
MINDFULNESS: THE DOORWAY TO SIMPLE LIVING

Mark A. Burch

Simplicity Institute Report 12n, 2012



SIMPLICITY
INSTITUTE

© Mark A. Burch, 2012. All rights reserved.

Mindfulness: The Doorway to Simple Living

Mark A. Burch¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Words contain no awareness.
They can only trigger awareness.
It does no good to try to impress a man
with some thought he can't relate to.
But if you can make him realize the obvious,
that might change his life.

(Paul Williams, 1973: 21)

The term “mindfulness” has a specific meaning and has only recently been incorporated into narratives about simple living as such. It is clear, however, that for those passionate about voluntary simplicity, there has always been more involved than mere material minimalism—though reducing material baggage is certainly an important aspect of the practice. Some contemporary writers about simplicity seem to think of it as little more than a spate of Spring house cleaning. But in the lives of those inclined to drill deep and suck out all of simplicity’s sweetness, a transformation of consciousness has also been involved. The physical changes that come into our lives are often preceded and organized by some prior psychological, and sometimes spiritual, change of perspective. Charles Wagner, a 19th century Alsatian writer about simple living described it this way:

No class has the prerogative of simplicity; no dress, however humble in appearance, is its unfailing badge. Its dwelling need not be a garret, a hut, the cell of the ascetic, nor the lowliest fisherman’s bark. Under all the forms in which life vests itself...there are people who live simply, and others who do not. We do not mean by this that simplicity betrays itself in no visible signs, has not its own habits, its distinguishing tastes and ways; but this outward show, which may now and then be counterfeited, must not be confounded with its essence and its deep and wholly inward source. *Simplicity is a state of mind.* (emphasis in original) (Wagner, 1903)

In consumer culture, people can bring good humour and a spirit of camaraderie to parting with material possessions, especially if this arises from some sort of trauma or catastrophe. But such events are viewed as temporary setbacks from which we hope soon to return to the pursuit of a consumerist way of life. Enduring loss because we must is quite different from deliberately cultivating a shift in how we see the world, what we desire for ourselves, how we feel about our relationships, and how we live our daily lives. This shift in worldview is something I think is fundamental to living a joyful, fulfilling simplicity in some approximation to a life-sustaining symbiosis with the rest of nature. We don’t arrive at this point of view simply by choosing to change our minds. We can choose, however, to cultivate practices which effectively change our minds for us.

¹ Mark A Burch is an author, educator, and group facilitator who offers presentations, workshops, and courses on voluntary simplicity. He has published four books on voluntary simplicity and is currently completing two further books, including a sourcebook for educators in simple living.

Richard Gregg, the originator of the phrase “voluntary simplicity”, writing in 1936, went so far as to suggest that an inner transformation of consciousness is both prior to and essential for making progress toward simple living. It is from a transformed awareness that new social forms and institutions evolve to change the course of history:

“...the way to master the increasing complexity of life is not through more complexity. The way is to turn inward to that which unifies all—not the intellect but the spirit, and then to devise and put into operation new forms and modes of economic and social life that will truly and vigorously express that spirit. As an aid to that and as a corrective to our feverish over-mechanization, simplicity is not outmoded but greatly needed.” (Gregg, 1936: 17)

Many other similar examples could be cited from the simplicity literatures of several centuries and a diversity of cultures, but these examples should suffice to illustrate an important connection between simple living and a transformation of consciousness which for many is both its driver and its effect. But what is this transformation exactly and what role does it play in voluntary simplicity?

2. MINDFULNESS

“All human evil comes from a single cause, man's inability to sit still in a room.” (Pascal, date unknown)

Lest our discussion of mindfulness start off by sounding too esoteric, it is well to remember that all of us have ready access to several different states of awareness every day. There is nothing mysterious about this. Everyone can distinguish between sleeping and being awake, and perhaps even between sleep dreaming and dreamless sleep. We may also recall moments when intense danger or excitement seemed to make us “hyper-awake,” very much present in the moment and the activity at hand. So these four states of consciousness are more or less familiar to everyone: dreamless sleep, sleep dreaming, waking awareness, and hyper-wakefulness under stress. Mindfulness is just another state of awareness no more mysterious and just as accessible as these.

When I was a boy of five or so, my father took me fishing for the first time. Besides learning how to put a worm on a hook, he told me to sit very still in the boat because banging my feet around could scare away the fish. I dropped my line over the side with a float attached. I should watch the float closely for any sign of its being pulled under water. Then I should pull up on my fishing rod and hook the fish. These few instructions—sit still, be quiet, watch for the invisible—introduced me to many hours of fishing. Also, without my knowing it at the time, learning to fish became my first doorway into a state of consciousness I would later discover is called “mindfulness.” For the first time in my life, I was being challenged to both pay attention to what a fish might be doing with my bait, but also to myself as motionless, vigilant, awake. The sort of mindfulness I experienced while fishing was spontaneous and natural. As such, it was also unpredictable and unstable. To sustain longer periods of mindfulness more or less on purpose, however, requires more regular and deliberate practice.

There are several ways of thinking about mindfulness. It can be a heightened state of concern and due diligence in decision-making; a particularly lucid awareness of everyday experience; clear awareness of subtler processes of one's own mind such as distinguishing thoughts from feelings from desires, etc.; clear awareness of being aware, i.e., self-reflective consciousness; and a continuous and precise awareness of the process of being aware itself (witness consciousness) (Goddard, 1938; Tart, 1994; Thera, 1967). Exploring these in detail would take us beyond the scope of this writing. For now I will adopt John Kabat-Zinn's (1994: 4) definition of mindfulness as a state of awareness consisting of unhurried, non-judgmental attention to one thing at a time. Mindfulness

involves concentration—but without strain or tension. This concentration is akin to the feeling of being absorbed in some activity or experience, when time is forgotten and our whole awareness is filled with the business at hand. It involves paying attention to whatever we are experiencing in the moment, without being distracted by memory, expectations, or imagination. It is the very opposite of multi-tasking, rushed impulsiveness, or just “zoning out” in a daydream. It involves a readiness to look beneath the surface appearance of things and to open ourselves to the inner meaning they have for us.

3. MINDFULNESS IN ETHICAL CONTEXT

Before discussing mindfulness in more detail, I want to say something about the ethical context of the practice. We in the West are sometimes tempted to cherry pick bits of other people’s cultures to suit our whims or enhance our commercial prospects. Writing ad copy that sounds like Taoist philosophy can apparently help you sell luxury cars. Doing yoga can be a lifestyle statement if you’re wearing gear from the right store. Similarly, there are now situations in which mindfulness practice is being treated as a handy “technique” for achieving goals which otherwise contradict the ethical context of which it was traditionally a part. This is not a trivial matter.

Mindfulness, or Right Mindfulness, is one precept drawn from a set of interdependent precepts called The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. Within this tradition, it is assumed that practitioners of mindfulness are also going to be practicing the other seven precepts of the Path, plus participating in many other aspects of a disciplined and highly inner self-managed life. The tenets of the Path mutually reinforce and balance each other in such a way as to protect practitioners from harm they may cause themselves or others by misunderstanding or misapplying any single precept taken by itself. Thus we come to true Right Mindfulness only and also by cultivating Right Knowledge, a Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort and Right Contemplation. It’s a package deal. Practicing mindfulness in absence of harboring Right Intention, applying it through Right Action, or lacking Right Knowledge of its meaning and value, can lead to some truly bizarre results.

It is deliriously misguided to think that mindfulness should be used as a gimmick to shield oneself from the suffering of other beings. Mindfulness is not a tool for taking advantage of others in their suffering or to anesthetize ourselves against injustice and fraud. To placidly pursue one’s personal advantage, indifferent to the moral and systemic atrocities such as those that were committed in 2008, can strengthen the very ego-dominated thinking that the right practice of mindfulness is supposed to uproot. Right understanding of mindfulness practice helps nourish in us both the ethical sensitivity and spiritual capacity to act in solidarity with others to care for each other and the Earth. While I don’t think it’s necessary to become a professed Buddhist in order to cultivate mindfulness, I think it is imperative to be aware of the context of ethical precepts which have always surrounded the practice and which help define its meaning. Failing to do this can leave us in possession of too little knowledge, and what little knowledge we have we apply like moral imbeciles.

4. MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Mindfulness practice has both a general meaning and also denotes specific activities. In the general sense, mindfulness practice can mean learning and repeating any skill or routine that helps intensify, steady, and focus mindful awareness. Like learning how to dance or play a musical instrument, mindfulness practice is something that can be learned and then strengthened through repetition.

Formal mindfulness practice consists of sitting meditation with attention focused on one's breathing, either by counting breaths or by silently witnessing the act of breathing, to the exclusion of all other internal or external distractions. While basic mindfulness practice can be learned in an hour or two (more advanced practices demanding more time), mastering it takes considerably longer and often represents a time and energy commitment that few in consumer culture are willing to make. Persisting in practice is essential to discovering what it has to offer, and many mindfulness practices aim to become continuous. This quality of continuous practice is illuminated by the 17th century Samurai warrior Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1716: 26-27):

In one's life, there are levels in the pursuit of study. In the lowest level, a person studies but nothing comes of it and he feels that both he and others are unskillful. At this point he is worthless. In the middle level he is still useless but is aware of his own insufficiencies and can also see the insufficiencies of others. In a higher level he has pride concerning his own ability, rejoices in praise from others and laments the lack of ability in his fellows. This man has worth. In the highest level, a man has the look of knowing nothing.

