

Practicing Mindfulness

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The only time our normal stress overload feels good is by comparison with the turbo-charged holiday variety. Here's to the holidays!

This is the time of the year when we have good parties, friends and food, and when we want to give great gifts. But we all know there can be too much of a good thing. When the party's over, we look at the credit card bills and stand on the scale. We get to reap what we've sown.

Do we go unconscious for two months and call it "enjoying the holidays"? Does it happen in an instant, or is it gradual?

Whether its friends, finances, family or food, we often find ourselves in situations where we've bitten off more than we can chew. While we have the purple pills and Prozac, Tums and Tylenol to help us get through the season when we've overdone it, maybe there's another way...

Perhaps equanimity becomes an option in these times. At its most basic, equanimity refers to an evenness of mind. It can lead to balance in the midst of frenzy. We still laugh, cry, love, even feel anger. Cultivating equanimity is developing the ability to skillfully experience the fullness of life without judgment or blame, consciously choosing how to act moment by moment.

It might mean:

- Taking the time to enjoy even the first bites of that chocolate cake, instead of having to consume two entire slices just to taste it at all.
- Knowing how to relax and have fun without having three drinks.
- Being able to say no, enough, or thank you very much.
- Enjoying what we have, instead of needing to have what we want.
- ... and understanding that some of the most pleasant experiences in life are often the most ordinary.

We can learn to be comfortable in our own skin. We can learn to have compassion for our inner critic, and to love ourselves as we are, facing the fear, honoring the anxiety, even letting go of the energy of anger in a safe non-accusatory way.

We all know what it means to have our buttons pushed. But whose buttons are they? If we didn't have those buttons, could they be pushed? What would it be like to recognize that reactive tendency in our selves, acknowledge it without judgment, and choose to respond in a conscious and deliberate fashion? Living our lives proactively, this could be the difference between surviving and thriving.

With the holidays still in motion, there's a great opportunity to pay attention to how we move through these times; a first step in growing awareness around our behavior. Can we check in with ourselves every time we check out? Can we choose gifts of thoughtfulness? Can we give thanks, share smiles and enjoy the true spirit of the season?

If the ball has already dropped, we could begin a new year's practice of being here in each moment without judgment, starting with stepping on that scale. Let's be honest, gentle and accepting of ourselves, making conscious choices with those next morsels of food. And we can let the jingle of change in our pockets ring like the bell of awareness reminding us to choose compassionately about how we spend our precious time and hard-earned money.

Mindfulness in the midst of chaos is a real holiday gift.



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