath or two to give yourself the time to release whatever charge is left over from Step 2.]

Recall a time when you have hurt yourself... or did something to yourself that you feel sorry for... When you have recalled such

a time... think to yourself, “I have caused myself pain and suffering for this and other thoughts, words, or actions... I now forgive myself...”

[You may wish to repeat this several times, either by recalling other events or staying with the time that you recalled.

If this step seems too difficult, tune into your feelings and try to discover what is going on. Forgive yourself for a small thing to get started, and progress gently and compassionately to what you once thought to be unforgivable.]

Step 4:

[Again, take one or more deep breaths to relieve yourself of the feelings and sensation that arose when you were forgiving yourself.]

Recall a time when another person caused you to suffer, either by words or actions... Try to make this recollection as vivid as possible... and bring to mind the feelings you have about it... Then remember that the person who you recalled was also suffering... knowingly or unknowingly... when she or he caused you harm... Now pick a small part of this pain... and say to the person, “I forgive you... I release you... I set you free...”

[Repeat this as many times as needed.

Each time you return to this forgiveness meditation, allow forgiveness to arise little by little until you feel free.]

How do you feel? [I’m going to ask this question after each **Mindfulness Break** to give you a moment to check in with yourself after the process!] Write down any insights you may have had during this practice. Were you able to forgive yourself? Remember, it is much easier to forgive someone else if you can forgive yourself! Where you able to forgive someone else? Who was that? Were you able to ask for forgiveness of someone else? What was their reaction in your mind? What else did you learn from this experience?

For more information about this type of meditation, please visit **Meditation Practices**⁴ and search for “*forgiveness*.”

ANOTHER FORGIVENESS STORY

This story begins in 1967, the year after Helen's mother died. She was only nine when her father died and sixteen when her mother passed away. At school, she became friends with Tara, who often invited her home for dinner. This is where she met Evelyn and Stephen Nighthouse, Tara's parents, as well as Irl and Sam, her younger brothers. Helen's kindness and sweet disposition endeared her to Tara and her family and Evelyn and Stephen became like surrogate parents for her. Oh yes, Sam was only four and Ira ten and they really took to Helen. This all took place in upstate New York. Stephen had given up his promising career as a standup comedian because of his love for Evelyn and became a successful businessman. Evelyn had been a professional dancer turned mother when Tara was born.

Ken Gordon came into the picture when he started living with Helen in 1977. Ken and Helen met three years earlier and they both had a strong commitment to spiritual growth. Throughout the ensuing years, the Nighthouse family became a fixture in the lives of the Gordons. When two girls were born, Evelyn and Stephen became like grandma and grandpa to them. In fact, by 1991 or so, they were the only grandparents for the Gordon girls.

As time went on, Helen and Tara continued to be "BFF's" and Stephen lost his business because of a shady partner. He was in his seventies by then and he and Evelyn were growing old. By the time it became necessary to care for their elder parents, Irl, Sam and Tara were in different places. Sam had a very successful business and had purchased three acres of land in Sonoma County to start a vineyard and plant olive trees. The parcel of land was rocky and hilly, but today the vines and trees are flourishing. Tara, an artist and aspiring actress, was living in Southern California and Irl was lost in space. His highly successful legal practice fell apart after divorcing his wife who got just about everything. He was alienated from his children and found life very difficult. By the time of Stephen's illness, he was living in his car in Southern Oregon.

All of them except Irl celebrated Stephen's 82nd birthday at Sam's vineyard. They knew at that time that Stephen had some

form of leukemia related to Lewy bodies, but he was still lucid and funny as ever. Sam's big dogs jumped all over the place and Stephen was happy to have most of his family together. They laughed and ate and had a good time.

Stephen and Evelyn were living on the peninsula in the San Francisco Bay Area and were well established there due to his army pension and social security. As Stephen's health deteriorated over the next six years, we all began to worry about Evelyn. How would Evelyn survive without Stephen? The answer came six years later a couple of weeks before Stephen passed away. Lying in bed in the Veterans Hospital, Stephen asked that Irl come and visit and Irl was invited to stay at Sam and Kate's house near the Nighthouse residence. The friction between Sam and Irl became unmanageable as was the friction between Tara and Sam and Irl and Tara. They were embroiled in a dysfunctional situation that looked quite hopeless.

After Sam treated Irl badly, Irl moved in with Evelyn while Stephen was dying. He remained there after Stephen's death and took care of his mother. This was quite fortunate for Evelyn had a stroke which would have been fatal if Irl had not been there. As it happened, Evelyn was moved into a rehabilitation home and Tara moved in with Sam to help care for their mother. Helen and Ken visited Evelyn often and spoke about how difficult the situation was. Sam was offering some financial support, but he was very controlling over what Evelyn could spend prior to the stroke.

While Evelyn was in recovery, the owners of the apartment she rented notified her that they would be remodeling the bathrooms and the rent would go up by a significant amount. This presented yet another problem for the surviving Nighthouses and eventually Tara and Irl took Evelyn to the Los Angeles area. Irl found an apartment for him and Evelyn, but Evelyn had to be taken to a recovery home almost immediately. This was where she was to spend the rest of her days.

After Tara passed, Irl and Tara were brought together in Los Angeles for a while but soon resorted to their old ways of antagonism. Sam was totally out of the picture until a strange series of events happened. Tara had arranged to come up to the

Bay Area to bury the ashes of her parents. This was to take place in early August. Irl was to be available by Skype or Facetime, but didn't want to make the trip.

Around the same time as these arrangements were being made, the Gordons had a wedding to attend. This is when the first miracle happened. When Ken looked on the board with the table assignments at a wedding he and Evelyn attended, he noticed Sam Nighthouse and next to that he saw Kate Nighthouse! Ken grabbed his wife and both of them were stunned to see these names on the wedding table assignments! When Kate and Sam arrived at the wedding, Ken greeted them warmly and told them about his activities and his children. Helen also had a congenial conversation with them. Sam and Kate left very shortly after the dinner complaining that the music was too loud and not their type.

A few days later, the second miracle happened. Sam wrote emails to Helen and Ken stating,

I wanted to apologize to the both of you for not saying goodbye. We did not see you and assumed you were both on the dance floor. The music was so loud it was piercing and it was hard to see anyone! We had a great time and it was such a beautiful wedding.

It was nice to see the both of you it's been a long time. Honestly I have thought of the both of you many times but was never able to bring myself to make contact with you. Please understand it's nothing about you both - it's my challenges with my family. You both have been wonderful to my parents and we are so thankful for all that you have done for us. We love you both and we are so sorry that our relationship has been put on hold.

Time has healed my pain of what has happened in the past and hopefully for you as well. I hope someday you will allow us to regain our love and friendship with your family It's good to see that everyone is doing great.

This email moved both Kate and Helen to tears and they could

foresee a reconciliation happening. Helen and Tara spoke at length about this and invited Sam and Kate to join them in the ashes ceremony. Sam and Kate suggested that the ceremony take place in the vineyard, a place that both Evelyn and Stephen loved very much. Ken was asked to lead the ceremony and Irl flew in the night before.

Helen, Tara, Irl and Ken arrived at the vineyard on the appointed day and the third miracle took place. Irl and Sam saw each other and hugged each other like the long lost brothers that they are. This set the stage for the ceremony to take place in an atmosphere of forgiveness and congeniality. A special olive tree was purchased and a beautiful site was chosen for the lion's share of the ashes. Everyone took part in spreading the ashes in the hole where the tree was to be planted and everyone took part in planting the tree. Then each one spread their share of the remaining ashes in other special places around the vineyard. The rest of the day was spent having a meal together. Both Irl and Sam had tears in their eyes as the sun was setting over the mountain and it was time to return to the Bay Area.

This example shows the power of forgiveness to bring families together. Wouldn't it be wonderful for people of different colors, religions, social circumstances and background to come together in forgiveness? After all, we live on a "tiny blue dot in the vast emptiness of space," and there is nowhere else to go. We must get along and forgive one another for humanity to survive.

9. GOALS AND HOW TO ACHIEVE THEM

Gratitude, loving kindness and forgiveness are the true foundations for a life of love and happiness. As you will see in a later chapter, these contribute vastly to inner peace, tranquility and equanimity. These qualities purify your heart and mind and promote beneficial hormones in your brain. These are some things to strive for and meditate upon on a daily basis. When gratitude, loving kindness and forgiveness are in place, it is much, much easier to accomplish your goals, whatever they might be.

Are you looking for a partner to share your life with? Are you looking for a new place to live or a new job? Do you need to figure out what to do with a health condition? Is your home or car in bad need of repair? Do you want to start a business of your own? Father Eli taught that **Mindfulness Breaks** are a wonderful tool for achieving goals.

In life, it is necessary to have some sort of goal. It might be as simple as getting up each day and going off to work so you can chill on the weekend. It might be earning enough money to retire early in life and play golf or tennis every day. Whatever your goal is it is what you are trying to achieve. You'll find that most successful people have well defined goals.

Some people maintain to-do lists. Many times, things get skipped over and never accomplished. A to-do list is fine if you follow through. Setting goals outside of your to-do list can help you achieve them as long as you diligently pursue them.

People talk about *The Secret*, a book and documentary that tells you that whatever you believe and conceive you can achieve. What they don't tell you is that the people they interviewed worked diligently to achieve their goals. They were not deterred from them when things didn't go their way. They continued to pursue their goals with hard work and diligence. There is no substitute for hard work when it comes to achieving your goals.

Father Eli taught us to aim high! We should not settle for anything less than what we want. He says, "Be sure to make your goals high enough. If one jumps for the highest limb possible, he can always catch a lower one on his way down."

We shouldn't have too many goals. Think of the child who

wants so many toys that he can't choose one to be satisfied with. In the beginning, we should choose three goals. The first goal should be a short-range goal to be completed in about three to six months. This goal should be relatively easy to obtain, for example, a new job, home or iPhone. The second one should be a mid-range goal of perhaps three to five years in the future. This should pertain to something in your life that you would like to improve such as your relationship with your parents or children, or better and more loving friendships, or a new home, or a trip around the world. The third type of goal should be a lifetime achievement goal such as awakening, perfection, or simply peace of mind.

To clarify your goals, take a plain piece of paper and divide into three columns. On the first column, write "Ten things I'd like to do." On the second column, write "Ten things I'd like to own." On the third column, write "Ten things I'd like to change in myself." Now select the easiest one to work on from the top of the three columns and focus on it.

Now that you have chosen the goal that you want to work on, you must realize that there may be several things that you may have to do to accomplish you goal. So, for example, if you want to cook a nice meal for your spouse, you would need to decide what to cook, obtain the ingredients, consult a recipe, make sure you have the right utensils, etc. On another piece of paper, write down the goal that you want to achieve. On the next line, write down "The time limit is..." and fill in the blank. Having a specified time limit is very important to keep you on track to your goal. We accomplish them by overcoming obstacles and weaknesses, not by praying, visualizing or talking about them. We need to enumerate these obstacles and weakness in order to have a chance to accomplish our goals.

On the left side of the paper, write "Things I must overcome," and on the right side of the paper, write "What I'm going to do about it." Ask yourself, "Which one am I going to do first?" Sometimes, it is important to do these tasks in sequence and sometimes the tasks can be done independently. Using the example of the meal from above, you may have certain

ingredients in your home and don't have to put them on your shopping list. Extending this a little, you may already have all the utensils you need, but not have a critical ingredient like the fish you want to fry or the oil you want to fry it in.