These are the levels in general. But there is one transcending level, and this is the most excellent of all. This person is aware of the endlessness of entering deeply into a certain Way and never thinks of himself as having finished. He truly knows his own insufficiencies and never in his whole life thinks that he has succeeded. He has no thoughts of pride but with self-abasement knows the Way to the end. ...

Throughout your life advance daily, becoming more skillful than yesterday, more skillful than today. This is never-ending.

There are many specific practices that can cultivate mindfulness. My fishing story is an example of an activity the primary purpose of which was recreational. Secondarily we intended to catch some fish. Only incidentally did it also begin to establish mental habits which could heighten mindful awareness. Nearly anything which is repetitive and requires enough concentration that its effect is to still and focus the conscious mind, e.g., long distance running, swimming, many forms of repetitive work, paddling a canoe or kayak, can work like a mindfulness practice if we bring to it the appropriate intention. During such activities, people sometimes experience glimpses of the lucid-consciousness-in-stillness which is mindful awareness. However, the effect is usually sporadic and unstable unless a deliberate regime is in place to develop such awareness toward a stable state of awareness.

Practices that specifically develop stable states of mindful awareness often entail formal meditation or contemplation. In Buddhist Vipassana (mindfulness of breathing) practice, for example, attention is focused on the breath with the intention of slowly developing concentration, cultivating inner stillness and eventually an ever deepening insight into the activities and dynamics of one's own conscious awareness. The practice itself is not very hard to understand but is challenging to maintain.

Meditation means learning how to get out of this current [the incessant stream of thoughts], sit by its bank and listen to it, learn from it, and then use its energies to guide us rather than to tyrannize us. This process doesn't magically happen by itself. It takes energy. We call the effort to cultivate our ability to be in the present moment 'practice' or 'meditation practice'. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 9)

Christian "Centering Prayer," while differing from Buddhist Vipassana in its intention, is nearly indistinguishable in its method. The Buddhist is intent on liberation from suffering and growing in compassion whereas the Christian practitioner of centering prayer is intent on cultivating a state of inner stillness and spiritual receptivity to the action of the Holy Spirit. The Buddhist "anchors" attention on the breath while the Christian anchors it on a "prayer word," not unlike a mantra,

expressing the contemplative's intention to open themselves to intimacy with God (Keating, 1998). But otherwise, all the physical postures, preparation, attitudes and activities that one brings to the practice are nearly identical.

I'm convinced that a sustainable society will be one that voluntarily and consciously embraces both simple living and mindful living as its core values of the good life. The role mindfulness plays in sparking a taste for a simpler, more sustainable livelihood has always been of major interest to me. At first I thought people choose a simpler life because they decide rationally that it is the best thing for them. Maybe they arrive at this choice because of reading or conversations with others, or maybe because some trauma has impacted their lives which forces them to rethink their priorities. But however it was that individuals got to their personal tipping points, I thought that eventually the decision was taken and the choice to simplify just unfolded from there.

One benefit of simple living is more leisure time. A common theme in the simplicity literature is the observation that about 70% of people who are practicing simple living also practice formal meditation or some similar activity. It's seldom clear from these stories, however, whether meditation came before the decision to live more simply and therefore may have been a contributing factor, or whether it was one choice among many of how to spend one's new found leisure time. After all, what do people do instead of go shopping? Well, among other things, maybe they meditate. On the other hand, maybe it is the accumulating effects of meditation itself that empowers us to leave off shopping and adopt a more sustainable way of life.

Over years of studying voluntary simplicity in the life stories of others, and after decades of personal practice, I've come to think the causal arrow more often points from mindfulness to simple living than vice versa. I will review below the variety of ways I think the practice of mindfulness also develops in us a desire for simple living. I'm not as certain that the choice to live simply, when springing from other motivations such as reducing debt, or choosing to live in solidarity with the poor, or even to reduce one's ecological footprint, leads as regularly toward the formal practice of mindfulness.

Lest this sound like a course in spiritual practices rather than an essay on voluntary simplicity, we only need to note that some such practices as these—and there are a great variety of them—have consistently appeared in the writings and memoirs of historical figures who have sung the praises of simplicity, as well as being frequently mentioned in modern surveys of people who identify themselves as practitioners of strong forms of voluntary simplicity. In an extensive study of over 200 practitioners of simple living, Linda Breen Pierce (2000) reported:

“Many of the participants talk about mindfulness. They feel that simplicity is about living mindfully and consciously. Some of them believe that it is through the practice of daily, mindful living that we come to experience our spiritual selves. Mindful living is developed through the conscious awareness and appreciation of the tasks we do each day, of the people with whom we interact, and of the natural beauty that surrounds us.” (Pierce 2000: 305)

And elsewhere Pierce notes:

“Approximately 70 percent of the survey participants indicated that their religious or spiritual practices and experience are a high priority in their lives. In fact, the vast majority reported that living simply had enhanced their spirituality if, for no other reason, by giving them more time to participate in spiritual and religious practices. ...

Many study participants believe there is a strong relationship between spirituality and simplicity. Indeed, some feel that it is impossible to separate the two experiences. It is not always clear which comes first, but simplicity appears to reinforce spirituality and vice versa.” (Pierce 2000: 302)

In the third edition of his book, *Voluntary Simplicity*, Duane Elgin (2010: 73-89) offers more explicit and detailed discussion of “embedded consciousness” as contrasted with “self-reflective consciousness,” his terms for less and more mindful states of awareness respectively, than in previous editions of his book. Elgin argues that making a voluntary choice to live simply implies both that we are making a conscious choice, and also that we are conscious of ourselves as choosers. In consumer culture we run on automatic, not making fully voluntary choices because our choices are often not fully conscious. We choose based on habit, conformity, impulse, expediency, short term necessity, but rarely do we make choices in lucid self-awareness. We run on automatic in a constant state of mental distraction. Mental distraction was not invented by consumer culture, to be sure, but it is greatly amplified and exploited by it. Today it’s popular to call this distracted state “multi-tasking” but which elsewhere has been more accurately called “chronic partial attention.” Remedy for this state of affairs can be found by learning the skills necessary to sustain conscious self-awareness. Learning to pay attention to ourselves, Elgin says, liberates us from the embedded consciousness which would otherwise make truly voluntary choice impossible.

But the development of self-reflective consciousness is only a doorway into something much more profound for Elgin. The practice of conscious self-remembering gradually dissolves our delusion that we are separate, self-sufficient beings. As the boundaries between self and other soften and gradually disappear, far from falling into an abyss of nothingness, we discover instead that we’re aware of our selves in our inter-existence with everything else, a state of awareness that Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh has termed “inter-being” (Macy & Brown, 1998: 52). This shift in self-consciousness in turn helps foster a number of what Elgin calls “enabling qualities” for a way of life which is both materially simpler and also environmentally and socially more sustainable. Above all, it is also freer and more joyous for the person living it.

Elgin’s portrayal of the relation between cultivating self-reflective consciousness and more sustainable living is insightful, though largely philosophical and speculative. An empirical approach has been taken by psychologist Tim Kasser working at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois (Kasser & Brown, 2009). Kasser and research collaborator Kirk Warren Brown gathered survey information from 400 Americans, 200 of whom identified as voluntary simplifiers, and 200 matched controls who identified with the American mainstream consumerist lifestyle. Respondents were asked questions about their level of well-being and personal happiness, the size of their ecological footprint, their values, and mindfulness practice. Kasser and Brown found that, (a) respondents who reported performing more ecologically responsible behaviors also reported higher levels of happiness and personal well-being and smaller ecological footprints; and (b) mindfulness practice and being oriented toward intrinsic values (non-material, inner rewards) was a stronger predictor of happiness than just identifying oneself as a voluntary simplifier (as contrasted to identifying as a mainstream American). Kasser and Brown (2009) concluded:

A primary take home message of the findings of this study is that living more happily and more lightly on the Earth is not as much about whether people think of themselves as voluntary simplifiers, but instead is more about their inner life---that is, whether they are living in a conscious, mindful way and with a set of values organized around intrinsic fulfillment. ...

In sum, then, [in promoting a happier, more sustainable way of life] a more productive approach may be to cultivate a way of life that encourages mindfulness and intrinsic values. (Kasser and Brown 2009: 40)

There is a growing literature about links between mindfulness practice and well-being. Reviewing all of it is beyond the scope of this essay. But hopefully we now have some basis for the idea that cultivating mindfulness is a necessary condition for an orientation of consciousness needed for a more sustainable livelihood. Below we will take a closer look at what we mean by mindfulness as a

state of consciousness, as contrasted with mindfulness practice, how mindfulness can be deliberately cultivated, what practical effects the practice of mindfulness can produce, and what contribution these might make to simple living.

5. MINDFUL AWARENESS

As we practice mindfulness, a mindful consciousness grows in us. We slow down and pay attention. We take time to look into things rather than just at them. We let ourselves be absorbed in the experience of this moment. What happens is something like the difference between eating an ice cream cone while talking with a friend, and going away to sit on a park bench with only the ice cream cone for company. In the first case, our attention is divided between the ice cream and our friend, and is constantly switching from one to the other and therefore not likely to get deeply absorbed in either one. In the second case, we are free enough from distractions to focus entirely on the experience of eating the ice cream. We may discover that the ice cream is really delicious or really terrible: Mindfulness will reveal both. The point is that we are mentally present to notice.

