

# Mindfulness and Knowledge

Yael Schweitzer, LCSW, BC-DMT

March 15, 2010

When Eve was tempted to eat the apple way back at the Garden of Eden, she was faced with a choice of picking one of two forbidden trees: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. Eve chose knowledge over life and set us, all human beings, to a limited life span of suffering with an endless source of evolving knowledge.

Mindfulness practice serves as a key to open the door to a special kind of knowledge - self knowledge. In mindfulness we know things as they are - learning from observations, especially observations of ourselves. In his beautiful Poem “Two Kinds of Intelligence” the Sufi poet Rumi tells us about two kinds of knowing - the knowledge of acquiring outside factual information and the one hidden within us. The practice of mindfulness connects us with our inner wisdom; we learn to observe the thought patterns and the manifestation of emotions in the body. Mindfulness opens the door to a wealth of knowledge and understanding of our motivations, behavior, actions, relationships and the way we hold our well being.

There are five elements in the practice of mindfulness that enable us to access our inner wisdom:

**1) Pause:** Taking a pause from the constant activity and rush of daily life. The pause is not just a physical stop but also a pause of the ongoing activity of the mind. Even when we sit to rest, our mind is busy creating stories, remembering and ruminating. The pause invites disengagement from these incessant activities.

**2) Bring awareness in:** As we pause we bring our awareness to the body, to the breath, sensations, thoughts and emotions. Being aware means noticing the inner activity without getting caught up in it: feeding it, believing in it or entertaining it.

**3) Connect with the breath:** Even when we pause physically, there is always a subtle movement - the movement of the belly and chest - rising as we breathe in and falling as we breathe out. When we bring awareness to the breath we connect with the vitality of our being. The breath is a sign of life, we start our independent journey in this world as we emerge from our mother’s womb and take the first breath, and we separate from this world when we breathe our last breath. The breath connects us to a higher level of being, to our spirituality, to our soul. (In English: respiration - spirit. In Hebrew: Neshima means breath, Neshama means soul).

**4) Be in the present moment:** Bringing awareness to the breath helps us to be in the present, as we can only connect with the breath that we take “now”. We can live fully only the life that we live “now”.

**5) Adopt a non Judgmental approach - applying compassion:** The way we observe ourselves is a key to self knowledge. Being aware of the constant activity of the mind, facing the content of our thoughts and connecting to the scope of our emotions can trigger judgmental thoughts. The only way to really acquire wisdom from what we notice is to let go of judgments and develop compassion to our human nature.

It is obvious how the mindfulness approach and self observation, based on these elements, can be useful in the therapeutic process. Acknowledging patterns of thoughts, noticing familiar paths that lead to depression/ anxiety/anger and recognizing reactivity - this added knowledge enables the observer to make a choice. It is not always a straight path to change though. One can see repeated patterns and yet fall into them again and again. Emotions can come and present themselves and yet persist to stay. Sometimes awareness can just loosen the grip of emotions and thoughts, and this can be only a beginning of a long journey to release and healing.

When choosing to eat from the apple of knowledge, Eve knew she is going to pay the price for her choice. She indeed was expelled from the Garden of Eden but she had the taste of choice and her eyes were open to see that she is naked. Only with open eyes she, and all of us coming along (through painful birth), come to see what we really need. Self knowledge can be painful - we are expelled from delusion and beliefs about who we are, we learn to meet ourselves as we are, we see flaws and traits that are not the ones we are proud of, but we also begin to connect with our inner wisdom. Change may be gradual and slow, but the sense of control that springs from accumulated knowledge enables the beginning of rehabilitation and growth.

#### **Related reading:**

**Two Kinds of Intelligence, by Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi**

<http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/show/38198-Mawlana-Jalaluddin-Rumi-Two-Kinds-of-Intelligence-wbr->