

Spring Washam
Week Two, *Beginning Again*
March 6, 2016
“Remembering to Be Present”



Welcome back, everyone. My name is Spring Washam, and this is the second session in our four-part class series, *Beginning Again*. Last week, we talked about meditation and how it was helpful with beginning our practice, and we talked about patience and learning how to be present.

Today I want to talk more about mindfulness. This is a word that you hear everywhere, and a lot of people actually don't fully know: What is mindfulness? What are we practicing when we say meditation?

In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is a word that we use to describe the art of being aware. What we're doing when meditating is developing mindfulness. We're practicing a quality of paying attention. This is rare in our culture. Most people are lost night and day in a distracted mind. This is everywhere. We're on our phones, running around, habitually lost in the torment of the mind and its endless thinking. We're never really present, and we don't know what it's like to be mindful all the time. Sometimes we might every now and then have a beautiful experience that we're actually there for.

Mindfulness is a form of training; it develops over time. It's an aspect of awareness, but what we're doing is developing concentration. We're developing a mind that pays attention instead of a mind that's lost. It's a bit like working out at the gym. If you went to the gym and hadn't been there in five years, and you sat down and tried to lift a huge weight, it would be challenging. What happens over time is that the more you practice mindfulness, the more it becomes a habit of your mind. Your mind develops this muscle of paying attention.

We want to learn how to know what's happening in the body, in our emotions, and particularly in our thinking. Where's our attention all day long? When we sit down to meditate, we want to practice mindfulness, feeling the body and becoming present. Again, most of us are lost. We have no idea what's happening. We don't understand how we feel. We feel lost, hurt, distracted. We're not able fully to observe our experience. We get lost in experience.

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In some way, mindfulness is a part of the mind that becomes more of the observer. It becomes more aware. When we develop meditation, instead of being caught in something—lost in a drama, overwhelmed by something—we begin to look back, almost with a bird’s-eye view, and notice what's happening without being lost so much in what's happening. This is where freedom is. This is how we can begin to relate to our lives with much more space and calmness. We start to become present and aware of what's happening, and then through that mindfulness we're able to meet the challenges that life brings.

When we practice mindfulness we are also relating to ourselves with equanimity. We're observing. We're not lost in everything. We sit back. We look. We're present and we allow things to arise, and we allow them to pass away. We become nonreactive. Instead of pushing things out and grasping at things, we just meet the challenges of life. We meet our emotions and our thoughts non-reactively. This is freedom.

This word *freedom* is developed and cultivated in meditation, and we start with small successes. Can I let go? Can I just be here? Can I open to the present moment? Mindfulness is this quality that we want to develop. We want to pay attention. Mindfulness is like going into a dark room and turning the light on, and the light is the awareness itself. What's happening? What's happening in my heart, my body? Why can't I be with what's happening? This is the practice. This is the art of meditation, and we're always learning. We're always developing mindfulness.

Let's sit and practice together for a little bit of time here. Always, each week, we will have a short, guided meditation. You can pause the video and sit longer if you have more experience, or if you're on the go and you're busy and you just want to take a few moments to feel your breath, feel your body, and become mindful and present, that's beautiful, too.

Find your comfortable position, wherever you are, and we'll begin with closing the eyes. And I'd like to start with just ringing the bell. Let me ring this beautiful bell, to begin our meditation and to end it.

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We come back and begin again. Relax, feel your body, feel your breath. Sit down and feel your posture on your cushion. Turn your phone and your computer off. Take this moment to feel what is here.

As you connect to your breath, feel the whole body sitting and notice what's happening. Are there thoughts present? Is the mind lost in the past? Is it lost in the future?

See if you can let go and become aware of what's around you, feeling your body as the center point. Your breathing becomes a place to help calm the mind. We want to relax the mind, relax the body, and notice what's happening. We want to become mindful and return our attention.

You feel that the mind is restless or sleepy. We want to become aware of that and allow things to settle. We're not trying to get anywhere. We're not trying to get away from anything. We're opening to things just as they are in this moment. There's nowhere to go other than here. Stay as connected to the present moment as you can, and be patient with the mind. We're training in these ways. We're training in awareness.

As we end our meditation, remember always that we are practicing. Practice means it's never about perfection. We're not here to perfect ourselves. We're here to perfect our love, and mindfulness is the doorway into that. We learn step by step how to be here and how to be present. Gentleness and compassion are always part of meditation. Loving awareness is an aspect of mindfulness. It's a great description of mindfulness, actually: loving awareness.

Thank you for joining me for our second session. Next week, we'll talk more about the nuts and bolts of meditation practice, mindfulness, and working with the body. Thank you. See you next week.