Mindfulness in the environment means becoming conscious through mindfulness of how we live all the time—even though often we are not paying attention. Mindfulness in the environment means waking up to the beauty all around us and enjoying it. It also means waking up to the ugliness all around us and perhaps choosing to do something about it. It means noticing noise, and odors, and dangers and then noticing ourselves and what decisions and actions we take in response to these things. Do we run and hide? Do we buy bottled water? Do we plug in i-Pods and zone out? Do we start working with friends, neighbors, family and institutions to change what offends our new awareness?

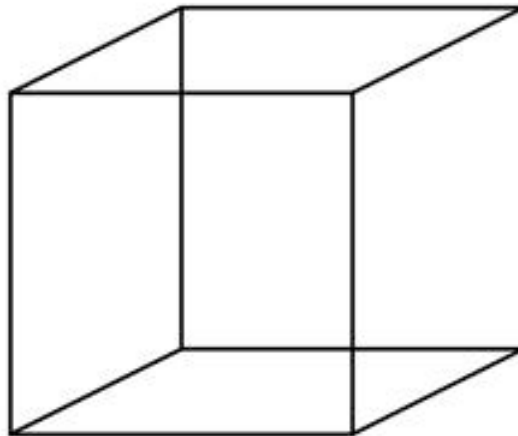
When we discover beauty, sometimes we find it in the most “unlikely” places—i.e., in places we weren’t paying attention to before. Perhaps for the first time we begin to realize that beauty and value aren’t confined to special wilderness areas, ecological reserves, or “private collections.” The whole Earth is full of the possibility of undiscovered beauty, and therefore worth protecting. Why do we surround a Picasso or Rembrandt with video cameras and security guards while wild flowers go unprotected? Because wildflowers are more common? Because we didn’t make them? Or because we didn’t notice them before?

If mindfulness practice is pursued with diligence, discipline and regularity for some time, it reliably produces a number of changes in our worldviews, values, and consciousness of life. I believe these changes constitute the primary colour pallet of a worldview of simple and sustainable living. These transformations don’t have to be forced and they aren’t a new list of normative pronouncements coming from a self-appointed moral authority. They emerge gradually and organically along with mindful awareness, once the decision is made to cultivate mindfulness in the first place. What is required of us is to stay loyal to the practice by whatever means we do so.

To help describe these changes in awareness, I’m arbitrarily grouping them under two broad headings: (a) transformations of thinking and perceiving, and (b) transformations of feeling and desire.

6. TRANSFORMATIONS OF THINKING AND PERCEIVING

Helpful in visualizing what happens to thinking and perception as mindfulness practice starts to take hold is an old gimmick from the field of perceptual psychology called the Necker Cube. It is usually used to illustrate figure-ground reversal:



A

In the illustration above, corner “A” of the cube can be either the “front” or the “back” surface, depending on one’s “perspective.” If you see it as part of the front, see if you can make the perspective shift so that it now appears to be the back and vice-versa. Can you make it shift from one place to the other as often as you like? How do you feel when you do so? Some people find it impossible to shift perspective but most can make the switch, which also sometimes comes with a subtle inner sensation of “shift.” The shifty feeling, and perhaps our complete inability to make the perspective shift, are both signs of attachment to our customary way of perceiving the world. Prising it loose, even in this very minor example, takes effort, concentration, and can be a little disorienting at first.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the physical sensation of making this shift means that the perceptual habit is embedded in the body as well as the psyche. Recognition that our state of mind is partly grounded in the body may be one reason so many Eastern spiritual practices include more physical elements such as yoga, t’ai-chi, kundalini, etc., than has traditionally been the case in Western practice which tends to draw a sharper boundary between the body and the mind/spirit.

The transformations of perceiving and thinking that can result from mindfulness practice can have this quality of arising as sudden little “jerks” in our consciousness. They reveal a whole new perspective that we realize was staring us in the face all along, just as both sides of the Necker Cube are visible from the very beginning. But suddenly we are seeing or thinking differently. Sometimes, these transformations occur much more slowly, as if an image is coming into focus. Perhaps we have been dimly aware of the image for some time, but little by little it comes into view until one day we recognize it for what it is. As the opening quote for this essay observes: We are realizing something obvious which can change our lives.

Following below are some of the transformations of thinking and perceiving that appear in conjunction with mindfulness practice that I think are also central to a more sustainable way of life. In my experience they arise more or less together as an organic whole—a new gestalt for consciousness itself. But this doesn’t happen suddenly and certainly not quickly.

6.1 Shifting from experiencing oneself as the subject of awareness to oneself as both the subject and the object of awareness

Our habitual state of awareness is usually that we experience ourselves as simple observers of the objects comprising an “outside world.” But during mindfulness practice, attention is turned inward

so that it is ourselves which become the focus of attention. In this way, we become both the subjects and the objects of our own awareness. This shift from being the subject of our own awareness to become both the subject and object of awareness is pretty much synonymous with mindfulness practice as such. Anyone incapable of making their own thoughts, feelings and inner states the object of their awareness is probably incapable of meditation itself because this is close to the essence of where meditation begins.

The practice of mindfulness strengthens our inclination to make ourselves the objects of our own self-knowledge. It also increases our capacity to do so. Our own thinking, feeling and acting thus become not just “outputs” from an unreflective consciousness, but inputs to conscious reflection itself. We become self-aware. This shift in where we focus attention, at least part of the time, is the essential foundation for the other transformations of consciousness made possible by mindfulness practice.

We may all be capable of self-reflective awareness, but that’s not to say that many of us spend very much time in this frame of mind. After all, consumer culture is not a way of life that encourages us to do so. Even though Socrates cautioned that “The unexamined life isn’t worth living,” consumer culture uses all manner of attention-getting strategies to keep our awareness focused outward on the products it wants to sell, the work it wants us doing, the dangers we should be avoiding, the opportunities we should be seizing. Consumer culture offers very little encouragement for directing attention inward to strengthen self-awareness or to discover our inner (intrinsic) sources of joy and well-being. Because it takes attention, energy and commitment away from consumer culture, mindfulness practice is the ultimate subversive act.

Cultivating a more introspective (contemplative, meditative) approach to life is essential to sustainability and human well-being because it’s unimaginable that habit-driven, semi-self-aware people can successfully meet the challenges that lie ahead. We will need to notice and respect everything both within us and outside us in order to fashion a more skillful way of life. Mindfulness practice requires that we slow down, pay attention, take things to heart, notice the full range of experience presenting itself to us, and open ourselves to the spontaneous moral sense necessary for important decisions. Mindfulness practice helps us know our place, respecting both our capacities and our limits. Such fundamental lessons in humility are essential to living in harmony with both our human and non-human neighbours.

6.2 Shift in consciousness from “foreground-only” awareness to “foreground + background” awareness

The consciousness dominant in consumer culture is strongly foreground oriented. It attends closely to what most strongly stands out in present moment experience. What stands out is action, movement, change, novelty, the shock and awe cultivated by advertising, the media and the military. Even more important, what usually dominates our foreground awareness of things is their surface appearance. That’s why so much time and energy are spent in consumer culture on cosmetic activities, image management, issue “spin,” and so little energy invested in finding out and engaging the essence of a thing. Consumer culture also does this at the expense of noticing what is not present, apparently stationary, apparently silent, invisible or entirely absent. There is probably even an evolutionary bias toward this foreground-dominant orientation of perception since it would have been important to human survival that we pay attention to the moving lion rather than the background of motionless grass against which the lion was moving.

The practice of mindfulness makes possible a shift between foreground and background perspectives such that the background is taken more into account. It’s possible even to cultivate an awareness that integrates them—being able to see the Necker Cube “vibrate” back and forth between its two possible orientations, or even fuse them together in a single perceptual experience.

Less abstractly, it's easy for us to see some human actions as environmental threats (mining tar sands) and different human actions as conserving of the environment (planting trees). What we find nearly impossible is fully appreciating what the Earth can do for itself when human meddling is entirely absent. It is easier for us to notice pollution (a bad odor, gunk pouring into a stream, etc.) than it is to register the absence of these as positive evidence of health. Correspondingly, we find it hard to properly value things that don't exist or that shouldn't exist. A young mother being interviewed recently for a television program on organic foods had the idea, however, when she told the interviewer that her main reason for buying organic food was for what was not in the food—pesticide/herbicide residues, hormones, antibiotics, modified genes, etc. It's easy to see the validity of this perspective when it's pointed out this way, but it's an altogether different thing to sustain a continuous awareness of both the foreground and background, visible and invisible, acting and non-acting aspects of our experience.

Mindfulness practice teaches us literally to perceive more clearly and then to value more highly stillness (the absence of motion), solitude (the absence of company), letting go (the absence of clinging), simplicity (the absence of clutter and distraction). We start to sound more like Taoists who know the value of the absence of a thing as well as the possession of it. Two particularly important instances of this principle can be found in leisure and non-action.

It is sometimes observed that living simply can both increase leisure and is also a form of the life of leisure itself. Consumer culture has difficulty differentiating leisure from idleness even though they are very different psychological experiences. Some would say idleness is even the opposite of leisure. But if simple living might sometimes be a synonym for leisurely living, then the 20th century German ethicist and social philosopher Josef Pieper also gives us some insight into the connection between leisure and a mindful orientation of consciousness:

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude—it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time....

Compared with the exclusive ideal of work as activity, leisure implies an attitude of non-activity, of inward calm, of silence; it means not being 'busy', but letting things happen.

Leisure is a form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality... For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation.