The hardest thing about goal setting and execution is knowing how to begin. The goals **Mindfulness Break** can help you figure out what the best way for you to begin. Not only that, by getting a clear picture of your goal and the steps needed to accomplish it, it may become easier to obtain.

ACHIEVE GOALS MINDFULNESS BREAK

Before you begin this **Mindfulness Break** for achieving your goals, you should have your objective clearly in mind, along with a feeling for the obstacles you must overcome to achieve it.

This **Mindfulness Break** is done during the *Contemplation* step of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** from chapter 5. If you have been taking regular **Mindfulness Breaks** for a couple of weeks, you can try skipping the *Stretching and Relaxing* step, but for sure, do not skip anything else for best results.

Step 1:

[Follow steps one through six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** of chapter 5. Proceed to step 2 when you are ready.]

Step 2:

Allow an image to form that represents the completion of your goal... Where are you...? What do you see...? What do you smell...? What do you hear...? What do you taste...? Allow this image to become clearer... What's happening now...? What does the scene look like from a short distance above...? What does the scene look like from far away...? Who is with you...? As you ponder these questions..., allow the image to evolve... Begin to get a sense of what you have to do to get there... Take your time... Don't hurry... Don't worry about how good your image is... or whether you have a clear image at all...

Now let that image go... and think about what is going on right now... Allow an image to form that relates to the first step you

must take to reach your goal... See it clearly... Where are you...? What do you see...? What do you smell...? What do you hear...? What do you taste...? Allow this image to become clearer... What's happening now...? What does the scene look like from a short distance above...? What does the scene look like from far away...? Who is with you...? As you ponder these questions..., allow the image to evolve... Promise yourself that you will take action on this first step as soon as possible...

Now let go of this image and return to your breath... Breathing in..., know that you are breathing in... Breathing out..., know that you are breathing out... Relax... Let go... Release...

Step 3:

[Follow this with the awakening step from the **Basic Mindfulness Break.**]

How do you feel? Now would be a good time to write down anything that occurred to you during the visualization. What insights did you have, if any? What was your end goal? What is your first step to achieving that goal? What action will you take to accomplish this first step? Note that this may simply be a planning step in which you outline all the tasks you must complete before you can accomplish your goal. Report back to me about your achievements!

10. STRESS

Psychologists and medical doctors now consider stress to be a serious disease - as serious as heart disease. It can also lead to many other problems such as headache, back pain, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, decreased immunity, stomach problems, insomnia, anxiety, anger, insecurity, forgetfulness, burnout, eating disorders, social withdrawal, and many other symptoms as well. More and more people are stressed out and don't know what to do about it. Stress triggers the fight-or-flight response in your body and causes the release of cortisol, the primary stress hormone.

As you will see, stress comes in two varieties: harmful stress which is called distress or strain (too much stress,) and beneficial stress which is called *eustress*. Father Eli would classify distress or strain as a tense emotion. When you feel stress, you tense up and are often overwhelmed. Stress makes your body tense up and sends chemical to your muscles in preparation for an attack by a saber tooth tiger. There are no tigers to threaten us these days, but we are no better off when we are stressed than primitive man was when a tiger was in the vicinity.

Stain or distress is too much stress or it is stress applied too quickly. This kind of stress can produce distortions in the mind such as a nervous breakdown. This is similar to sore muscles or a charley-horse when exercising too much. Any new exercise program or mental activity should be started with very little stress and have it gradually increased.

The first law of becoming a new boss is, "Don't change a thing!" This is similar to the old sea saying, "Don't change the set of the sails immediately after coming on watch!" This may sound surprising, but when things are changed in an office, workplace or factory too quickly, they can cause a great deal of stress. An excellent example of this is the stress many Americans are feeling these days since President Obama was replaced. The new administration has taken to undo everything he accomplished and continues to deny climate change. This is one of the reasons that **Mindfulness Breaks** are so relevant now.

Our stresses come from our jobs, our relationships, traffic, and

all types of other insecurities. For example, while I was writing this chapter, I woke up in the middle of the night recently and was stressed out because one of my cars was due for a smog check. A simple thing, you may think, but I had planned to meet my son at the smog place without insuring that he would bring the car which was in his garage. So, after stressing for a while, I realized that there was something I could do about it. I got out of bed, sent him a text with instructions to bring the car to the smog place and went back to bed. By recognizing the stress, understanding its cause, and taking action, I was able to go back to sleep.

Psychologist Kelly McGonigal writes,

“My curiosity about how your attitude toward stress influences its impact sent me on a search for more evidence. I wanted to know: Does how you think about stress really matter? And if believing that stress is bad for you, what’s the alternative? Is there anything good about stress that’s worth embracing? ...

The latest science reveals that stress can make you smarter, stronger, and more successful. It helps you learn and grow. It can even inspire courage and compassion.

The new science also shows that changing your mind about stress can make you healthier and happier. How you think about stress affects everything from your cardiovascular health to your ability to find meaning in life. The best way to manage stress isn’t to reduce or avoid it, but rather to rethink and even embrace it.

So, my goal as a health psychologist has changed. I no longer want to help you get rid of your stress—I want to make you better at stress. That is the premise of the new science of stress, and the purpose of this book.”

-Kelly McGonigal – The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It

This kind of stress has been called *eustress*. It is possible to generate eustress in situations where we put ourselves out,

stretch our limits, and reach out of our comfort zone. Eustress can put us into flow – a state in which things seem to happen on their own. Flow seems to happen when our high skill level meets a high level of challenge. In flow, our ego drops out of the picture. Flow is the mental state of operation in which you are performing an activity in which you are fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what you are doing.

Father Eli teaches that strain or eustress is necessary for life. For example, to develop a muscle, we put a load in it with weights or having to pull something. As long as we don't increase the load by too much in a given interval of time, the muscle will grow to meet the demand of the new weight.

If you work for yourself, make sure you do just a little more work each day and try to do it a little better than before. This will allow you to develop to meet new challenges. Bosses should also be asking a little more each day from the people they supervise or they will not continue to grow. As they mature, assign a little more work and a little harder work until they deliver the efficiency you desire. Don't worry if they are making mistakes; these are part of the learning process. If they are not making mistakes, they are not progressing.

Children also should be kept under a little stress in order to grow. Their homework should be designed to serve this purpose. If everyone in the class makes an "A," the homework is too easy and they will not learn. On the other hand, an "A" student should be given more work because he or she learns faster.

On the other hand, distress – the bad stress - can be very harmful to our immune system, our health, and our vitality. George Mumford writes,

“Our bodies like to be in homeostasis. We like to be balanced. Life is hard enough—we want to be comfortable! But, again, to get better and improve our game on and off the court, we need to move out of our comfort zones. That doesn't mean you should so far out of your comfort zone that you can't

function well. Our bodies work best when we push them in small increments. If we push ourselves too far, eustress can become distress. We have to really pay attention, because they can manifest the same symptoms. Eustress is achieved through moderation, sticking to the middle way, and not going to extremes. ...

Moving out of your comfort zone through experiencing eustress is a continuous incremental process of romancing your discomfort zone. It's not like you get to a certain level and then stay there. Things are always either going forward or backward; they're not staying static. If you are comfortable where you are and you just want to stay comfortable, that's fine, but that isn't the way to pursue excellence and wisdom."

*—George Mumford from *The Mindful Athlete: Secrets to Pure Performance**

So how can we tell the difference between eustress and distress? How can we develop a state of flow or get rid of distress? Many people give us advice on this, but we have to discover how to relate to these states of mind on our own. The Stress Relief **Mindfulness Break** is a good place to start.

STRESS RELIEF MINDFULNESS BREAK

The Stress Relief **Mindfulness Break** trains you to recognize stress in your life and accept your stressful situation. You will then investigate what is causing the stress and then let it go.

This **Mindfulness Break** is done during the *Contemplation* step of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** from chapter 5. If you have been taking regular **Mindfulness Breaks** for a couple of weeks, you can try skipping the *Stretching and Relaxing* step, but for sure, do not skip anything else for best results.

Step 1:

[Follow steps one through six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** of chapter 5. Proceed to step 2 when you are ready.]

Step 2:

Now that you are completely and deeply relaxed... recall at time when you experienced stress... Where are you...? What do you see...? What do you smell...? What do you hear...? What do you taste...? What is being said...? What about the situation makes it stressful?

Now acknowledge that this situation caused you stress... Investigate the causes of your stress... by replaying the situation over and over... until the causes become clear... or the stress is no longer bothering you... Recognize that you are not your stress... and allow it to transform...

Sit with this feeling of relief for a while... and know that you can always relieve your stress in this manner...

Step 3:

[Follow this with the awakening step from the Basic **Mindfulness Break.**]

How do you feel? Did this work for you? Why or why not? Does the stressful incident still cause stress in you? Now would be a good time to write down any insights you had or anything that occurred to you during the **Mindfulness Break**. What action will you take to relieve stress in the future?

11. ANGER

Anger, like stress, is a tense emotion. You cannot be angry and relaxed at the same time. Anger, in all its levels and depths, is almost always accompanied by a high degree of hate. The only time it isn't is when you get angry to spare your child, spouse or friend from burning their fingers or falling off of a cliff. It can also be useful in cases of social justice, economic justice, racial justice, climate justice and other similar situations. Anger can motivate us to work towards correcting these conditions, but, as I have learned, it is important to recognize our own contributions to them. This leads to the insight that there is no "us" and no "them" in climate change. We all live on one planet and there is nowhere else we can go. By taking this attitude, we can unite people to solve social issues.

Otherwise, it is a completely destructive emotion. You definitely want to cause harm to the other person, whether physical, mental or emotional. Anger triggers the fight, flight or flee response in your body and causes the release of cortisol, the primary stress hormone and adrenaline. These chemicals remain in your bloodstream for anywhere from thirty minutes to one hour. This is called *emotional carryover*. The simple exercise of *Clearing the Mind* (Chapter 3) can help as well as the Anger Control **Mindfulness Break** in this chapter.

According to Dr. Paul Ekman, the anger spectrum includes annoyance, frustration, exasperation, argumentativeness, bitterness, vengefulness and fury. Each of these emotions has anger as their basis and each represents a certain degree of tension. Annoyance may be difficult to contend with, but fury is impossible to control, unless you have been trained in **Mindfulness Breaks** or similar practices.

In primitive times, anger was necessary to get our adrenalin working so that we could harness our energy to run away from or stay around to fight lions and tigers. Now, anger is one of the most destructive emotions we experience. It causes us to inflict pain and suffering on ourselves and the people we love the most.

In the 1970s, psychologists used to think that anger must be gotten rid of. They would have patients beat a pillow to get it out

of their system. We were told to yell and scream to vent our anger. But for me, all these actions just made me exhausted and the anger was still there. After all, a pillow is just a pillow and not anything to get angry about. I participated in “bitch sessions” during the Fischer-Hoffman Process in which I yelled and screamed at my parents for all the harm they caused me. Then I would write about the experience and eventually came to understand they were not the cause of my being the way I was. I eventually forgave them.

My teacher, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (affectionately known as Thay) taught us to embrace our anger and treat it with tenderness. We are encouraged not to fight with our anger or despair, but to treat it with mindfulness. When we are mindful of anger, we know what is going on in the present moment. We examine our anger and apply the little mantra, “Breathing in, I know that anger has manifested in me; breathing out, I smile towards my anger.” Thay says that this is not suppressing or fighting our anger. This is an act of recognizing our anger and embracing it with a awareness. He writes,

We practice taking care of our anger in the same way. Mindfulness recognizes anger, is aware of its presence, accepts and allows it to be there. Mindfulness is like a big brother who does not suppress his younger brother’s suffering. He simply says, “Dear brother, I’m here for you.” You take your younger brother in your arms and you comfort him. This is exactly our practice.

