

JOY: The Journal of Yoga

Fall 2004, Volume 3, Number 6

What Makes Us Lose Our Mindfulness

John C. Kimbrough

Teachers of, and writers about Buddhism frequently will tell us that it is the awakening of a new mindfulness that is the starting point to cultivating the Buddha consciousness.

Sometimes this mindfulness is not brought about by studying and practicing Buddhism but just by our experiences of life and the strength of our soul and character.

This writer had the opportunity to experience such an awakening himself some 23 years ago when he stopped using drugs and drink.

He saw it again recently when a younger man that he knows in Bangkok stopped the use of drink and drugs 30 days ago.

With this kind of change, the mind and consciousness becomes clearer, and with it, there is a new mindfulness about so many things, both in the present and the past and a new use of and directing of our mental and physical energy.

There is also a new joy in living as we become free from the burdens of unhealthy habits and how those unhealthy habits weaken and deaden the mind, heart and soul.

It is easy for us all to see that things like drugs and drink, which we usually go to for pleasure, to relax, or to be one of the guys and accepted by others, can in reality be something that is making us dull and sluggish and cultivating a habit and addiction that will be difficult to let go of.

Many times, it is also our ongoing interest and habit of living our lives through the senses that takes us away from mindfulness.

The habit of watching television and movies every night may take us away from seeing who and how we are and what our thoughts and feelings are like.

We are also very attached to experiencing pleasure through the body and some may say that the desires that we experience or crave through the body can be hurting us in more ways than we are aware of.

We often may wonder why someone that we can experience a mental, physical and spiritual connection with when we have sexual intimacy with them may not be able to be someone that we can love or even like when we are not interacting with them in that manner.

Any addictive tendency to something through the senses will weaken our mindfulness as our attention is directed to that experience instead of within and to things happening around us.

Another thing that can weaken our mindfulness and make our whole being sluggish is what our attitude is to eating and diet and what we eat.

Yoga and Buddhism ask us to be mindful about what we eat, asking that it be only enough to give us nutrition, and that we eat as close to a wholesome, pure and vegetarian diet as possible.

The greed for money can keep us at work for a far too great a time and make us think about getting more and more, without seeing how we may be getting into habits of bad or dishonest business ethics.

Many times we seek recognition from others and this may be more prevalent in some countries and cultures than in others. In seeking recognition, we are getting caught up in the idea that what others think of us may be most important, instead of understanding that we can work on ourselves and bring ourselves to a better and higher state.

Another mental and behavioral state that takes us away from mindfulness is our attitudes to others.

Many times we make a judgment about another very quickly that may be rooted in dislike, anger, resentment or fear.

Again, with this emphasis on looking to and acting or reacting to things externally, we lose our mindfulness.

If these are the things that take us away from mindfulness, what may be some of the things that can bring us to a greater state of mindfulness?

One is to be sober, living a life free from drugs or drinks. The use of other stimulating substances that disturb and unbalance the body and mind, such as cigarettes and coffee should also be avoided.

A period of time each day spent in silence is useful to bringing one to a greater state of mindfulness. This period of silence can take place in the Yoga practice of relaxation or in the both Yoga and Buddhist practice of meditation.

If we spend some time studying religious or spiritual scriptures we are opening an avenue for cultivating mindfulness also, as we have an opportunity to reflect on aspects of living that we usually may not each day.

With mindfulness we can make changes and be enthusiastic about making those changes.

With mindfulness we can cultivate the consistent effort and discipline that is needed to grow as people, whether it involves getting sober and clean after years of drink or drug abuse, or whether it is working the path of Yoga or Buddhism.

With mindfulness, we can see and experience the fruits of our internal progress and changes that we make in our habits and attitudes.

And again, according to many teachers of, and writers about Buddhism, it is mindfulness that serves as the foundation for the cultivation of those mental states that in Buddhism are known as the factors of enlightenment, those being joy, concentration, tranquility, equanimity, effort and energy and an investigative nature.

John teaches Yoga, Buddhism and English and lives in Bangkok, Thailand. He can be reached at johnckimbrough@yahoo.com

Copyright © 2004 JOY: *The Journal of Yoga*