Leisure, like contemplation, is of a higher order than the *vita activa*. (It) is the power of stepping beyond the workaday world, and in doing so touching upon the superhuman life-giving powers which, incidentally almost, renew and quicken us for our everyday tasks. It is only in and through leisure that the 'gate of freedom' is opened and man can escape from the closed circle of that 'latent dread and anxiety' ...the mark of the world of work. (Pieper, 1952: 189-190)

One of history's greatest poets of simplicity was Henry David Thoreau who, in his journal of country living, *Walden*, offered many descriptions of how he was occupied in his leisure. Clearly, Thoreau used his simplicity to deepen his mystical and philosophical perception, another way of understanding the cultivation of mindfulness:

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet. I feel all my best faculties concentrated in it. My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and forepaws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts; so

by the divining rod and thin rising vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine. (Thoreau, 1854: 87)

A second example of this more inclusive orientation of consciousness is appreciating the value of non-action. The narcissistic West has always lionized the man of action. He's always in motion, always on the attack. His best defense is a good offense. He's the early bird after the worm. Such people are deeply puzzled by the Eastern view that just as often as we want to act, it is sometimes wiser not to act—to actively practice non-action. The Western consciousness confuses non-action with inaction which it interprets as lack of strength, nerve, or capacity. Yet far from lacking the ability to act, a person operating from a different sort of awareness might discern circumstances in which the greater wisdom is not to act at all.

For example, two generations ago it was heroic to tame the howling wilderness and force nature to surrender her riches to humanity. Nearly everyone agreed with Descartes that nature must be "vexed" to give up her secrets. Now that nature lies battered and bleeding at our feet, we think it is heroic to save her. So we invade wilderness trying to count every species on Earth. We net them, weigh them, tag them, sample their blood, collect their DNA, halter them with radio tracking devices, stress them nearly to death, and then release them again thinking we're doing nature a favour. What we seem utterly incapable of doing is living simply, desist from meddling, and allow nature space and time to heal itself.

6.3 Shift of consciousness to perceive and value interdependence

Everyday awareness represents us as discrete observers of a world of objects separate from ourselves and jumbled together in the same physical space. The boundaries between "me" and "that" seem sharply drawn and distinct. This way of experiencing helps promote physical survival in nature because a too "mystical," touchy-feelly attitude toward a potential predator could delete one's genes from the evolutionary pool in short order. But as we have evolved, we've also discovered that there are unseen forces and relationships that play a major role in our survival and well-being. We ignore radiation and some bacteria at our peril, even though we can't see them. The winds and oceans and nutrient cycles of Nature move energy around and recombine materials in ways that sustain our lives, even though they are mostly invisible. If we take the time to become mindful of these relationships, we eventually discover that we are literally constituted by them.

"Entanglement" is a term used in quantum physics to describe a relationship between two subatomic particles such that any change in one particle is accompanied instantly by a change in its counterpart (What the Bleep! Down the Rabbit Hole, 2004). Taken as a metaphor, quantum entanglement is a specific instance of a more general principle of relatedness and interdependence in nature. Again we meet Thich Nhat Hanh's idea of "inter-being," itself a rendering of the classical Buddhist doctrine of "codependent arising."

Entanglement can be empirically demonstrated for quantum level particles by means of physical experiments. I don't intend to generalize a quantum phenomenon too literally to non-quantum levels of nature. But the concept of entanglement is a powerful metaphor for the interdependence of all beings at many different levels.

For example, there's lots of evidence for what might be called ecological interdependence. The cycles of weather, ocean currents, nutrients passing through food webs, energy exchanges, and genetic diffusion all link physically distant members even of different species in relationships of mutual influence.² Not only are nutrients and energy cycled through these relationships, but also

² The possibility of viewing the universe as a connected whole rather than an assemblage of un-related bits and pieces has been with us at least since the 19th century, as discussed in Paul Hawken's (2007) Blessed

pollution, toxins and mutations. Everything each of us does from breathing, eating, excreting and reproducing has consequences for other species and physical and biological systems elsewhere on Earth. These impacts are proportional to the amounts of matter and energy appropriated by human beings for our own uses, as well as to the toxicity of these activities. A consumer culture that preaches that maximizing consumption of matter and energy literally constitutes well-being, is also a culture that will create maximum impacts on nature. Growing in mindfulness of how our lives inter-depend on the lives and health of others opens to us a different basis for making our decisions about how to live.

At yet another level, we can discern various forms of psycho-social interdependence which can be both beneficial and pathological. From conception onwards we are profoundly social beings. We are conceived in relationships. We are raised and educated through interactions with other people and life forms. Power is exercised through social and physical relationships. The whole construction of the ego and our mental universe of learned knowledge and skill is built up and maintained through interactions with others with whom we are interdependent. This reality of connection also makes us vulnerable as individuals to strong cultural influences on the development of our values, attitudes and behavior and also vulnerable to mass social hysterias, delusions and mob thinking. Some thinkers have even proposed that the human species as a whole is psychologically entangled at an “archetypal” level—the level of heritable psychic structures that determine characteristically human ways of behaving (Jung, 1969; Progoff, 1969).³ In light of our profound psycho-social interdependence, the neo-conservative ideology that views people as isolated individuals pitted in competitions for personal advantage in an indifferent and inanimate world seems positively delusional.

Finally, many spiritual traditions teach that we are spiritually interdependent as well. We sense that we live in a universe that has a moral dimension that implies larger than personal connections and responsibilities. It is expressed in such metaphors as everyone being “children” of the same God (Judeo-Christian); or of a people who receives its identity from a common source or heritage (Judaic, Muslim); or of diverse peoples who nevertheless comprise a single whole by virtue of their connection within the sacred dimension of the universe (Medicine Wheel). Evidence of spiritual interdependence is difficult to verify publicly but it is often authoritative for individuals who experience it subjectively. In any case, for many spiritual teachers, the essence of spiritual experience is liberation from the delusion of being a separate self and coming to experience oneself as at home or belonging, i.e., embedded, in the universe rather than a stranger in it (James, 1958;

Unrest, New York, NY: Penguin, p. 34ff. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s book *Nature*, developed from a vision of holistic interdependence of plants and animals which resonated with the English Romantic vision of nature and later went on to influence the life and thought of Henry David Thoreau and many others. The holistic vision of nature would again appear in the work of the South African statesman and scholar Jan Christian Smuts (*Holism and Evolution*, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1926), in Julian Huxley (*Evolution in Action*), eminent botanist Edmund Sinnott (*Mind, Matter and Man*, New York, NY: Harper and Bros., 1957), Arthur Koestler’s development of the idea of “holons” (*The Ghost in the Machine*, London, UK: Arkana, 1967) and a continuing line of thought running through Ludwig VonBertalanffy’s *General System Theory*, and the theories of complex living systems as discussed by Gregory Bateson and writers like Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers (*A Simpler Way*, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publications, Inc., 1996).

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson’s book *Nature*, deeply impressed Henry David Thoreau, but Thoreau extended Emerson’s vision of the connectedness of nature to include human beings and issues of human rights and justice (See Hawken, Paul. 2007. *Blessed unrest: How the largest social movement in history is restoring grace, justice, and beauty to the world*. New York, NY: Penguin Books: 76.). The vision of an interconnected humanity is probably as old as history itself, but most visibly present in modern times in the lives and work of people like American poet Walt Whitman, novelist Leo Tolstoy, spiritual/political leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as the work of psychologists such as C. G. Jung and Ira Progoff.

Progoff, 1973; Walters, 2001). Thus our deepest spiritual experiences may not be theistic at all, but simply awakening to, or perhaps remembering, our birthright of relatedness to every “other.”

This intuitive apprehension of connection to everything else also includes a moral dimension that is eloquently described by Mildred Binns Young (1939). Note that her attention is absorbed not in supplying her own desires or aggrandizing her ego in some way, but rather finding that way of life by which she can be most “serviceable for a new world”:

My thesis is that some of the means for freeing our lives lie in drastic limiting of material possessions and processes, in a discipline which paradoxically has its reward in extension of our strength and insight to use them to the full. But we cannot grasp these means for freeing our lives until the necessity is made plain in our hearts and we want it completely.

When the necessity becomes plain, when the longing to set ourselves free is past denying, we begin to open into a realization of personal responsibility, of the oneness of human life, or what has been called unlimited liability. *We feel the obligation and the privilege to live as if we each had many lives to live and could afford to hold loosely our little footholds in this one. This opening out is the great release.*

Now, frankly, most of us have our hands so full of baubles that we haven’t even a finger free with which to reach out and satisfy the claim of unlimited liability. Poverty, or some approximation to it, willingly assumed, would set us free both for finding our responsibility and for fulfilling it when found. That is why I have called it functional poverty. It is to be embraced not as an ideal of beauty, our Lady Poverty of the Middle Ages, though it may wear her features. It is to be embraced not as a penance for the benefit we have long had from a society that starves our brothers, though it may be partly that. It is to be taken up not as a shirking of the responsibility of wealth or privilege, but as acceptance of wider responsibility. *It is to be taken up as a way to freedom, and as a practical method for finding the time and strength to answer one’s deepest need to be serviceable for a new world.*

Functional poverty means an adjustment of the mechanics of living by clearing off the rubble. This is a clearing off that opens the way for new growth in wisdom, love and function. It means a discipline that tempers the tools by which we work, and scours clean the glass of self through which we see at best but darkly. (emphasis added) (Young 1939: n.p.)