Imagine a mother getting angry with her baby and hitting him when he cries. That mother does not know that she and her baby are one. We are mothers of our anger and we have to help our baby, our anger, not fight and destroy it. Our anger is us and our compassion is also us. To meditate does not mean to fight. In Buddhism, the practice of meditation should be the practice of embracing and transforming, not of fighting.

The first function of mindfulness is to recognize, not to fight. “Breathing in, I know that anger has manifested in me. Hello, my little anger.” And breathing out, “I will take good

care of you.”

Once we have recognized our anger, we embrace it. This is the second function of mindfulness and it is a very pleasant practice. Instead of fighting, we are taking good care of our emotion. If you know how to embrace your anger, something will change.

Thich Nhat Hanh from his book, Anger

ANGER CONTROL MINDFULNESS BREAK

So it is with the Anger Control **Mindfulness Break**! Using our Basic **Mindfulness Break** from Chapter 5, we insure we are in a relaxed state of mind. From this relaxed state of mind, we can recognize and embrace our anger in such a way that it dissipates without too much trouble and without unpleasant emotions coming into play.

Step 1:

[Follow steps one through six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** of chapter 5. Proceed to step 2 when you are ready.]

Step 2:

Now that you are completely and deeply relaxed... we can learn to control our anger... To do this... I want you to imagine yourself as a five-year-old child... a sweet, innocent, lovely five-year-old child... completely loved by the people around you... by the universe... and God... if you believe in God...by all that is if you don't... Experience yourself completely at ease as a five-year-old child... Imagine how it feels to be so vulnerable... so insecure and so deeply concerned about your own inner life... It's no wonder that you now have feelings of anger... because you were so vulnerable...and possibly mistreated... and just let this image of the five-year-old child... be there for a moment... as you imagine your mother as a five-year-old child... Imagine your mother being vulnerable... being innocent...being subject to the whims of her parents...as well... wanting things to be one way... and having them turn out to be another way...

It's no wonder that your five-year-old child...wants the same

thing...Your back to visioning yourself as a five-year-old child...and hold this five-year-old child in your mind... while you call to mind an incident of anger... and realize the anger that you had was just a passing feeling... that it was able to dissipate somehow... that it was impermanent... Imagine this five-year-old child...being held by its mother...embraced sweetly... and naturally...

And then imagine yourself... embracing your anger like you would your five-year-old child... Hold this little anger in place... and say to it..., “Hello, my anger...I know you are there...I will take good care of you... I will watch you... I will observe you... I will allow you to be... in such a way... that you do not cause me or anyone else... to suffer.” Now hold this anger... as a five-year-old child... and allow the anger to go back into your subconscious... and allow yourself...to feel the release... of the anger... at this time... in this place...

And now... spend a few moments...examining how you feel now... about the situation... that provoked your anger... ... Now release your five-year-old child... just as you have released your anger... and prepare to come back to the room...

Step 3:

[Follow this with the awakening step from the Basic **Mindfulness Break.**]

How do you feel? Did your anger dissipate completely or at least partially? What was your experience like as a five-year-old child? How did you experience your mother as a five-year-old child? Were you able to embrace your anger like you would a five-year-old child? Write down any insights, thoughts and experiences you had with the Anger Control **Mindfulness Break.**

12. WEIGHT NORMALIZATION AND EATING

Weight is a problem for more than two out of three of all Americans. They are overweight or obese. One out of every three children is overweight. The problem of being overweight and obesity has reached drastic proportions. It is definitely a major health problem.

When I was in Barcelona and Italy last spring, I noticed a significant difference in the number of overweight or obese people. It turns out that instead of being 66 percent being overweight like it is in the United States, it is only about 40-50 percent of the people in the European Union are overweight.

What gives here? Why are Americans so overweight?

One answer that I can give right off the cuff is that Americans drink diet sodas and eat diet yoghurt. These so call foods contain artificial sweeteners. Diet drinks are especially bad. They indicate to the brain that some sugar is coming. When the real sugar fails to arrive, the brain sends out signals to crave more of what just got there. It wants you to have another diet drink. Diet drinks usually contain an artificial sweetener called aspartame. This is particularly damaging to cells because it changes the amino acid ratio in your blood. There are 92 common side effects of aspartame!

One way to deal with a weight problem is to change your diet. For example, everyone knows that cancer feeds on sugar. That's why they use sugar as a trace in PET scans. The sugar goes straight to the cancer and lights up the scanner. Adopting the cancer diet will also solve a weight problem. You must be diligent in learning what to eat, what supplements to take, and why.

THE CANCER DIET

If you read nothing else in this book, please pay close attention to and remember this: **cancer feeds on sugar**. Cancer feeds on false sugar. Therefore, first and foremost, eliminate sugar and other high glycemic index foods from your diet altogether.

Probably the most outrageous offender of human health is the soft drink industry. Whether you drink a diet cola or a regular cola, you are subject to feeding cancer cells in your body. Diet

drinks are especially bad. They indicate to the brain that some sugar is coming. When the real sugar fails to arrive, the brain sends out signals to crave more of what just got there. It wants you to have another diet drink. Diet drinks usually contain an artificial sweetener called aspartame. This is particularly damaging to cells because it changes the amino acid ratio in your blood. There are 92 common side effects of aspartame!

The anticancer diet, says David Servan-Schreiber, M D, Ph D in his book, *Anticancer: a New Way of Life*, p. 4, Anticancer Action section,

“...is made up primarily of vegetables and legumes prepared with olive, canola, or flaxseed oil, or omega-3 butter, herbs, and spices. Unlike the traditional Western diet, meat and eggs are much less prominent; they are served as accompaniments in small amounts.”

According to Servan-Schreiber, the anticancer plate consists of vegetables, fruits, and vegetable proteins including lentils, peas, beans, tofu, etc.; herbs and spices, mainly turmeric, mint, thyme, rosemary and garlic; fats of olive, canola, or flaxseed oil, and omega-3 butter; grains in multigrain bread, whole-grain rice, quinoa, and bulgur; and optional animal proteins from fresh, organic free-range meats, omega-3 eggs, and organic free-range dairy products.

During the early stages of my 2013 episode of bladder cancer, my diet was restricted on the recommendation of Michael Broffman. The foods I was to avoid at that time were avocado, eggplant, soy, vinegar, pineapple, alcohol, chocolate, and wheat. I never got a full explanation of why this was so, but I was told that in general, these foods contradicted the workings of the Chinese herbs and supplements that he had me take. I did quite well on this restriction. I even surprised myself at how little chocolate I had during this period. I could see and smell a whole plate of Mala's chocolate chip cookies without having a single one. I found gluten free bread to be less than optimum, but kept on it to avoid the wheat. I made my own restriction of avoiding sugar

because of a video I saw about the effects of sugar on the immune system and the knowledge that cancer feeds on sugar. For more information, please watch the documentary, *Hungry for Change*.

STRAWBERRIES, BLUEBERRIES, AND RASPBERRIES

Strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries are some of my all-time favorite foods. What they have in common is that they are rich in ellagic acid. Ellagic acid is a phytochemical that inhibits the genesis of tumors. They contain other phytochemicals called anthocyanins, which gives rise to their colors. Berries also contain significant amounts of antioxidants. Antioxidants supply electrons to reduce the inflammatory ability of free radicals.

They also contain high amounts of vitamin C, which activates the immune system. For example, one cup of strawberries has more vitamin C than an orange. In addition, strawberries have two types of fiber that are wonderful for digestion. One type is tiny fibers in the meat of the fruit which connect the seeds to the core of the strawberry. The other type is found in the seeds, themselves.

NON-GMO FOODS

We are in deep trouble with our food system. This puts our health in trouble and our medical systems in disarray. This means that big pharmaceutical companies make billions of dollars and doctors and hospitals make lots of money because we are so sick. We are sick with cancer. We are sick with obesity. We are sick with diabetes. We are sick with heart disease. All of these illnesses can be traced back to what we eat and environmental factors.

The food we eat now is mostly processed food. Why? Because it makes more money for big agricultural cartels (frankenfood companies) and big brother chemical companies like Monsanto. They spend billions of dollars to convince us, our children and our grandchildren that they are good for us. They make us addicted to the sugar content in the processed foods, and you now know that cancer feeds on sugar.

The main reasons we are in trouble are GMO (genetically

modified organisms) foods, too much sugar in just about all processed foods, which are, addicting, and the environmental factors of herbicides, pesticides and more.

In one documentary film that I saw, the filmmakers told the story of the devastating effects of GMO foods on a herd of cattle. These animals were allowed to glean the cotton fields somewhere in Norther India. For generations, they were safe from harm when they completed gleaning. After the field had been planted with GMO cotton, the herd was again allowed to glean the fields after harvest. All of the animals perished. What do you think happened to them? Could the same be happening to us when we consume GMO foods?

Here are five steps that you can do right now:

1. Cut out refined and artificial sugars from your diet.
2. Stop buying GMO and processed foods and the Frankenfood companies will have to stop making them. For example, boycott Cheerios and donuts.
3. Shop at farmer's markets when possible and buy organic fruits and vegetables as much as possible.
4. When you eat meat, be sure it is from free range animals and prefer organic.
5. Practice mindful eating

MINDFUL EATING

Most of us rush through our meals without thinking about our food or even tasting it! It goes in. We feel full. We leave the table. Done! This is not the right way to eat. This is no way to enjoy our meals. What we need to do is to eat mindfully.

What is mindful eating? Mindful eating is the practice of paying attention to each bite of food you take. It is contemplating the origin of the food. We think about such questions as, where did it come from? How did it get here? Who raised the food for us? What were the circumstances under which it was raised? Who delivered it to the store or farmer's market we bought it from?

These days, we even might want to consider whether the food has gluten in it or not. We also want to avoid genetically

modified organisms (GMO) and only buy non-GMO food.

We might want to reduce or eliminate animal and animal products from our diet. This reduces the suffering of living beings and preserves our planet. Did you know that the major cause of global warming is due to greenhouse gases from animal waste products, especially methane? This amounts to 51% of global warming when you consider all the destruction of the rainforests, soil degradation, and animal waste products. Did you know that the amount of water you use for one year of daily showers is the amount of water needed to raise just one pound of beef?

Another major cause of global warming is food waste. I recently learned that reducing food waste is currently the third most plausible solution, after refrigerant management and wind turbines (onshore). So please take it upon yourself to prepare only what you will eat and not any more.

We might want to express gratitude to the producers of the food and recognize and transform our unwholesome thoughts, especially greed (putting more than we can eat on our plate). We might want to learn to eat in moderation.

When I saw Michael Broffman at the beginning of the 2013 episode of muscle invasive bladder cancer, he told me about three categories of eating food.

The first category he called the science of eating. This involves scientifically being mindful of nutrition, carbs, gluten, and whether or not the food contains GMO's or is organic.

The second category has to do with the preparation of food. This is the artistic approach. The considerations here are the attitudes of the people preparing the food and how they are putting their energy into it.

The third category is the context of eating. What this means is that if you are enjoying a meal prepared by a friend or a nice restaurant, it hardly matters what you eat. Unless, of course, you are on a gluten-free diet or have other important restrictions.

