

The Beauty of Discipline

As you've no doubt noticed, I used the word *discipline* in speaking about the cultivation of mindfulness . . . and for good reason.



To cultivate mindfulness really does involve and call out of us a certain constancy of motivation and purpose in the face of all sorts of energies in our lives, some from inside ourselves and some from outside, that dissipate our awareness by perpetually distracting us and diverting us from our intentions and purpose. The discipline I am referring to is really the willingness to bring the spaciousness and clarity of awareness back over and over again to whatever is going on—even as we feel we are being pulled in a thousand different directions.

Just taking this kind of stance toward our own experience, without trying to fix or change anything at all, is an act of generosity toward oneself, an act of intelligence, an act of kindness.

The word *discipline* comes from *disciple*, someone who is in a position to learn. So when we bring a certain discipline to the cultivation of mindfulness and are aware of how challenging it is to bring a sustained attending to any aspect of our lives, we are actually creating the conditions for learning something fundamental from life itself. Then life becomes the meditation practice and the meditation teacher, and whatever happens in any moment is simply *the curriculum* of that moment.

The real challenge is how will we be in relationship to whatever is arising? Here is where freedom itself is to be found. Here is where a moment of genuine happiness might be experienced, a moment of equanimity, a moment of peace. Each moment is an opportunity to see that we do not have to succumb to old habits that function below the level of our awareness. With great intentionality and resolve, we can experiment with non-distraction. We can experiment with non-diversion. We can experiment with non-fixing. We can experiment with non-doing.

If we are willing to encounter our old habits in this way, without turning non-distraction and non-doing into unattainable ideals, and if we can bring gentleness and kindness to the process over and over again for even the briefest of moments, then we might taste the very real possibility of being at home and at peace with things exactly as they are without having to try to change or fix anything in this moment.

When it comes right down to it, this orientation constitutes not only a gentle and healing discipline. It is a radical act of love . . . and of sanity.