As we “simplify” focal awareness through mindfulness cultivation practices, we discover that we are carried within a larger Life that is layered and complex. This lends to life a certain precious charm and mystery. This is easy to overlook if we are too much in a hurry or our awareness is too distracted to notice such things. It is one thing to just gobble down an orange. It is another thing to hold it, feel it, smell it; to look deeply into it to see the blossom it came from; the tree that sustained the blossom; the earth that supported the tree; the air and rain that fed the tree; the harvester who picked the fruit; and the whole chain of hands through which it passed to arrive on our table. When the sun and the seasons, and the bees and the rains, and the clouds and the human labor are all present in our awareness—because we have deliberately taught ourselves to take time and pay attention until they are present—then the experience of eating an orange, or consuming anything for that matter, is replete with relationships and responsibilities we didn’t notice before. Consciousness of how interdependent everything is increases appreciation and respect. We also become more aware of how our action, or non-action, has consequences no matter what. It therefore becomes important that both our actions and non-action have life-giving effects.

Another effect of consciousness of interdependence is to break down our sense of isolation and excessive individuality. While we are responsible for each other, we are also supported and strengthened by the relationships we are responsible to. This support can be literal and material as when the Earth literally feeds us from itself or friends help support us in times of loss or distress. But the support can also be extremely subtle as when we experience moments of being linked into and sustained by some vast, intuitive communion of spiritual energies that hugely surpass in power and extent anything we know at the material level of our lives. This reality has been given many

names like the “Communion of Saints” in Christianity, “Indra’s Net” in Hinduism, the “Tao” of Taoism, the “Cosmic Body” of the Buddha. It is this knowledge that increasingly claims our loyalty.

Appreciating our place in a connected universe can also increase our appreciation for our own fallibility and thereby promote humility. Individuality is relativized rather than being the absolute measure of all other values. Since the rational functions of the ego are what virtually constitute individuality, the compass of what the ego can grasp appears from the perspective of mindfulness to be very limited compared to the vastness of an entangled universe. We are only apparently individuals and our egos exist, relatively speaking, for only a very short time. Because our individuality is at every level limited, contingent, and transient, we can never, as individuals, grasp the whole. Therefore our perceptions, thoughts, decisions and actions relative to the whole will always be more or less fallible because they are always based on incomplete information. Then, the way to happiness and harmony if that’s what we want is: (a) counterbalancing the ego delusion by cultivating consciousness and remembrance of our interdependence with everything else; (b) cultivating humility in recognition of our limitations and fallibility and; (c) living simply and modestly so that the consequences of our relative ignorance and proneness to err are minimized. Humility is something that consumer culture doesn’t do very well since hubris and blind self-assertion are mistakenly viewed as signs of “ego strength.”

The gradually ripening awareness of interdependence at many levels also has many implications. We start caring about community again. Because everyone is linked, caring for others becomes an important way of caring for oneself. Not only humans but all life is part of this web of being. So our caring naturally extends to the Earth and all its beings. It also extends to past and future generations because we recognize a relationship with them as well. All that we do starts to seek nonviolent expression because, obviously, violence toward any is violence towards all—and violence toward ourselves as well. Since it is impossible to care for that which we do not know, we become interested again in what is local, what is here. Focusing on what is local helps keep us grounded and mindful. So we begin to think about rebuilding local economies and local communities of self-reliance and more conscious interdependence. This keeps life in view. It makes it possible for us to be responsible as well as awake to our responsibilities. All of this really starts to add up to a different way of living. And it turns out to be vibrantly luminous, loving and rich.

To arrive at the unshakable, you must befriend the Tao.
To do this, quiet your thinking.
Stop analyzing, dividing, making distinctions between
one thing and another.
Simply see that you are at the center of the universe,
and accept all things and beings as parts of your
infinite body.
When you perceive that an act done to another is done
to yourself, you have understood the great truth. (Walker 1995: n.p.)

6.4 Shift of consciousness from scarcity and craving to perceive plenitude and gratitude

Just as during formal mindfulness training we may focus attention on breathing and exclude both inner and outer distractions, so later can we focus attention on different aspects of our inner experience. Sometimes it isn’t until we discover mindfulness practice that we begin to appreciate how consumer culture’s incessantly repeated siren songs of advertising, government propaganda, corporate branding, etc., subtly directs our attention in certain ways and distracts it in others.

In the class I teach about voluntary simplicity, I invite my students to begin by recalling three moments in their lives when they felt very well, happy, and fully in touch with the meaning of their lives. They write these down, at first just as phrases or single sentences. Then we expand these one-

line recollections into more detailed descriptions of these life experiences. Finally, we share the stories. I then invite everyone to create a “gratitude log,” a log book like a ship’s log, but dedicated to the practice of remembering and compiling a record of events from previous times in our lives for which we feel gratitude. We also aim to build this into a daily practice of noticing events and experiences for which we feel grateful and establishing the discipline of writing them down. This practice has recently been popularized in a number of different modern renditions (Ban Breathnach, 1995) but also has an ancient pedigree in formal spiritual practice and secular philosophy (Ignatius of Loyola, 1521; Irvine, 2009). What is happening here is another version of the Necker Cube juxtaposition. We aim to shift attention away from the “noise” of consumer culture which is continually focusing our awareness on what we lack, what is scarce, what we must fear will happen, or what we might fear to lose. Instead, we focus attention on the “signal” from our Lifeworld that sufficiency is already present in our daily experience and our past experiences of well-being. We also develop, based on this history, rational confidence in our own ability to learn to want what we have regardless of what the universe provides in the future, rather than wanting what we don’t have, thus multiplying our suffering by intensifying desire.

6.5 Shifting goals from pursuing the extrinsic reward of material possessions more toward intrinsic and non-material sources of well-being

The cultivation of mindfulness can also shift where we focus our effort in life and where we look for sources of well-being. Kasser & Brown’s (2009) research mentioned above suggests that people who focus attention on intrinsic, non-material sources of reward tend to be both happier and better environmental citizens than people who look outside to material things for the good life. Mindfulness can help foster this shift by helping us appreciate more fully the absolutely pivotal role that inner states, inner monologues, and the orientation of consciousness play in relation to personal well-being. We appreciate it more because we are paying more attention to it. We learn to leave off asking how many things we need to satisfy our many desires and start asking instead how many desires we are willing to provide for.

The work of cognitive psychologist Timothy Miller (1995) is very helpful in this respect. Miller argues that human beings evolved to crave more and more because this helped early hominids acquire larger territories and more mates which in turn increased reproductive success. We humans have certainly succeeded in this mission—so much so that our population and our consumption habits threaten most other species. The survival challenge for humans now is not to amass ever larger territories and harems. Instead, we should aim to use the capacity of consciousness to subordinate desires which are completely natural to what mindful self-awareness now tells us is necessary for the well-being of the whole, interdependent life system of the Earth. In other words, the boundaries of our consciousness are being challenged to expand yet farther to construct our personal identities around the whole interdependent community of life, rather than pursuit of our individual consumption prerogatives.

Despite the differences between cognitive therapy and mindfulness practice per se, Miller makes a convincing case that it is not material consumption itself which contributes most to well-being, but the orientation of consciousness that we bring to our life experience. If we want to, we can orient consciousness toward paying close, non-judgmental attention to daily experience. We can teach ourselves to practice gratitude. We can teach ourselves to extend compassion to others growing from mindful awareness of our own experiences of suffering. If we do these things, then we give ourselves the best possible chance for mortal beings living in uncertain times to experience contentment.

7. TRANSFORMATIONS OF FEELING AND DESIRE

Mindfulness practice can also effect shifts in how we feel and what we want out of life. I believe this is absolutely crucial to a culture of simplicity and sustainability. It's one thing to know what we need to do to live more sustainably. It's an altogether different matter to actually want to do it. Complicating this process is what I will call a "confusion of desire" that I think is an artifact of consumer culture. This takes a bit of explaining.

I was once giving a workshop about voluntary simplicity when, close to the end, one of the workshop participants commented: "I don't feel like you're trying to convince us that simple living is a good thing. I feel instead that you believe this is what comes naturally to people and what is healthy for us. We're just here trying to remember that." This was a revelatory moment for me.

A simpler, more sustainable way of life is often portrayed in popular culture as requiring many sacrifices and deprivations. But the key word is "portrayed." Like any other "portrayal," a great deal depends on the biases and agendas that surround the act of portraying something. Because it is so close to us, we scarcely appreciate how thoroughgoing is the influence of consumer culture. It is very challenging to parse how much of what we desire is spontaneously present in our human nature, and how much of it has been drummed into us by consumer culture from infancy. Furthermore, even supposing that a destructive desire such as greed may be innately present, we seldom explore to what extent we might reduce the influence of such destructive desires through routines of psychological hygiene that we might teach each other as we grow up. Mindfulness practice can help us distinguish the innate desires present in human nature, the desires that help assure our survival, from the blooming confusion of learned wants we accumulate during our passage through consumer culture. Thus mindfulness practice is not changing what we want so much as offering insight into the origin of what we want. Given this insight, we then enjoy a greater measure of freedom in deciding which of our desires serves well-being and which do not. In this way mindfulness practice can change both what we want in life and the emotional basis from which we work for it.