Keep these categories in mind as you learn more about mindfulness in eating.

MINDFUL EATING PRACTICES

When we slow down and eat mindfully, our life and health takes on a much deeper quality. Being present with every bite benefits us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We feel nourished on all levels and this has a significant influence on the rest of our day.

If you want to improve your life and health, physically, and mentally, try these six practices for mindful eating. You may want to adopt one of them per week to see how they work for you and then choose the ones that you relate to best.

1. **Slow down** and enjoy every minute of your meal. Eat slowly by chewing every bite at least 30 times before swallowing.
2. **Plan a healthy diet** around non-GMO organic fruits and vegetables. If you must eat meat, make sure it is organic, free range, and that the animals have not been fed GMO foods. I enjoy fresh fish from the farmer's market, often.
3. **Completely avoid** soft drinks of any kind, alcoholic beverages, and GMO foods. Soft drinks contain too much sugar. Diet soft drinks are even worse, for they often contain the poison, aspartame. It has been shown that artificial sweetening signals the brain that real sugar is coming, which it never does. This puts your whole system on red alert, waiting for the promised real energy boost. As for GMO foods, no one really knows the long-term effects of these foods on your body.
4. **Between each bite**, put down your fork, spoon, or sandwich while you chew each bite of food completely.
5. **Be grateful** for the food that is on your table. Contemplate the interconnections that had to be made for you to have food on your table.
6. **Eliminate waste** by preparing only the amount of food you will eat.

You might enjoy the following contemplations before eating. They come from Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the monks

and nuns of Plum Village. They are recited at meals and retreats.

This food is the gift of the whole universe: the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard, loving work. May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive it.

May we recognize and transform our unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed, and learn to eat with moderation.

May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that we reduce the suffering of living beings, preserve our planet, and reverse the process of global warming.

We accept this food so that we may nurture our sisterhood and brotherhood, strengthen our community and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.

Mindful eating is also a way to promote weight loss. When you eat mindfully, you may learn not to eat more than you absolutely need, and you may be able to recognize that you are full sooner.

At one of our meetings of the **Mindfulness in Healing sangha** (meditation group) in 2014, one lovely participant brought in a basket of freshly picked oranges with their stems in place. She wrapped the stems with a red ribbon. After our invocation and thirty minutes of mindfulness meditation, we practiced not-eating meditation with the oranges. They were not yet ripe for eating. We picked up our oranges and felt the texture of their skins. We noticed the flower-like structure at the junction of the stem and the skin. We noticed places on the stem where possibly other orange flowers could have developed. On the orange, itself, we noticed the rough skin and indentations here and there. We scratched the surface of the orange skin in order to smell its fragrant citrus odor. We placed the orange next to our ear to hear the wind blowing in the tree where the orange grew. We did a guided meditation of what it would feel like to peel the orange, all in one piece. We could experience what the rind felt like. We could feel the moisture of the orange juice inside. We could experience the thrill of breaking out one

segment and tasting its sweet flavor. Everyone was delighted by this experience. You can try these steps the next time you eat an orange or tangerine. You will also be delighted.

WEIGHT NORMALIZATION MINDFULNESS BREAK

Now we come to the Weight Normalization **Mindfulness Break**. This **Mindfulness Break** was inspired by a psychologist friend of mine who is also a weight counselor. When we were all much younger, we'd have scrumptious meals together and eat so much it was hard to drive home! But things have changed and we don't have such big meals any more. I totally miss the chocolate desserts!

Like the other **Mindfulness Breaks**, we begin this one with the *Contemplation* step. This particular step takes advantage of an important aspect of **Mindfulness Breaks** which we will explore later. For now, let's say that having a goal of a specific weight falls in line with the Achieve Goals **Mindfulness Break**.

Before you begin this **Mindfulness Break**, please have a goal in mind for the ideal weight you want to achieve. This could be a weight loss or even a weight gain! That's why we use the term, "weight normalization" in the instructions below. The subconscious mind needs this to work on getting to your ideal weight. It is insufficient to simply say, "I want to lose about twenty pounds." The subconscious mind goes, "What does that mean?" In effect, this is not suitable as a goal because there is no time limit and it is not specific enough. A good goal might be, "I want to weigh 154 pounds by the winter solstice and I want most of what weight I lose to come from my belly fat."

Do you have your desired weight in mind? Let's begin!

Step 1:

[Follow steps one through six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** of chapter 5. Proceed to step 2 when you are ready.]

Step 2:

This is the level of the mind... that we process our desires... For this... we want to become more mindful of our weight... We want

to become more balanced with our eating...

To do this, allow an image to form... to represent your body as it is right now...lying there wherever you are... Allow this image to be as realistic as possible... and feel what it feels like to be alive... in this body...

Now allow this image to migrate to an image of how you would like to see your body... in the time frame of your goal... What changes would you like to occur within the time frame...? What changes... will weight normalization allow you to make... in that time frame...? Hold this image... for a moment. Allow yourself to feel as if it was possible... Imagine what you will be wearing... as you go out to dinner with your friend... to celebrate the look and feel of this new body of yours... Imagine how good you will feel... when your weight normalizes to just where you want to be... at the end of the time frame... Now imagine the happiness you feel... going into the restaurant... with your friend... You've already learned... how you will normalize your weight... by eating mindfully... So you are completely in control., when you sit down at the table... and chew what you want to eat... You recognize that all you need to do... is to take half of your order home... for your next day meal... and it will help you accomplish your goal...

Now imagine yourself eating this meal... whatever it is... When you pick up a piece of bread... take one bite only... and put the bread down... When you eat a bite of food... with your fork or spoon..., take one bite only... a small bite. Allow the food to be in your mouth for a short period of time... and put down the fork or spoon... while you chew your food... You do not need to pick up your fork or spoon... while you eat...

Look around for a moment... at your friend... and the people in the restaurant... and watch how they eat... And notice... that they too..., are beginning to eat mindfully... as they enjoy their conversation... and the water that they are drinking... They turn to you... and they say... "Wow! You look great... and look at how nicely you are dressed... How did you do it...?"

And you're sitting there dining with them..., enjoying what they are saying... enjoying your meal... putting down your fork or

spoon with each bite... taking one bite of bread and putting the bread down... before taking another bite... taking a sip of water in between... enjoying the freshness of the water... enjoying the freshness of the food... enjoying your friend.

Now stay with this image for a few moments... and allow something to tell you... what you should know... in order to continue to normalize your weight... to exactly what you want it to be... .. .

[Allow a few minutes of silence to work on the wonderful idea of having the body that you dreamed of.

Now remember: you can return to this image anytime you want just by repeating these instructions.]

Step 3:

[Follow this with the awakening step from the **Basic Mindfulness Break**.]

How do you feel? It might be a good idea to draw a picture of the image that you formed in this **Mindfulness Break**. Also, write down any insights or ideas that came to mind while you were relaxed. How did it feel to see yourself with your ideal weight? Did this give you any hint of what you want to look like? Did you enjoy the attention you were getting from your friend? What else do you want to remember about the **Mindfulness Break**?

13. SELF-HEALING

Symptoms of various kinds arise due to pain, illness, chronic diseases, cancer and other abnormal health circumstances in the body. Sometimes, they are indications of something wrong that needs immediate attention. If this is the case for you, please stop reading and call 911.

Most of us run off to the doctor to be given a prescription to reduce or relieve our symptoms. We never take a moment to look deeply inside and harness the body's immune system to cause self-healing to occur. We have been told that this is not in our best interest. We shouldn't "self-medicate" ourselves, as one cardiologist told me during a preparation for surgery consult regarding the use of red yeast rice and niacin to reduce cholesterol. She would have had me on statins, which are derived from natural sources like red yeast rice.

There is also a whole world of alternate or integrative medicine to explore before we enrich the pockets of the pharmaceutical companies. Integrative medicine practitioners have many treatments that are effective for many symptoms. For example, acupuncture can be beneficial for pain reduction.

On a Sunday afternoon in the winter of 1997, shortly after my first diagnosis of muscle invasive bladder cancer, I went to see a Vietnamese Buddhist acupuncturist, Dr. Van Vu, who used to spend his Sundays treating people in Mill Valley. I was suffering with such severe back pain that I could hardly walk from the parking lot and I definitely had a difficult time climbing the stairs. Dr. Vu's assistant helped me to a massage table to rest until Dr. Vu could treat me. He stuck some needles in my back and other places and stated that while I had good chi, I had too much self-hate inside, and suffered from bad sleep. He was right on! I walked out of there completely healed of back pain.

In *Healing Cancer with Your Mind: 7 Strategies to Help YOU Survive*, I wrote about investigating alternatives with regard to self-healing. There, you will find information on homeopathy, faith healing, shamanism, acupuncture, massage, body work, guided imagery (read "**Mindfulness Breaks**"), hyperbaric oxygen therapy, Ayurveda, immunotherapy, off label treatments (using

medicines that were designed for one purpose for another), genetic interventions, and a whole host of suppressed cancer treatments. For the most part, I took advantage of this arsenal of cures and found much self-healing from mindfulness meditation, walking meditation, and retreats.

When you have pain or discomfort there is tension in your body and it is difficult to focus on anything else. When we celebrated my daughter's marriage last winter, I was suffering from a pulled calf muscle from tennis. I had recently recovered from this injury and felt fine. On the way down the stairs the morning of the event as we were preparing to leave, I was wearing my dress shoes (vintage 1990s) and slipped on the carpet. The pain returned in full force and I had a miserable time at the wonderful celebration. A few days later, after I had a chance to take a Self-Healing **Mindfulness Break** the pain subsided. I took no pain killers at all.

The tensions in your body arising from pain bring on the fight, flight or flee response, just like emotional hurts. They also cause the stress hormones of cortisol and adrenaline to fire. You feel like you have no control over the situation and you reach for the pain killers. There is another way: take a Self-Healing **Mindfulness Break!** Like the other **Mindfulness Breaks** in this book, the Self-Healing **Mindfulness Break** induces the relaxation response and counteracts the effects of the stress hormones. In this environment, self-healing can take place and you can feel better with your symptoms removed or greatly reduced.

During all my episodes of cancer, I would use this technique to reduce my pain and anxiety. I would climb into bed, put earphones in my iPhone and ears and lie back to listen to relaxing music as I did the **Mindfulness Break**. On almost all occasions, I would fall asleep and wake up refreshed. Today, I am cancer free once again.

For me, cancer is like a cold that most people get when summer flows into autumn or autumn flows into winter. The seasonal changes bring on a slew of symptoms that are cold or flu like. Most people reach for over the counter medicines to bring

relief, and in a few days or a few weeks, they are back to normal. With me, colds are rare, but bladder cancer seems to come around every year or two these days. I can't treat it like a common cold, but I can continue to preserve my bladder and remain under surveillance on a quarterly basis.

SELF-HEALING MINDFULNESS BREAK

The Self-Healing **Mindfulness Break** deals primarily with the symptoms you are experiencing right now. You'll be asked to recall the first time you experienced the symptoms you wish to work on. If this is difficult, don't worry. Whatever you can recall can be used for self-healing. If you are currently symptom free, you can still use this **Mindfulness Break** for healing those places in your mind and body that continue to feel pain – emotional or physical. Be sure to have a condition in mind that you want to work on before you begin this **Mindfulness Break**.

