

# Is The Cup Half Full or Half Empty?

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A client sat with me, talking about the difficulties and challenges of his life. He lost his job and had hard time finding his identity. There were debts that need to be paid, he felt that he failed and he worried about his family. "Yes", he said, "I know that my wife is working, that I am healthy and my kids are doing just fine - There is this question of what to look at - the full half or the empty half of the cup", he continued "I have the tendency to look at the empty half of the cup".

"How about", I said, "if you don't look at this half or the other, but at the CUP that contains them both?"

The invitation to look at the CUP is an invitation to adopt a mindfulness approach. There are three ways it can be practiced:

**1. Beyond full or empty, good or bad:** Being mindful encompasses looking at our experiences, thoughts, emotions and sensations without judgment. An emotion is an experience; it is part of the tapestry of life, one color in the rainbow of emotions. When we look at thoughts and their process, we bring curiosity to the phenomena of thought, the variety of ideas, contents and inventions, and the complex way that the brain react to inner and outer reality. We see all this, to the best of our ability, for what it is, without adding "good" or "bad" to it. **Compassion** is the main ingredient of this "cup" approach, and it enables us to see things beyond definition of good or bad.

In therapy clients learn to identify judgment towards their experiences and transform the judgments into compassion - towards themselves and their thoughts. No matter if the content is pleasing, aggravating or frightening - they learn to accept that there is a range of emotions and being sad angry or fearful is part of being human. There is no half full or half empty - there is content worth looking at - no matter what.

**2. The process as a container:** An important part of practicing mindfulness is to bring attention to the process rather than the content. Bringing mindfulness to the process means noticing how an emotion expresses itself in the body, where in the body we notice it, how it changes - increases, decreases, moves to other parts, expands, shrinks, and how long it lasts. Observing the process of thoughts means noticing the appearance and disappearance of thoughts, the rising, developing, associating, luring, jumping, drifting - all the subtle and gross manifestations of the process we call thinking.

In bringing awareness to the process one starts to create a tiny gap between the thought and the content, or the observer and the object of the observation. This gap

enables to take away some of the power that the thought has over the person who thinks it. In the therapeutic process, this is an effective tool to help clients be less reactive and more responsive, be able to choose how to handle their inner and outer behavior.

From this perspective we really **look at/observe the cup itself**, and we pay less attention to the content within whether it is full or empty, cold or hot. We rest in the knowing that the cup holds halves, quarters and thirds that keep changing and taking shape and form in the space that is available for them.

In other words - we look at the mind as an entity that creates thoughts, emotions and sensations and we observe with curiosity and appreciation the ways that the mind operates them.

**3. Holding the experience:** Each client comes to therapy because something goes wrong or doesn't meet expectations, or because life as is doesn't feel right any more. Sometimes the trigger for the unrest is external and sometimes internal, but the common ground for all clients is a difficulty to accept things as they are. Learning to embrace life, to hold the experiences with perspective of the whole picture, is the art of living mindfully.

It is important to note that accepting doesn't mean becoming passive and not striving for change. We can accept the wholeness of our life experience and from that place seek higher level of existence. It is important to get out of abusive or unsatisfying life situation - acknowledging and accepting a situation actually helps us to act towards change.

Looking at the CUP from this perspective means in this regard **BEING** the cup. It means for you - being fully present in your life.