7.1 The transformation of the emotional basis of working for change

All discussions of our sustainability challenge include some sort of emotional sub-text. Between the lines of all but the driest academic reports, we can pick up a specific feeling tone, and sometimes more than one. In nearly every case, I usually hear one or more of three possibilities:

Fear—We should be concerned about the sustainability challenge because absolutely terrible things will happen if we don't act right away. Appeals to fear of environmental catastrophe have been the common motivational currency for environmentalists for two generations now. Even David Suzuki, the lion of Canadian environmentalists, has softened his doom and gloom warnings lately, choosing to focus instead on all the benefits we could enjoy by conserving ecosystems and species. Environmental activists have their neo-con counterparts who threaten us with visions of economic collapse, compromised national security, and deterioration of our standard of living, if the warnings of environmentalists are heeded. Recent experience seems to teach us, however, that greed is a closer threat to the economy than the dire warnings of environmentalists.

Guilt—We should be concerned about sustainability because what we have done to the planet is morally wrong, selfish, and a betrayal of our divine mandate to be good stewards of the Earth. Evidently at least the Vatican thinks guilt is still a good motivator because it recently decided to issue a new list of mortal sins, most of them relating to acts of environmental abuse or violations of human rights (Pullela, 2008). Guilt, it should be noted, is another form of fear: fear that we stand condemned before a moral authority or a supreme being, or that we have betrayed our own values.

Greed—We should be concerned about sustainability because it represents unparalleled opportunities to invent new technologies, develop new services, create investment opportunities, do well by doing right, in short, to get rich. Failing to act on the sustainability file is to be economically irrational and to fail to take advantage of the paradoxical opportunity to make money cleaning up the mess created by our earlier pursuit of making money. What's not to like? Greed is also another form of fear: fear that I may live in deprivation if I don't amass surpluses; fear that others will take advantage of me unless I take advantage first; fear of scarcity.

As understandable as these feelings might be, we are left to ask if they are appropriate or even effective motivations for wise action? Fear can be a short term motivator to be sure. But psychological studies of the effects of fear and stress on human beings show that it narrows attention rather than opening the mind. Fear is not conducive to the play and experimentation essential to discovering creative solutions to difficult problems. Fear focuses attention on the feared object or situation, which may not be the best focus in order to resolve what causes the fear. Finally, fear is not a stable motivator. As soon as the feared object is removed or the situation resolved, motivation drops to zero. When there are multiple, interacting, long-term threats, as in the sustainability challenge, this simply won't do.

Guilt is an aversive feeling that motivates us to escape the situation or the company in which we feel guilty. Guilt aims to fix blame rather than fixing the problem. We can seek short-term stop-gap solutions or even magical remedies like confession/atonement rituals. I wreck the Earth, feel guilty, confess my sin, find absolution, then go out to wreck the Earth again. Most problematic is that guilt is essentially a self-indulgent sentiment. The focus is on me and the moral condition of my soul from which presumably I cannot change or be redeemed except by supernatural intervention, when the focus of attention could instead be on my behavior or structural characteristics of my society that I can change.

Greed is an inappropriate motivator for several reasons: First, greed is violent in so far as greed necessarily deprives others of access to whatever I am greedy for. Second, because greed is violent, it sows a psychology of division and competition within society at a time when cooperation would be more useful to solve our problems. Third, and most important, greed derives from a lack of conscious mindfulness of our interdependence. Greed assumes that my individual welfare can be improved independently of the welfare of others. This is a metaphysical, ethical and practical mistake.

An alternative to fear, greed and guilt has been offered by Cheri Huber (1990: 117-124), a Zen roshi living in California. Through her own practice of mindfulness, she brings wonderful insight to this question. Having witnessed some sheep being slaughtered on a farm near her practice center, she brought this experience back into her practice of mindfulness. She wondered how we all become hardened to the suffering of animals, other sentient beings, and thereby also hardened to each others' suffering? She found that many of the reasons we might give ourselves for acting differently toward animals, such as guilt, amount to new forms of self-inflicted violence. Within the ambit of mindfulness practice, violence can never be used to reduce violence, precisely because we are all entangled and any violence toward the self, no matter how positive the intention (in this case in service of reducing the suffering of animals) merely propagates more violence. But since this violence is self-inflicted, it's avoidable. Huber points out to us the power of mindfulness practice to reveal a completely clean, nonviolent, wholesome basis for action in service of sustainability. We act not because we frighten ourselves with visions of what might happen if we fail to act (even though this might be justified); nor do we impose guilt on ourselves because of our moral failings (real as they may be); nor do we give free reign to our greed (even though "opportunities" may indeed appear because of the misery of other species and people). We act because the practice of mindfulness empowers us to perceive ourselves differently and feel ourselves to subsist in a different relationship with other people and with the Earth. From this new orientation of

consciousness, we do the “right” thing—the nonviolent thing, the life-giving and life-sustaining thing. We behave differently because we see life differently now, and feel differently about it. It’s that simple.

7.2 Transformation in how we understand desire

The view of human nature that prevails in consumer culture sees human desires as more or less innate, limitless, insatiable, and non-negotiable. It’s human nature to want things without limit. The main problem of life is finding the right things to satiate one’s desire—the perfect car, house, spouse, vacation spot, deodorant. Little effort is spent on distinguishing desire itself from the objects which we desire, or whether desires really are insatiable or not. Instead, considerable effort and money are invested in trying to teach people to desire more things, more often, and more insatiably than ever because this drives demand for consumption and hence profits.

Aristotle thought that indulging desires tends to strengthen them. So there is something about desire which is like an addictive narcotic. The more we indulge ourselves, the more we want to indulge ourselves. Modern researchers who study neuro-chemical activation of the brain have discovered that shopping releases dopamine, a brain chemical with effects similar to morphine, and also prone to be addictive (Lovitt, J. M. 2010; Parker-Pope, 2005). While there is certainly nothing wrong with pleasure, some of us would rather that our pleasures not lead us into addictions or become compulsive rituals that limit our freedom and ultimately reduce well-being.

Dedicated practice of mindfulness involves witnessing the arising and dissolving of all sorts of mental events, including desires. Practice helps us discover several things about desire. First, desires arise spontaneously and continually. But they also go away spontaneously and continually, unless they are indulged, in which case they tend to stick around. Some take longer than others to dissipate, but unless a desire is directly linked to a basic physical need like thirst or hunger, it comes and goes like any other thought. Thus we discover that indulging our desires is actually our voluntary choice to form an attachment to them. In effect, we are choosing to allow an addiction to develop in us, and often we even encourage the process. Stated differently, we are indulging a way of living that binds us to our past, to habit, to inertia—which is another way of thinking of “karma.” Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) expresses this well:

Here’s how mindfulness changes karma. When you sit, you are not allowing your impulses to translate into action. For the time being, at least, you are just watching them. Looking at them, you quickly see that all impulses in the mind arise and pass away, that they have a life of their own, that they are not you but just thinking, and that you do not have to be ruled by them. Not feeding or reacting to impulses, you come to understand their nature as thoughts directly. This process actually burns up destructive impulses in the fires of concentration and equanimity and non-doing. At the same time, creative insights and creative impulses are no longer squeezed out so much by the more turbulent, destructive ones. They are nourished as they are perceived and held in awareness. Mindfulness can thereby refashion the links in the chain of actions and consequences, and in doing so, it unchains us, frees us, and opens up new directions for us through the moments we call life. Without mindfulness, we are all too easily stuck in the momentum coming out of the past, with no clue to our own imprisonment, and no way out. Our dilemma always seems to be the other person’s fault, or the world’s fault, so our own views and feelings are always justified. The present moment is never a new beginning because we keep it from becoming one.

If we hope to change our karma, it means we have to stop making those things happen that cloud mind and body and color our every action. It doesn’t mean doing good deeds. It means knowing who you are and that you are not your karma, whatever it may be at this moment. It means aligning yourself with the way things actually are. It means seeing clearly.... When you stop outward activity for some time and practice being still, right there,

in that moment, with that decision to sit, you are already breaking the flow of old karma and creating an entirely new and healthier karma. (Kabat-Zinn 1994: 221ff)

Second, we discover that acquiring some object (car, house, backyard swimming pool) never makes desire itself go away. The desire as associated with some specific object may cease to preoccupy us, but desire itself is right back vexing us with more demands, regardless of how many objects we accumulate.

Third, sooner or later we begin to wonder if endlessly repeating cycles of craving things, obtaining the things we crave, only to discover that craving just returns to start the cycle all over again is the best way we have of pursuing well-being? The lessons of our own self-observation reveal that obtaining desired objects does not satisfy desire. The core premise of consumer culture is therefore a lie. We are slaves to the lie every day that we continue to indulge it. It's life in a hamster cage endlessly turning but going nowhere.

When we really take this lesson to heart, usually by watching it in operation over and over again, and by suffering its consequences day in and day out, we begin to see that it is desire itself that is problematic. We stop worrying about how to get the objects we want and we start thinking about where wanting itself comes from and what to do about that. Happily, the answer is quite simple: Treat desire just like any other thought or feeling arising during practice. See it arise. Note that it is a desire arising. Then simply let it go—unless it is something arising from authentic physical or psychological needs. Our ability to do this becomes more efficient with more practice. Timothy Miller (1990) summarizes this insight nicely:

You achieve self-realization when you really understand—not just in your mind, but also in your heart and in your bones—that your desires are not important. Not only are they not important, but satisfying them will not bring you happiness or even contentment. Not only that, but satisfying them might actually do harm and bring you pain. Not only that, but your desires are actually the source of your suffering. When you completely understand these things—in such a way that you can never forget them—then it becomes possible to perceive yourself, the people around you, the world, and all that's in it in an entirely new way. (Miller 1990: 203)

7.3 Transformation of *what we desire*

Not only can the practice of mindfulness change how we understand the dynamics of desire and their impact on our lives, in my experience it can also change what we desire. The reasons I might offer for this are more speculative than empirical.