The Self-Healing **Mindfulness Break** begins with the first six steps of the Basic **Mindfulness Break**. You may, if you wish and if you are able to relax yourself fairly easily, skip Step 1, but please do not skip any of the others before your move on to Step 2 of this **Mindfulness Break**.

Ready? Let's begin!

Step 1:

[Follow steps one through six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** of chapter 5. Proceed to step 2 when you are ready.]

Step 2:

Now that you are at a deep level of the mind..., we can do what we need to do today... I want you to allow an image to form... that represents a mild version of the condition that you have chosen to work on... I want you to re-experience that mild version... as completely as possible... What thoughts do you have about it...? Where do you feel it in your body...? What feelings and emotions do you have about it...? What sensations come to mind...?

And now... imagine or remember... just what it felt like when those mild symptoms went away... Was there anything you had to

do... to help them along... to help them go away...? Did they go away just by themselves...? Or did you have some sort of intervention...? There's no right or wrong answer here... It only depends on your experience... ..

Now let that image go... and recall at time when the symptoms were a little more severe... than this first incident... Answer yourself... what did it feel like in your body...? What were your thoughts about it...? What did you feel... emotionally about it...? How did you handle it...? However you handled it... is the way it was handled... and that's what happened for this more severe incident... If you used an intervention... what was it...? Was the intervention helpful...? Would you use it again...? What are your thoughts about the intervention...? Whatever your experience is... that's just the way it is... and allow this image to fade away...

Now I want you to imagine yourself... as you would like to be... free of your condition... Imagine how you would feel if you were free of your condition... What would you think about it...? What would your life be like without it...? Imagine the best possible life you could have for yourself... .. What kind of activities would you engage in...? Would you travel more...? Would you visit with friends and family more...? Just create for yourself... with your full imagination... the life you would like to lead... if you were totally free of your condition... .. Recognize that you can do this... You have the power and ability to do this... You have the desire and willingness... to help yourself... along this path... ..

Now let this ideal image go... and take a few moments... to notice anything you want to bring out of this session... because it is just about time to bring you out of this deep state of relaxation... ..

Step 3:

[Follow this with the awakening step from the **Basic Mindfulness Break.**]

How do you feel? Now would be a good time to write down any insights or intuitions that you had during the **Mindfulness Break.** Did you remember how the condition you worked on

began? What did this tell you about your condition? Were you able to visualize your ideal self? How did you like the image? What will you do when this image becomes real?

14. SLEEP

Sleep is so important for our health and well-being. There is almost nothing more important than a good night's sleep. However, if you are like me, you never seem to get enough sleep. So what do we do? Some of us drink lots of coffee to get our energy flowing – we take a coffee break! We seem to think that caffeine is a good substitute for sleep. But there is no good substitute for sleep – we could take a **Mindfulness Break**.

Our sleep gets disturbed for many reasons, not the least of which is our worries about the past or our expectations about the future. Slowing down and writing them down may help you sleep better. We also go to bed after watching violent episodes on TV and wonder why our dreams are so convoluted. They wake us up at night as if we were the star of the show and this was our chance to prove it. We go to bed after watching the news, which is hardly ever very good. We can be upset with our spouse or children and these upsets will cause us to sleep poorly. If we work too much, our sleep will be disturbed by thoughts of what we have to do next. This happens to me a lot when I am developing software. Instead of sleeping, I am planning the code that I have to write in the morning. I get into the habit of what I call a “coding frenzy!”

Sound sleep can have the positive effects of improving memory, concentration, immune function, and lifespan. Sound sleep is more or less a miracle drug! The right amount of exercise can help you gain sound sleep, but don't do it a few hours before you go to bed because it may prevent you from sleeping. Reducing your caffeine intake from coffee, tea and other sources can help you gain sound sleep. If you drink caffeinated drinks during the day, try to finish before noon to improve your sleep. Tryptophan – the sleep-inducing amino acid - can help you sleep. Have you noticed how sleepy you get after a big turkey dinner on Thanksgiving or Christmas? This is because of the tryptophan, which triggers melatonin and serotonin in your brain which induce sleep. Also, melatonin supplements may help.

If you are too warm, you may not sleep too well. Staying cool makes you feel more comfortable. Some people sleep better in

the company of white noise and they purchase a white noise machine. My daughter did so because of the noise in her apartment in San Francisco. Pets should not be sleeping in the same room as you. My son refuses to listen to me about this, I guess because his wife wants their dog nearby. The darker your room, the better you'll sleep. Having a sleep schedule could improve your sleep. For example, going to bed and 9:30 PM each night and getting up at 6:00 AM the next morning would provide eight and one half hours of sleep. Remember, "Early to bed, early to rise, make a man or woman healthy, wealthy and wise!"

Sara C. Mednick has done a lot of research on napping and sleeping. I love napping, myself. I usually take a nap after playing tennis and sometimes I sleep so deeply that I don't know where I am when I wake up. Most of the time, I listen to Tibetan bells, singing bowls or binaural beats during these naps. They take me to never-never-land and I wake up refreshed. About napping, Sara writes in *Take a Nap, Change Your Life!*

"Let's look at the rest of the animal kingdom. Do any other species try to get all their sleep in one long stretch? No. They're all multiphasic, meaning that they have many phases of sleep. Homo sapiens (our modern industrialized variety, anyway) stand alone in attempting to satisfy the need for sleep in one phase. And even that distinction is a relatively recent development. For most of our history, a rest during the day was considered as necessary a component of human existence as sleeping at night. As A. Roger Ekirch, one of the few historians to study sleep put it, 'Napping is a tool as old as time itself...'"

"By the first century B.C., the Romans had divided their day into periods designated for specific activities, such as prayer, meals and rest. Midday became known as sexta, as in the sixth hour (noon by their way of counting), a time when everyone would go to bed. The word has survived in the familiar term siesta."

About sleeping, she writes,

“Before Thomas Edison’s lightbulb, our great-grandparents would get as much as 10 hours’ rest during an average weeknight. Today, we’re lucky to get eight hours on the weekend. The amount of actual weeknight slumber has shrunk, on average, to an alarming 6.7 hours. We are a nation of the walking tired, so much so that 51 percent of the workforce reports that sleepiness on the job interferes with the volume of work they can do. One in five adults is so sleepy that it interferes with his or her daily activities a few days a week, while an additional 20 percent report impairment a few days a month.

Once the nation with the most productive workforce in the world, the United States, by a number of measures, has fallen behind countries such as France and Germany. Our standard of living is slipping. Our students are underperforming. Our collective health is deteriorating. In areas such as science and technology, we no longer dominate. Politicians, pundits and experts from all fields have made an industry out of explaining what’s going wrong. But continually overlooked is the role of that quiet little demon: fatigue.”

At one time last year, I was having a lot of trouble getting back to sleep after I had to get up to go to the bathroom. I devised this simple method of occupying my mind so that it would prefer sleep over wakefulness. The concept is pretty simple. You imagine a set of objects in twenty layers, each layer consisting of one object less than the one below it with the top layer having twenty objects. They are stacked in rows like bowling pins in 20 rows, not just four. The objects can be anything you choose, such as bottles of beer or wine on the wall or friends gathered for a party. You want these objects to be so boring that you would prefer to sleep. Try this practice the next time you can’t fall back to sleep.

1. Find a comfortable position lying down in your bed or wherever you wish to fall asleep.
2. Begin with a minimum of three deep breaths all the way

down into your belly and pay close attention to the in breath and the out breath of each one.

3. Now withdraw yourself into yourself and become aware of your body by being aware of how your body is oriented in your bed and each part of your body – your head and face, neck and shoulders, arms and hands, upper back and lower back, upper body and organs in your chest, your abdomen, your pelvis and hips, and finally, your legs and feet.
4. Now as you inhale begin to count the bottom row as “1” (in breath), then breathe out.
5. Move to the next row and count “1” for the object on the left (or right – it doesn’t matter) as you breathe in, then breathe out.
6. Next, count “2” for the one on the other side as you breathe in and then breathe out.
7. Continue like this, counting each row on the in breath then breathing out until you finish the last (20th) row – breathing in and counting, then breathing out.
8. If you haven’t fallen asleep by the end of row 20, start over again at the bottom.

One variation of this scheme is to begin with 20 and work backwards, if you please. Another variation is to count on the out breath. If this doesn’t work for you, you can try the Sound Sleep **Mindfulness Break**.

SOUND SLEEP MINDFULNESS BREAK

The Sound Sleep **Mindfulness Break** begins the same way all of the previous **Mindfulness Breaks** have begun – with steps one to six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break**. The idea for this **Mindfulness Break** came one night when my wife was unable to fall asleep. I recorded a session for her and before I knew it she was off to sleep. The moment I stopped the recording, I, too, feel asleep. This one really works.

Ready? Let’s begin!

Step 1:

[Follow steps one through six of the Basic **Mindfulness Break** of chapter 5. Proceed to step 2 when you are ready.]

Step 2:

Relax... let go... release... [Repeat as often as necessary until you are asleep.]

When you wake up from a nap or in the morning, write down any insights or problems you had with the process. Hopefully, you had a good nap or sound sleep and you feel better than before.

{link to gmsleep}

15. WALKING MEDITATION

Sometimes, we get restless and simply cannot generate the desire to do a full **Mindfulness Break**. This happens to me frequently. These are times when I simply take a short walk in nature – anywhere from twenty minutes to one hour or more.

Before and during the time of the Buddha, monks and nuns would walk slowly from their hermitage to the village to beg for food. Their minds would be fully attentive to each step they took. When they reached the village, they would go from door to door with their begging bowls. They would knock on the doors of the villagers and wait patiently for them to respond. When the door was opened, they would bow in deep respect and place their bowl in easy reach of the villagers. They would accept with gratitude any food offerings they would receive. When their bowls were full, they would walk slowly back to their hermitage and, say a few prayers of thanksgiving for the food they received and eat each morsel in total mindfulness. This is called mindfulness of eating, which we covered earlier. In the time of the Buddha, the members of his community would only eat twice a day, and nothing after noon. This gave them the time they needed for meditation and to do their daily chores.

During the war in Vietnam, there was a poignant moment in the demilitarized zone. There was continuous gun fire across this zone. A group of monks in orange robes started walking across the middle of the zone. Both sides of the war stopped their gunfire as the monks walked across. They were all safe.

This shows you the power of walking meditation. The participants are walking not only for themselves, but for the benefit of the people around them. They demonstrated the power of a moment of peace. Walking meditation is one of the most important activities for someone who is restless or in pain. For me, it became indispensable. Since I wasn't able to play tennis as frequently as I would like to have, I relied on walking meditation to provide some form of movement as well as an opportunity to feel what it feels like to walk.

The difference between walking meditation and going for a walk is subtle. When you go for a walk, you must pay attention to

where you are going, but your mind can go anywhere it pleases. With walking meditation, you must also pay attention to where you are going, but in this case, you are aware that you are walking with each step, moment by moment. When you lift your right foot, you know you are lifting your right foot. When you place your right foot, you know that you are placing your right foot. When you lift your left foot, you know you are lifting your left foot. When you place your left foot, you know that you are placing your left foot. Each step is done with total awareness.

A famous Zen proverb states, “In walking, just walk. In sitting, just sit. Above all, don’t wobble.” Of course, it is all right to wobble! Just wobble mindfully!

THE PRACTICE OF WALKING MEDITATION

There are basically two types of walking meditation. The first type is practiced indoors with a predetermined path, either in a circle or up and down a corridor. The physical environment usually determines whether you walk in a circle or up and down a corridor. You may even find yourself walking in a rectangle if there are obstructions that you need to walk around. This type of walking meditation is usually considerably slower than the next.