As we cultivate mindfulness, a taste for simpler surroundings, fewer possessions, less clutter, a more spacious and tranquil way of life, can spontaneously accompany the development of our practice. The material de-cluttering of our lives then becomes a slowly and organically evolving process of reshaping the whole of our lives. It is not a forced agenda for personal improvement that we impose on ourselves. Instead, it grows up from the sweetness of mindfulness practice itself. It feels, and is, completely natural. We begin to discover in our human nature not only the instincts and drives that served us well as we were evolving up to this point, but also that which now draws us forward toward awakening. We are waking up to our true place in the universe and our role within the living world of the Earth.

These realizations set in motion a gradual development in what we are prepared to pursue in life and what we now feel free to leave off pursuing. Creating a more tranquil, less violent, more cooperative lifestyle that is more involved with others, more committed to our local place, becomes a priority. We cease needing to be somewhere else, doing something else, with someone else,

because we know that everything we need for a good life is ready at hand. We cease struggling to “be somebody” because we realize deep down we are already somebody.

As mindfulness deepens, other things happen. Sometimes they can be very unpleasant and even painful. This is surprising to those who assume that mindfulness is a “blissed out” state of awareness. We are now sensitized to the beauty but also to the ugliness that surrounds us much of the time. We notice the intrusiveness and discourtesy of consumer culture and greedy lust that powers it. We are sensitized to the danger, the haste and the mostly avoidable violence which is so common a part of daily life in consumer culture. We notice how often we are motivated by fear, or habitual craving, and how often we suffer because of them. We start to feel caught in a badly scripted “reality” TV show where all the rules require deceit, back-stabbing, and finally tossing others overboard. We start wanting something different, something better.

I think this transformation in what we desire may be energized in three ways:

First, the practice of mindfulness, if generalized beyond our formal practice periods to become our general way of approaching life, can greatly increase the quality and depth of our ordinary daily experiences. All we are doing is learning to pay attention to what was there all along. But now we do so with more regularity, more concentration, and a greater appreciation for what the daily round may hold. Since we are paying closer attention to what we already have and to what is intrinsically available to us, maybe we are less inclined to hanker for more. In a classic passage from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) even the flight of a mosquito through his cabin is replete with metaphysical significance:

Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. ... I got up early and bathed in the pond: that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. ... I was as much affected by the faint hum of a mosquito making its invisible and unimaginable tour through my apartment at earliest dawn, when I was sitting with door and windows open, as I could be by any trumpet that ever sang of fame. ... There was something cosmical about it; a standing advertisement, till forbidden, of the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world. The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night. Little is to be expected of that day, if it can be called a day, to which we are not awakened by our Genius, but by the mechanical nudgings of some servitor, are not awakened by our own newly acquired force and aspirations from within, accompanied by the undulations of celestial music, instead of factory bells, and a fragrance filling the air—to a higher life than we fell asleep from; and thus the darkness bear its fruit, no less than the light. That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, had despair of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way. After a partial cessation of his sensuous life, the soul of man, or its organs rather, are reinvigorated each day, and his Genius tries again what noble life it can make. All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. ... It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. *Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep. ... The millions are awake enough for physical labour; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?* (emphasis added) (Thoreau 1854: 78-80)

Second, I think mindfulness practice introduces us by direct experience to intrinsic sources of well-being. We discover personally and directly, not by hearsay on someone else’s authority, how much we are the architects of both our own pleasure and our suffering. Well-being really does originate substantially inside us arising from intentions and choices we ourselves can make. This discovery is empowering and joyous. We learn that there are inner and outer forms of possession, and inner and outer goods to be possessed. Those which are inner are inherently more accessible, secure and

abundant than those which are outer. This causes our psychological “center of identity” to shift in an inward direction. It’s like the Necker Cube shift of perspective again. Why would we, after discovering this new world, return to the anxiety and insecurity of well-being that depends on material possession? As the 12th century Islamic spiritual and legal philosopher Al-Ghazali once observed: “You possess only whatever will not be lost in a shipwreck.”

Third, mindfulness practice helps us perceive directly how futile can be the cycle of pursuing desires, especially material ones, and how much suffering this brings into our individual lives, our relationships, and with the Earth. Thus it is merely common sense to exercise more discernment over what we want and give more attention to stilling desires as they arise.

Finally, mindfulness practice itself can be increasingly sweet as we make progress (Goddard, 1938: 76). This is not always the case, but very regularly it is. It’s quite natural then to desire to return to practices and states of mind that help us experience positive feelings rather than awaken every morning to gird ourselves for the general scramble for more. Having found a door in the wall, why would we not walk through it?

8. WHY CULTIVATE MINDFULNESS?

The evolution of man is the evolution of his consciousness, and 'consciousness' cannot evolve unconsciously. The evolution of man is the evolution of his will, and 'will' cannot evolve involuntarily. (Gender exclusive language in original.) (G. I. Gurdjieff)

Many benefits are claimed for the practice of mindfulness through formal sitting practices designed to help us learn it, even though paradoxically, one cannot practice mindfulness preoccupied by the conscious agenda of self-improvement and still be practicing mindfulness. I don’t know whether all the same effects are found among people who practice mindfulness more or less unconsciously as I did as a child when fishing, or whether a formal practice under instruction is necessary to discover all its potentials. In any case, mindfulness practice improves our powers of concentration, fosters equanimity and calm in moments of stress, heightens self-awareness of inner psychic processes, relieves stress and refreshes the body, and contributes to a more grounded and connected sense of self. In its loftier reaches, it enables insights into the causes of suffering, it is a stimulus to compassion, generates understanding of the sources, causes and consequences of all operations of the mind and emotions, and sometimes confers paranormal abilities. In the context of a theistic belief, generations of practitioners of contemplative prayer have claimed that such practices are essential to disposing oneself inwardly to a deeper and more transformative relationship with God.

I would like to propose another reason why one might take up the practice of mindfulness which is linked to what I take to be the purpose of human existence. If there is anything singular about human beings which may distinguish us from other species—at least in degree, if not in kind—it is that we have somehow come to embody a self-reflective consciousness. All species feed and breed and sleep. However, when we make these our ethical norms and our main purpose in life, we fall far short of our potential. We’re doing just exactly what comes naturally to all species. There are even many species that make tools, or in some other ways modify their environments to make them more congenial to their own interests. James Lovelock (1990) has proposed that the whole thrust of evolution itself has been life making the Earth a more congenial home for more life. And to be sure there are species with complex signaling systems which are only a step or two away from language if they do not already qualify. So what is left?

I think a great deal can be said for the great Viennese depth psychologist Carl Jung’s hypothesis that the evolutionary purpose of human life appears to be the development and extension of consciousness (Jung 1961: 338). Of all the creatures we find in nature humanity appears to be, at least so far, the species which is most conscious of itself, and most capable of

reflecting back an image of nature to itself. We might say that we are nature “waking up” to have a look at itself, and perhaps even evolve beyond its own innate competitive instincts to adopt instead a consciously caring posture toward itself. This is a remarkable evolutionary achievement which is also a spiritual achievement and a Divine gift. Everything can be found represented in consciousness, or just beneath the surface as the unconscious. Together, consciousness and the unconscious contain, in one form or another, all that nature has been and all that nature strives to become. So the psyche contains both fact and aspiration—both history and many potential futures. I have come to believe that the practice of mindfulness can become one method of deliberately cooperating in the development of consciousness, both through the discovery and integration of unconscious contents, but also by manifesting the evolutionary and developmental possibilities also present in consciousness.

Humanity is life on Earth thrusting itself toward whatever it is next capable of becoming. I don't believe this implies leaving behind our organic nature to develop some sort of “silicon intelligence.” Nor do I think what is well for us is to “return” to some dimly remembered or wishfully imagined primeval harmony.⁴ Becoming conscious involves an increasingly deliberate cooperation with the natural developmental energies which already strive to carry nature beyond itself. It requires somehow resolving a paradox, namely, that the process of evolution builds on and includes exactly what it seeks to transcend. We are nature's offspring and therefore are heir to all the impulses, tendencies, conflicts and behavior patterns that in past evolutionary epochs served us so well, and which are now obsolete and often threaten the next steps in our transformation. We acquire possessions like squirrels mindlessly storing nuts. We haggle over mates as if our reproductive success still depended on it while crowding the earth with seven billion of ourselves. We wage the most savage conflicts over the most sublime of our ideas and the most trivial of offenses.