The other type of walking meditation is outside, where there are lots of choices. You may not necessarily choose a destination at the beginning of your walking meditation. Both types of walking meditation have their benefits and advantages. Walking outdoors has the disadvantage of many distractions, but walking outdoors can be wonderful when you walk mindfully and learn to appreciate the wonders of life. We notice the bird in the sky and in the trees. We look at the beautiful flowers and other plants. We experience the importance of rivers and streams bringing fresh water to the land. We pass other people and animals and greet them with kindness in our hearts.

In an advanced form of walking meditation when you are walking outdoors, you may come across something that captures your attention like a beautiful flower, a friendly cat or dog, a beautiful sunset, beautiful ripples on a pond, creek, or river, a field of grasses that look totally amazing, or anything else. In this

case, you can stop to appreciate these wonders of life and then continue on.

Step 1:

[Decide on when and where you want to do walking meditation. If you are indoors, you might want to plan a period of nine minutes of walking meditation in between two periods of sitting meditation. This is what is usually done in sitting groups, although the periods of sitting meditation are considerably longer.

If you are practicing outdoors away from your home, drive there comfortably and mindfully and begin your walking meditation the moment you get out of your car. The period can be any time between nine and thirty minutes or more. Be sure to walk mindfully from your car to the path for your meditation.

What does it mean to walk mindfully?]

Step 2:

[When you walk mindfully, you are aware of each step. When you lift your left foot, you know you are lifting your left foot and all of your attention is on the lifting. When you place your left foot, all your attention is on placing your left foot.

When you lift your right foot, you are aware that you are lifting your right foot and all of your attention is on your right foot. When you are placing your right foot, all of your attention is on the placing.

To make matters easier, each time you lift either foot, you can say to yourself, "Lifting." When you place either foot, you can say to yourself, "Placing."

So you carry on like this, "Lifting... placing... lifting... placing." Or you can use any words that help you to focus on your lifting and placing of each foot.

In my personal experience, I learned to use my own poem:

*Lying still,
Breathing in, breathing out,
Healthy cells grow all by themselves,*

I am free of cancer.

When I lift my left foot, I say to myself, “Healthy.” When I lift my right foot, I say to myself, “Free.” I began this in 1997 and still practice it today.]

Step 3:

[When the time period that you have allocated for walking meditation ends, please don’t stop there. There is no reason to discontinue walking meditation even though the formal period of walking meditation is over!

Walk mindfully to the kitchen or wherever else you are going in your house if you are practicing indoors. Walk mindfully to your car if you are walking outdoors. Drive mindfully to your next destination.]

After you have become used to this type of meditation practice, you might want to apply it to other aspects of your life. For example, when you wash the dishes, simply wash the dishes. Don’t wash your worries, your cares, or your anxieties. Leave them behind. When you fold the laundry, simply fold the laundry. Don’t fold any of your anger, your fear, or your stress into the clothes. Just fold the clothes.

Do you get the idea? Bring mindfulness into everything that you do and you’ll find that your life flows a lot easier.

For more information on walking meditation, please visit the **Meditation Practices** website and search for “walking meditation.” You will find many interesting articles for you to read and some entertaining videos for you to watch.

16. INNER PEACE AND HAPPINESS

As noted in the chapter on gratitude, the practice of being grateful for what I have led me to a sense of inner peace and equanimity. This is the place where I was able to make appropriate decisions for my health care and put the education of my children ahead of owning a house. When I go for a walk in nature, I walk mindfully and continue to enjoy these feelings of inner peace.

According to Father Eli, inner peace depends on pleasant, relaxed emotions. In fact, relaxation is the peace that surpasses all understanding, and it is closely related to love – self-love and love for others. Eli says that inner peace and happiness are the same thing, and when I feel peaceful, I always feel happy and vice versa. Eli says,

"Happiness is a state of mind in which our thinking is pleasant a good share of the time. Notice that HAPPINESS IS NOT AN EMOTION - it is a state of mind. That means that it is more permanent than an emotion, for an emotion may be fleeting." (Second Book of Wisdom, Lesson 11)

In his way of thinking, there are two types of emotions: tense emotions, like anger, stress, hate, fear, anxiety, frustration, and worry; and relaxed emotions, like love, kindness, pleasure, peace, joy, and compassion. You cannot be happy nor have inner peace when you are feeling one of the tense emotions. You can only be happy when you feel relaxed.

Happiness is the *normal state* of a well-adjusted animal. When you're happy all your senses get better. Your internal organs function better, as well as your glands and heart. You heal quicker and memory works better. Children get better grades, and develop a love for learning. So stay happy, stay relaxed. All religions say that righteousness and eternal life are obtained by happiness and cheerfulness. Happiness is the method of obtaining a peaceful personality and perfection of character.

This is why we begin **Mindfulness Breaks** with *Mindfulness of Breathing* and *Clearing the Mind*. We clear the mind of all

negative feelings and emotions and pave the way for relaxation. This is also why the practice of gratitude is so important. Achieving a relaxed, happy state of mind leads to the many benefits that we have seen in previous chapters.

On the other hand, unhappiness, tension, and hate are the major causes of disease, and all psychiatrists know this. You owe it to yourself to stay happy and relaxed. Then you will know inner peace.

Remember that love, like inner peace comes from within and exists aside from outside circumstances. As we saw before, love is the desire to relieve pain and bring happiness. Lust, on the other hand, is the desire to mate. Love and lust may exist together, but there is also lust without love and love without lust, i.e., without the desire to produce offspring. However, we have been taught that we have no right to happiness. This is because of the Christian ethic which ties love and lust together. This destroys love and lust. There is no reason why you cannot love a man, a woman or a child.

This leads to the teaching on jealousy. True love would say, “If she’s happier with him, let her have him.” A good marriage depends on maturity, relationship and having the same goal. If you act out of love, it will lead towards righteousness and perfection.

If the person says, “I can’t love _____,” they don’t know what love is. They think they’ll be hurt. What hurts is falseness written into this by the church. Love should give you a good feeling. When you think of what you can do to make someone happy you’re beginning to love. Love demands an approach: be with someone, be around someone. You just don’t take the time to just be with someone. Remember the definition of love: bring happiness and reduce pain in every way that you can.

Inner peace is not something you deserve; it is your inherent birthright as a human being on the planet at this time in your life. It is the normal state of a healthy person. You can be relaxed and happy only now – not anytime in the future. The daily practice of **Mindfulness Breaks** can facilitate this.

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hahn tells us to practice “mouth yoga,”

the practice of smiling. This relaxes the cheek muscles and spread the relaxation to the rest of the body. Smiling is a demonstration of love. Confucius said, “A man who does not smile shouldn’t be in business or in front of the public.” No matter what’s said or what is done, smile. Smile will make it better.

Many think that people who seek after happiness, inner peace and enlightenment are selfish. If there’s so much unhappiness in the world how can you be happy? This is a false belief because the better you are, the better people around you can become. In other words, as you improve due to **Mindfulness Breaks** and other practices, people around you are influenced and possibly inspired to improve their lives. The people you touch will spread the improvement to the people they touch until the whole community and ultimately, the whole world is improved. “Yeah, right,” you might, think, but it is possible. Buddhist practitioners take the *bodhisattva* vow – a vow to seek enlightenment not only for themselves, but for all humanity. All of humanity needs to be enlightened if we are to secure the future for our children and our children’s children. The Buddha taught that his enlightenment was for everybody, not just himself. He didn’t keep it to himself. Remember, inner peace is the starting point for whatever you want to achieve.

Another false belief is that happiness and inner peace is a reward for being good, as some religions teach. In reality, happiness and inner peace is the result of a lot of hard work on yourself.

The company of good friends is essential and it is important to be around people you love and who love you. Man is a gregarious animal and friendship with others is most beneficial. A good friend furnishes something you need as you furnish something they need. One of the ways to make a friend is to ask someone for something or to do something or asking advice. Whether you know how to do it or not is not important, a friend is valuable to you because you need them for happiness

THE MAGIC OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Unconditional love is the kind of love you share with someone

when there are no strings attached. Your love for the other person or pet or whoever else never depends on their state of mind, their actions, or their words. You love them unconditionally. You saw an example of this in Micah's Story from chapter 1.

Another example of unconditional love is in the movie, *Breathe*. The movie tells the true story of Robin Cavendish, an Englishman born in 1930. At the age of 28, he married Diana Blacker and they had a wonderful life together in England and in Kenya with friends and family. In 1960 or thereabouts Diana became pregnant and Robin became paralyzed from the neck down from Polio. He was on a respirator for the rest of his life.

The couple returned to England and Robin was placed in a hospital for disabled people. After baby Jonathan was born, Diana began a campaign to get Robin out of the hospital so that she could take care of him at home, along with Jonathan. Her care for him for the next thirty-three or thirty-four years was a stunning example of unconditional love.

One of their friends built a wheel chair for Robin with a portable respirator so he could go outside, visit other polio victims he had become familiar with in the hospital, and actually travel to different parts of continental Europe in a specially designed vehicle that would carry the chair. On one occasion, they were traveling in Spain and the portable chair needed to be recharged. One of the traveling companions plugged the respirator in the wrong socket and it blew up. They pulled off the side of the road and were unsuccessful in fixing the portable respirator. While everyone took turns using the manual respirator to keep Robin alive, the inventor of the chair was sent for to repair the portable respirator. In the meantime, a party developed around them that lasted through the night and into the next morning when the inventor showed up. He fixed the respirator and they carried on. Robin and the inventor became advocates for disabled people and many other portable respirators were distributed to other polio victims.

In 1994, Robin's lungs had become so inflamed that it was time to let him go. They had a "going away" party for him and he died

in the summer. He became a medical phenomenon as one of the longest-living survivors of his type of polio. It was said that to know Robin was to know the personification of courage. I would say that to know Robin, Diana and Jonathan is to know the personification of unconditional love. In honor of the unconditional love they all shared, Jonathan produced the movie and his mother, now in her eighties, attended the opening.

Unconditional love is an important component of successful **Mindfulness Breaks**. When you do a **Mindfulness Break** with unconditional love in your heart, the chances of it coming true are increased one thousand fold. This is based on my personal experience as well as the Zen teachings of Father Eli. I would say that every time I practiced a **Mindfulness Break** in the state of unconditional love, what I was visualizing came true. Remember, no one, other than me, thought that Micah would survive. Zen Master Cheri Huber says,

No matter what, our best hope is Unconditional Love.

Do you think that it is possible for a group to express unconditional love? Let me tell you a story. It begins with the founding of Plum Village in Southern France in 1982 by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) and Sister Chan Khong. Today, there are over 200 residents of Plum Village and visitors to the retreats they offer in the tens of thousands of people coming through. Retreats are offered for people of color; for veterans of war, especially the war in Vietnam; for Palestinians and Israelis; for the LGBTQ population; and much more. They are offered in such places as Plum Village Monasteries in France, Australia, Hong Kong and Thailand, the Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, California, the Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, the European Institute of Applied Buddhism in Germany, and the Magnolia Grove Monastery in Mississippi, as well as in over 200 local communities all over the world.

When Thich Nhat Hanh suffered a massive stroke in November of 2014, the doctors gave him little chance to survive, and survive he did. He taught us the lesson of how to live in the

face of almost certain death. What he did was continue to breathe. When he breathed in, he knew he was breathing in, even though he couldn't tell anyone. When he breathed out, he knew he was breathing out. People all over the world were breathing with him, day in and day out. The sun never sets on the followers of Thay, and many people were showering unconditional loving kindness towards their teacher. He continues to live today in the Plum Village Monastery in Thailand, but that is not the end of the story.

Seven months after his stroke, I took my wife to see an outstanding Vietnamese osteopath, Dr. V. He had been treating Mala for about two years prior to this seminal visit in June of 2015. At that visit, he told me about some research that was done in Sweden on lymphocytes in the brain and shared with me a presentation he made in Hong Kong about this study. I had a strong insight that Dr. V. could help Thay. It just so happens that Thay was staying in San Francisco and receiving stroke treatments.

I posted a letter in our global sangha (community) newsgroup asking for the person in charge of Thay's treatment schedule so that I could connect Thay with Dr. V. Brother Phap Linh responded to my email and I told him about the Swedish research and Dr. V.'s ability to offer Thay some relief. Within a few days, Dr. V. was treating Thay and he was beginning to improve by leaps and bounds. I was told to keep this under wraps, so I did.

On October 10, 2015, two days before Thay's 89th continuation day (birthday), there was a Miracle of Mindfulness event in San Francisco, which I attended and hosted the Earth Holder's Sangha information table at the event. After chanting, and dharma talks, Sister Chan Khong gave us an update on the status of Thay's health. We learned that he was progressing faster than the doctors had thought possible. When I spoke to her in person at the book signing table after the event, she told me, "80% of Thay's recovery can be attributed to Dr. V." I was still encouraged not to tell anyone about Dr. V. It wasn't until a year later on his 90th continuation day that I was able to write about Dr. V. and lymphocytes in the brain. I wrote a birthday message to Thay on

October 11, 2016 that went,

My name is Jerome Freedman (True Precious Light) from Greenbrae, California. I continue Thay by leading the Mindfulness In Healing Sangha at the Pine Street Clinic in San Anselmo, California since 2009. I continue Thay by teaching mindfulness to mothers in my neighborhood. I continue Thay by daily practice on my own and with the Earth Holder Sangha. My books, guided meditations and blog articles feature Thay and many are dedicated to him.

*I take great joy in the insight I had in June of 2015 about **lymphocytes in the brain** from talking with Dr. ... V. when he was treating my wife. This led to Dr. V. treating Thay both in San Francisco last year and in Plum Village. Sister Chan Khong told me in person last year that 80% of Thay's recovery can be attributed to Dr. V.*

I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude for the many visits I've shared with Thay, especially the 1997 retreat at UC Santa Barbara just seven months after I first was diagnosed with bladder cancer and the time I had breakfast in his room with Sister Chan Khong in the winter of 2006. At the breakfast we discussed "healthy cells grow all by themselves," from a poem I wrote at the beginning of my cancer.

[Read more at <https://goo.gl/bxz8ti>.]

So let me ask the question again, and please consider you answer and share it on this page: <https://goo.gl/bxz8ti>. Do you think that it is possible for a group to express unconditional love? What is your answer?

LET THE MAGIC HAPPEN

Father Eli was very clear to explain how important it was for us to let the magic of **Mindfulness Breaks** happen without too much interference from our egos. This became very important to me shortly after my son was magically cured from stage four grade four metastatic kidney cancer that began in 1976. As we were working together, I noticed that my seven-year-old child didn't

know enough to believe that his cancer was usually fatal at his stage and he was able to create his mind stories from a place of innocence and trust. His state was such that he was never attached to the results of his mind stories.

This is an important point to notice. When we become invested in the success of our **Mindfulness Breaks**, we invite tension into the process. Naturally a little tension is necessary, but this is only to create the desire to accomplish our goals. This desire is the activator for all we think and do. Here is where our planning comes into the picture. We use our conscious mind to gather all courses of action and to figure out all the steps to accomplish our goal. Then we have to let go, get out of our own way and let our superconscious mind work it through. We have to be patient to allow the universe to respond to our desires, rather than force our hand. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Patience is the mark of true love. If you truly love someone, you will be more patient with that person." And Lao Tzu writes,

Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear?

Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself? The Master doesn't seek fulfillment.

Not seeking, not expecting, one is present, and can welcome all things.

Mindfulness Breaks always require that you live only in the present moment. The past is gone and there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot live in the future before it gets here. Your creative mind was developed to respond only to your present environment or actions, not to the future or what may happen. It can only function in the now! Father Eli writes,

Therefore, live life NOW and enjoy it NOW - those who don't learn this will never live life to its fullest and enjoy it to its utmost. Most people start out intending to enjoy life sometime in the future when something or other happens, so that they never get to enjoy it at all, for the future never comes.

Don't look forward or backward from this day. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." We were never meant to add the regrets of yesterday and the worries over tomorrow to the load of trying to perform today. Just live and enjoy life this day. Do what you want to -- "Ane ye hurt no one, do what ye will." As you get older, and looking back, you will never regret the things you have done for enjoyment in life, you will regret the things you did not do -- the opportunities you have missed which can never return. (Second Book of Wisdom)

So have patience and allow magic to happen when you consistently practice **Mindfulness Breaks**. Don't just sit around and do nothing or watch TV all day waiting for your results. Be sure to take the necessary action steps you've outlined while you setting your goals.

For example, during my last episode of cancer, I would do **Mindfulness Breaks** in the afternoon. I would breathe in the blue light of the *Medicine Buddha* and imagine the red spots of cancer in my bladder responding to the blue light. I would help the process by watching my diet, taking my supplements, doing walking meditation and all the other health-building and immune system building activities that I could think of. It takes work and commitment to make **Mindfulness Breaks** work!

When you do a **Mindfulness Break**, practice with sincerity, reverence and humility. Bring to mind your concept of the source of all power, be it God, the universe, the cosmic intelligence, or the creator of all there is. Offer you gratitude for being present this moment for your practice. Approach it with all the humility you can muster, and relax into the process. Experience how great it is for you to put yourself in alignment with all there is to achieve your outcome.

Remember to prepare your mind by practicing *Clearing the Mind* (Chapter 4) and being grateful for what you have as in Chapter 6. When you are finished, don't rush off to do a bunch of things. Sit silently for a short while and do nothing. Then, take a break and stay as calm as you can.

17. WISDOM

This chapter presents wisdom teachings of Father Eli, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddha and others. Many of these wisdom teachings are so obvious that they are hidden from most people. Most of them have become part of what I teach in my meditation group on Wednesday evenings.

IMPERMANENCE

The Buddha taught that all conditioned things are impermanent. Everything must change. What are conditioned things? Anything that is subject to causes and conditions is a conditioned thing. This means your body, your children, your home, your city, your country, your planet and your universe are conditioned things and they are subject to change. The song goes something like this, “The Rockies may crumble, Gibraltar may tumble, but our love is here to stay.” Don’t believe it! Even true love evolves. Eckhart Tolle teaches, “Even the sun will die.” When we recognize the insight of impermanence, we can learn to be in the present moment and take life **just as it is**. A lot of our suffering is related to wanting things to stay the way they are. Nature says they don’t.

Every cause has its effect. Every effect has its cause. This is the way it works everywhere in the universe. Everything has its consequences and when things happen as if by chance it is only a manifestation of a hidden cause. Our thoughts, feelings, words and deeds create the reactions of people and things around us. We must learn to take responsibility for everything we feel, think, say and do every moment of our lives. When we do wholesome things, good things happen. When we do unwholesome things, bad things happen. This is the law of karma.

In my humble opinion, nothing contributes more to the insight of impermanence than the *Five Remembrances*. Each day, devout Buddhists around the world recite the Five Remembrances. When you first hear them, they may strike you as sentimental, but they evoke the truths that motivated the prince Sidhartha Gautama to seek and to realize the enlightenment that made him the Buddha, the Awakened One.

The Five Remembrances

I am of the nature to grow old. I cannot escape old age.

I am of the nature to have ill-health. I cannot escape sickness.

I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.

My actions are my only true belongings. There is no way to escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground on which I stand.

After practicing these for a while, you may begin to have a deep insight into the reality of impermanence. This is one of the fundamental laws of nature and it is also true in the natural world. We would not be here if things were not impermanent.

We are here because of the explosions of several supernovae in our region of the galaxy. Supernovae are large stars that create the heavy elements necessary for life as they grow old, burn all of their nuclear fuel, and die in a massive explosion. Supernovae explosions in galaxies far away are so bright that they outshine their whole galaxies.

Out of the mass of supernovae debris in this part of the galaxy, our sun was born and the planets and moons with it about 4.6 billion years ago. The earth developed to what it is today by absorbing the impact of planetesimals (small planet-like objects) and other objects of various sizes.

Life developed on earth about 3.6 billion years ago, and humans made their first appearance as recently as 2.5 million years ago. On this cosmic scale of things, human life is just a baby!

Scientists predict that even the sun will die – in about 5-6 billion years. The sun will become a “red giant” star, become much hotter, and expand greatly. It will engulf Mercury, Venus, and yes, even the whole Earth. The only remnant of human life will be somewhere in outer space where the Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 are still roaming around in the vast emptiness of space.

So you see, instead of wanting things to be permanent, we

should celebrate impermanence and shout, “Long live impermanence!”

To contemplate impermanence, begin with several deep breaths as before. Withdraw yourself into yourself and become aware of your meditation seat. Bring your attention to your breathing.

When you are settled down in your breathing, begin to notice sensations in your body. You can do this by scanning your body from head to toes or from toes to head. Or you can do this by just noting sensations anywhere in your body.

Notice how sensations come into being, stay for a while, and leave. For example, you may have an itch on your arm. Your first impulse is to scratch the itch for immediate relief. However, if you allow it to just be for a moment or two, you will notice that it will change and most likely dissipate.

All of these changing sensations anywhere in your body are impermanent. There is nothing to get hung up about.

NO PERMANENT SELF

The teaching of impermanence leads us to question everything about ourselves. If you look hard deep inside of ourselves, what do we see? Our bodies change completely every seven years, so we are not our bodies. Our mind changes fifty-million times a day, so we are not our minds. What else could we possibly be? We can't find anything about ourselves that is permanent, non-changing and everlasting. Everything we are points to the fact that we are empty of a separate self, that we are empty of a separate existence.

There is not a single one of us alive who isn't dependent upon people, places, plants, animals and minerals. Even die-hard survivalists and men who live in the wilderness are dependent on the environment for their nourishment and water. They respond to the changing seasons, just like the rest of us. Without game and their natural instincts, they would not survive.

Since there is no separate self, there is no separate existence. We are all interdependent on all that is to give our lives meaning. What more can we learn from the insight of impermanence?

Well, if everything is changing, then there is nothing for us to call our permanent self. Furthermore, within our bodies and within our minds, there is nothing that lasts for more than a moment. Therefore nothing could be identified as the unchanging self or soul.

Nonetheless, it still makes sense to talk about ourselves as if we have some semblance of permanence. That's why we say such things as, "I am of the nature to grow old." This "I" is a conventional way of referring to our specific incarnation in this universe at this moment.

To contemplate no permanent self, begin with several deep breaths as before. Withdraw yourself into yourself and become aware of your meditation seat. Bring your attention to your breathing.

When you are settled down in your breathing, ask yourself the following questions.

"Are my eyes or what I see myself?"

"Are my ears or what I hear myself?"

"Is my nose or the odors I smell myself?"