I have come to think, however, that it is not the contents of consciousness we need to develop (ideas, philosophies, religious creeds), but consciousness itself, one pathway being the cultivation of mindfulness. With Jung I think that this is also partly achieved through making conscious what is currently unconscious. This process largely engages the internalized world of the past. We also need a forward-looking program for the development of human consciousness and practices such as the cultivation of mindfulness seem to have much to offer in this respect. As Jung also observed, what is most interesting about the psyche is not where it has come from, but where it is trying to go. Simplicity of living is a great help in this enterprise, and as the celebrated historian Arnold Toynbee also once observed, simplicity is evidence that we are making progress (Toynbee 1947: 198). He even assigned it the honor of making it a historical law: The Law of Progressive Simplification. It is not the society with the most military or economic power which is necessarily the most highly evolved. Greatness, he believed, consisted in the progressive simplification and dematerialization of culture—what he called “etherealization.” This occurred when a civilization

⁴ The tendency to idealize the past is a common characteristic of all atavist and naturist movements and finds its psychological counterpart in the belief that actualizing our development potentials merely amounts to returning to a developmentally prior stage. The eminent philosopher Ken Wilber has described all such notions as instances of the “Pre-Trans Fallacy.” This fallacy occurs when prerational states of consciousness such as those present in infancy and childhood are confused with transrational states such as those characteristic of spiritual and psychological maturity. This can have two consequences: First, all transrational states can be reduced to mere prerational states (the reductionist perspective), e.g., Freud's notion that religious experience was merely a regression to infantile narcissism and ‘oceanic consciousness’, or, for those who are sympathetic to higher or mystical states and confuse pre- and trans-, then there will a tendency to elevate all prerational states and ascribe to them transrational significance (the elevationist perspective). Wilber argues that what we mean by the “spiritual” includes and transcends reason but does not regress from or exclude it. It is neither reductionist nor elevationist in perspective. Wilber, Ken. *The Essential Ken Wilber: An Introductory Reader*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1998: 88-91.

could shift more and more of its economic and social resources away from dominance and manipulation of the material world and apply them instead to creative cultural pursuits and care of its members. Thus perhaps we can see mindfulness and simplicity as a co-evolving dialectic—a pair of dance partners who between them both facilitate and express the evolution of people toward what we are destined to become.

I have tried to illustrate that the practice of mindfulness changes the texture of consciousness in several specific ways. The decision even to take up formal meditation is already a decision to cultivate a more introspective, more intrinsically oriented way of living. Mindfulness practice amplifies and deepens this experience considerably. Our awareness shifts from simply being the subjects of our own awareness to also being objects of that awareness. The outputs of consciousness (thoughts, feelings, sensations, behavior) become objects for conscious inspection and insight. This sets in place a feedback loop of awareness that in turn nurtures other changes in awareness. We begin to notice both foreground action and figure, but also background causes and contexts. We begin to appreciate that we don't have to be lonely, isolated egos struggling with other egos for affluence, but that we are part of an interdependent community that implies both new sources of strength and new responsibilities. From this shift in focus, scarcity is transformed into plenitude and fearful clinging into gratitude. After securing material sufficiency for our authentic material and emotional needs, we're encouraged to pursue what are inner and non-material sources of well-being. We discover how to work for change not from fear or greed or guilt, but from a newly emerging spontaneous awareness of the solidarity and love we feel for the whole community of life and this is sufficient. Mindfulness helps us understand that much of our suffering arises from desire and that desire itself must become an object of contemplation if we are to discover insight that helps liberate us from this suffering. We learn to distinguish desires which serve life from those that serve profit and this insight transforms what we desire. For these many reasons, I see the practice of mindfulness and the changes it can bring into our lives as the source and essential foundation of a worldview which is actually capable of sustaining human and planetary well-being into the deep future. It is also the fundamental praxis of simple living.

References

- Ban Breathnach, Sarah 1995. *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy*. New York, NY: Warner Books.
- Elgin, Duane, 2010. *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*. (2nd Edition) New York, NY: Harper.
- Goddard, Dwight, 1938. "The 118th Discourse." In: *The Buddhist Bible*. Dwight Goddard (ed.), Boston, MA: Beacon Press: 73-82. As contrasted with the variety of meanings assigned to mindfulness by Charles Tart, the classical Buddhist sources identify four objects of mindfulness practice: the body, mental states, emotions, and external phenomena (dharma).
- Gregg, Richard, 1936. "The value of voluntary simplicity." Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill.
- Gurdjieff, G. I, Date unknown; Source unknown.
- Huber, Cheri, 1990. "One less act of violence." in: *That Which You are Seeking is Causing You to Seek*. Cheri Huber. Murphys, CA: Zen Meditation Centre: 117-124.
- Ignatius of Loyola, 1521. *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org/ccel/ignatius/exercises.html.
- Irvine, William B., 2009. *A Guide to the Good Life: {The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy}*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press: 68. In his survey of the philosophy of stoicism, Irvine cites the practice recommended by Chrysippus (d. c. 206 BC) and later Stoics of "negative visualization." In this practice, one uses imagination to visualize the loss of relationships or possessions that one values, partly as a way of preparing the soul for such loss, which is inevitable, but also to heighten appreciation and enjoyment of them while we have them. As such, the technique sometimes referred to as "premeditation of evils" is another way of cultivating gratitude for what we have rather than focusing attention on what we don't have.
- James, William, 1958. *Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: New American Library.
- Jung, C. G., 1961. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. A. Jaffe ed. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Jung, C.G., 1969. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Vol. 9, Part 1. Bollingen Series #20. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon, 1994. *Wherever You Are, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Kasser, Tim and Brown, Kirk Warren, 2010. "A scientific approach to voluntary simplicity." in: *Less Is More: Embracing Simplicity for a Healthy Planet, a Caring Economy and Lasting Happiness*, edited by Cecile Andrews and Wanda Urbanska, 101-106, (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers).
- Keating, Thomas, 1998. *Intimacy With God*. New York, NY: Crossroad Books.
- Lovelock, James, 1990. *Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Lovitt, J. M., 2010. "Beyond Beverly Hills and Rodeo Drive: Compulsive shopping triggered by dopamine levels." One 80 Center, 3 August 2010. Accessed at: <http://one80center.com/>
- Macy, Joanna and Brown, Molly Young, 1958. *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Live, Our World*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers: 52.
- Miller, Timothy, 1995. *How To Want What You Have: Discovering the Magic and Grandeur of Ordinary Existence*. New York, NY: Avon Books: 214-215.
- Parker-Pope, Tara, 2005. "This is your brain at the mall: Why shopping makes you feel so good." *Wall Street Journal*, 6 December 2005. Accessed at: www.mindfully.org/Health/2005/Shopping-Dopamine-lunkie6dec05.htm/ and also:
- Pascal, Blaise. date, source unknown.

- Pieper, Josef, 1996. "Leisure, The Basis of Culture." in: *Less is More: An Anthology of Ancient & Modern Voices Raised in Praise of Simplicity*, edited by Goldian VandenBroeck, 189-190, (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions).
- Progoff, Ira, 1969. *Depth Psychology and Modern Man*. New York NY: Dialogue House Library.
- Progoff, Ira, 1973. *The Symbolic and The Real*. New York, NY: Dialogue House Library.
- Pullela, Philip, 2008. "Vatican lists 'new sins', including pollution." Reuters, 10 March 2008.
- Tart, Charles, 1994. *Living the Mindful Life: A Handbook for Living in the Present Moment*. London, UK: Shambala. In popular culture, mindfulness can mean just paying attention to the details of a situation or decision and making responsible choices. It includes looking into the background of the question at hand, making an unhurried and considered decision, and including in that decision everything that should rightly be included. Being mindful is thus a sort of synonym for due diligence or being prudent in our decision-making.
- Charles Tart, a 20th century cognitive psychologist, practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, and pioneer in the study of changing states of consciousness, has also identified four other shades of meaning that define mindfulness:
- Mindfulness can refer to a clear, lucid quality of awareness of the everyday experiences of life. The state of awareness is focused on actual happenings in the present moment, undistracted by fantasies of what has happened (memory) or fantasies of what might happen (imagination).
- Mindfulness may refer to a clear quality of awareness as applied to deeper and more subtle processes of the mind. The capacity to distinguish among sensations, perceptions, memories, thoughts, imagination, etc., and how these arise and succeed each other and from where they originate.
- Mindfulness can refer to awareness of being aware (witness consciousness). This is a form of self-consciousness which consists in not being totally identified or completely absorbed in the content of ongoing experience: some part of the mind, a neutral observer or "fair witness" remains aware, in a relatively objective way, of the nature of on-going experience as related immediately to here and now existence. This is "self-remembering"—being clearly aware of what is happening, and also aware of oneself as being aware of them.
- Mindfulness can be a continuous and precise awareness of the process of being aware, such that a thought is recognized at the time as a thought, a perception as a perception, an emotion as an emotion, etc., rather than mistaking any of these for each other.
- Thera, Soma, 1967. *The Way of Mindfulness: The Satipatthana Sutta and Its Commentary*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. The authoritative classical text on mindfulness practice in the Buddhist tradition. Downloaded as .pdf from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wayof.html>.
- Thoreau, Henry David, 1992. *Walden*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Toynbee, Arnold, 1947. *A Study of History*. (Vol. 1) New York, NY: Oxford University Press: 198.
- Tsunetomo, Yamamoto, 1716. *Hagakure: The Book of The Samurai*. (trans.) William Scott Wilson (New York: Kodansha International), 1973, 26-27.
- Wagner, Charles, 1903. *The Simple Life*. Paris, France: (trans.) Mary Louise Hende. (New York, NY: McClure, Phillips & Co.): 16-17.
- Walker, Brian, 1995. (transl). *Hua Hu Ching: Unknown Teachings of Lao Tzu*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Walters, Kerry, 2001. *Rufus Jones: Essential Writings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- What the Bleep!?! Down the Rabbit Hole. Lord of Winds Films, 2004.
- Wilber, Ken, 1998. *The Essential Ken Wilber: An Introductory Reader*. Boston, MA: Shambhala: 88-91.
- Williams, Paul, 1973. *Das Energi*, New York, NY: Elektra Books: 21.
- Young, Mildred Binns, 1996. in: *Less is More: An Anthology of Ancient & Modern Voices Raised in Praise of Simplicity*, edited by Goldian VandenBroeck (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions): 54-55.