"Is my tongue or what I taste myself?"

"Is my skin or tactile sensations myself?"

"Is my mind or brain myself?"

"Are my thoughts, memories, plans, images, hopes and dreams myself?"

"If none of these sense doors or sensations is me, what am I?"

Ponder these questions as long as you want. Then take several deep breaths to return to your daily life or drift off to sleep.

INTERBEING

Once we grasp the ideas of impermanence and no permanent self (non-self), we begin to realize that nothing we know of has a separate existence. You cannot be by yourself, alone. I cannot be by myself, alone. We all have to inter-be with each other and the whole cosmos. The insight of Interbeing means that we are interconnected with everything around us, near and far. We all have to recognize that our existence depends upon the existence of others and the whole earth around us.

We depend on others to bring food to our tables. We depend on others to build housing for us. We depend on others to make clothing so that we won't freeze to death in the winter. Our dependence on everything around us is so deeply engrained that we hardly even notice it.

Have you thought about how that piece of corn you are eating arrived on your plate? Who planted the seed? Who harvested it? Who brought it to the market? Who purchased it? Who provided the energy for you to cook the corn? When you think about it, it takes a lot of people and causes and conditions to bring a single ear of corn to your dinner table.

UNSATISFACTORINESS

Along with impermanence and no separate self, unsatisfactoriness is the third of what are called the three factors of existence. This factor, unsatisfactoriness, is now the subject of a new book by bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize winner, Robert Wright called *Why Buddhism is True (And Why You Can Blame Natural Selection for Your Suffering)* (<http://amzn.to/2yakQT2>.) He explains our genes are disposed towards doing whatever they can to persist into the future generations. This is the only thing that natural selection is geared towards. This means that we have a natural tendency towards never being totally satisfied! Robert Wright writes,

Natural selection “wants” us to be recurrently unsatisfied, to keep seeking a bit more of the things that in the hunter-gatherer environment of our evolution helped spread genes: more food, more sex, more status. And the less we get the picture, and the less we see how short-lived the ensuing thrills will be, the more ardently we’ll pursue them. We’ll be driven by craving (tanha, in Buddhist terminology) to stay on what psychologists call the “hedonic treadmill,” pursuing the ever-receding horizon of lasting gratification.

He goes on to explain that our brains are wired to seek pleasure which lasts only a short time. Just imagine what would

happen if once we completed a scrumptious meal, the pleasure does not last and we're hungry a few hours later or the next morning. Then we have to ingest another meal, feel satisfied for a while and get hungry again. The same is true of sexual pleasures. After we've completed the act, the desire returns with a short while to have another go at it.

We all know that life is full of disappointments, complications, suffering and unsatisfactoriness. When desirable things happen we want them to last forever. When undesirable things happen we want them to go away instantly. How do we reconcile these opposing forces?

When we try to hold onto something that is changing beyond our control, we are bound to be disappointed and feel depressed. We identify suffering with unpleasant situations most of the time. However, pleasant ones can also lead to suffering when we become attached to them. The more we crave pleasant sensations, the more unhappiness they will bring. It is in the craving and grasping for pleasant sensations that suffering abides.

Both pleasant experiences and unpleasant experiences are of the nature to change. They are impermanent, ever changing, and cause us misery. Coming to terms with this can bring on equanimity and inner peace.

A funny thing happened while I was writing this chapter which illustrates this point. None of my friends with whom I attend the Dean Lectures on astronomy at the California Academy of Sciences were available to go with me tonight. So I thought I would get clever. I made a call to a couple that I am acquainted with who normally attend the lectures. The number I had for them had been disconnected. I knew that the wife of the couple plays tennis at a local tennis club and decided to call there. I had played there many times in tennis competitions. It just so happened that the person I wanted to talk to was at the club at this time. I was elated. After getting her phone numbers into my contacts, I asked if she and her husband were going to the lecture tonight. She said that they had grandparent duty and would not be going. I was deflated. A few minutes later, I checked the internet to see what the topic of the talk would be and decided

that it was not so interesting that I wanted to go alone.

So, within the space of a few minutes, I had a pleasant experience (i.e., finding my friend at the tennis club), and unpleasant experience (i.e., she and her husband not going), and a neutral experience (i.e., deciding not to go). The whole thing vanished and I continued working on my writing.

The contemplation of unsatisfactoriness is begun the way the others are – with at least three deep breaths. This is followed by bringing your attention into the body. When you are ready, begin the following contemplation.

Recall a time when you were disappointed with something that happened in your life. Make it a small disappointment at first so you can get used to doing the contemplation.

Recall how you felt about the situations. What did it feel like? Did it make you feel more than disappointed, like miserable? Did you get depressed? Notice your feelings.

Now pay attention primarily to how the situation made you want to avoid experiences like this. Notice the flavor of the avoidance. Do you see how we want to avoid unpleasant experiences?

How long did it last? Were you able to recognize that this unpleasant experience was impermanent?

Take a full deep breath or two as you let this experience go and be just what it is. How do you feel now? What sensations are you experiencing right now?

Now recall a time when you were elated with something that happened. Again, make it a small event that you can practice with until you become familiar with the contemplation.

Recall how you felt in this situation. What did it feel like? Did you want to make the experience last and last? Notice whether you wanted it to last.

Recall how long this experience lasted. Wasn't it also impermanent? Didn't you want more?

The wanting more of this experience is craving. Craving is an aspect of pleasant experiences when we want more.

How did you feel about the experience of elation? Did it give you more energy? Were you happy about it?

When you are ready, take a deep breath or two and let this experience go and be just what it is.

Now you have an opportunity to compare the unsatisfactory experience with the satisfactory experience. How do they compare? Are you able to let both experiences be just as they are without craving the good one and being adverse to the bad one? When this happens, you naturally experience a state of equanimity.

When you are ready, return to your normal life. You now have the experience of knowing that both pleasant and unpleasant experiences are impermanent and they pass.

PRESENCE

What is presence? What does it mean to be present? It means to stop being busy and start paying attention to what is going on right here, right now. It means that we open up to positive feelings of love, support, intimacy and happiness. Zen teacher Jan Chozen Bays, sensei says,

"Presence has no measurable product except positive feelings, feelings of support, intimacy, and happiness. When we stop being busy and productive and switch to just being still and aware, we ourselves will also feel support, intimacy, and happiness, even if no one else is around. "

When we make presence the priority, we are here for whatever is given to us, whether it is taking care of our little ones, baking a cake, washing the dishes, or doing some creative work. Presence makes us feel as if time has stood still. Isn't it true that "time flies when you are having fun?"

Presence is result of being mindful of what is going on right here and right now, being open, fully alert and willing to be intimate bring about presence. Cheri Huber says,

"Only presence gives us what our hearts long for. So simple, easy, beautiful and affordable! Costs us nothing; gives us everything."

When we cultivate presence and don't focus too hard on the outcome, we pay more attention to the process of loving and understanding others and finding compassion in their suffering as in ours. Thich Nhat Hanh says,

"When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there?"

So what does it mean to be here? Is it where you are now reading this book? Is it in the room you are in? Is it being in your home or office? Is it being in your city? Is it being in your state or district? Is it being in your country? Is it being on your continent? Is it being on planet earth? Is it being in the solar system? Is it being in the Milky Way Galaxy? Is it being in the galaxy cluster? Is it being in the universe? Isn't it all of these places?

What does it mean to be now? Is it 10:00 AM PDT (or the current time wherever you are)? Is it four billion years since life in its most basic form appeared on planet earth? Is it four and one half billion years since the earth was formed as part of the solar system? Or is it 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang? Isn't it all of these times?

What does this little exercise teach us, living here on a tiny blue dot? All life that we know of takes place on the planet. All life depends on energy from the sun. All of life depends on the previous supernovae which blew up in this part of the Milky Way Galaxy. They were necessary to create the heavy metals necessary for life. All of this gives us a sense of interbeing – the interconnectedness of all things. This leads to the insight that there is no “us” to be pitted against “them.” We are all in this together and we must work together to sustain life on earth.

GENEROSITY

One of the most generous things that we can do is to offer our presence to everyone we encounter. There is nothing preventing this from happening except for the fact that our minds have a tendency to wander and not be present.

Being present is, in my opinion, the ultimate of generosity.

There are situations that we cannot be present for because they are far away or happening a time in the future. For these, we can turn to normal forms of generosity by giving of our time, energy and material resources to the causes that interest us. If you are unable to contribute money to those causes, you could think about volunteering your services by driving people to medical appointments, stuffing envelopes, serving public meals and all kinds of other opportunities.

Generosity is a trait that has to be developed over time. Once you start to give a little of your time, energy and / or material resources, you begin to realize the benefits of giving, and you begin to learn that giving and receiving are one in the same. Dale Wright has some good ideas on how to become generous:

The movement from ordinary states of self-concern to selfless giving always involves a gradual transformation of character, not a sudden leap. Like any form of strength, generosity needs to be intentionally cultivated over time, and everyone must begin in whatever state of mind they already happen to be. Understanding and accepting who you really are right now is as important as the commitment to become someone more open and generous. Whatever the quality of motivation, when we intentionally reach out to others in giving, some degree of transformation occurs. We become what we practice and do in daily life.

We have seen before that gratitude is the foundation of generosity. This is because to be grateful means that something has been given to us. We can also turn this around and give up something we like to someone else and make them happy.

18. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Jerome Freedman is an author, healthcare advocate, mindfulness meditation teacher, and a cancer survivor since 1997. He is a long-time practitioner in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh in which he is an ordained member of the Order of Interbeing. His recent article in *The Mindfulness Bell* titled “Healthy and Free” touched many people. He is also a certified teacher of the Enneagram in the Oral Tradition with Helen Palmer.

Jerome currently teaches **Mindfulness in Healing** at the Pine Street Clinic in San Anselmo, California and writes daily on his blog, **Meditation Practices**. He is a contributing author of *I Am With You: Love Letters to Cancer Patients*, Nancy Novak, PhD, and Barbara K. Richardson.

Dr. Freedman served on Board of Directors of the Marin AIDS Project and the Advisory Council of the Institute for Health and Healing between 2007 and 2010. He is now a major contributor to the Buddhist Climate Action Network and the Earth Holder Sangha – the Plum Village climate response community - as an activist promoting earth protection. He is also a technical advisor for Operation Diana, an NGO dedicated to the survival of elephants in Africa.

Dr. Freedman holds a Ph. D. in computer science, along with two master’s degrees in physics and a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering. He still consults internationally on software engineering problems and expert witness cases. He successfully interviewed Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson on cosmology and Buddhist thought in 2011.

He can be reached by for consultations, dharma talks, lectures, and days of mindfulness by email at jerome [at] mountainsangha [dot] org.

Also by Dr. Freedman

Stop Cancer in its Tracks: Your Path to Mindfulness in Healing Yourself

Healing Cancer with Your Mind: 7 Strategies to Help YOU

Survive

Seven Steps to Stop Interruptions in Meditation: How to Concentrate and Focus on Your Meditation and Deal with Distractions

Cosmology and Buddhist Thought: A Conversation with Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson – excerpted by Lion's Roar Buddhist Magazine

The Enneagram: Know Your Type! Awaken Your Potential!

Contributing author to I Am With You: Love Letters to Cancer Patientsⁱ published February, 2015.

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19. DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my family –

Mala, my wife of more than 35 years

My son Micah

My daughters Rachael and Jessica

To Father Eli, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the many teachers who have made this book possible.
