

191103 What Captures Your Attention Controls Your Life by Rev. Jennifer Hamlin-Navias

I think we humans are wired to be distracted. I can see an evolutionary advantage to distraction. ““From a survival point of view, it was important to be attentive to your environment as there could be something that’s an opportunity or a threat, ... We are prewired to notice other things and can’t switch off our attentiveness to the environment.” Distraction isn’t necessarily bad unless of course you are only distracted or cannot find focus.

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to what it is you are doing or to how you are being. More than likely it is not something that you fall into. Which is really too bad. I so easily can get frustrated or cranky or angry. I do not seem to need a practice to do any of those. But being mindful, for me and for many, is a practice that I need to be intentional about.

“Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens.” <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition>

You can clean up after dinner in a way that is harried and hurried and you can get the job done but you might be left feeling frustrated that no one seemed to enjoy the food you cooked, or cranky that you had to cleanup when what you want to be doing is watching your favorite TV show.

Or you could pay attention to the smell of the food as you clean up, or the temperature of the water as you rinse something off, or remember when your grandmother gave you that coffee mug. You could try to be thankful for the body that works enough that you can clean up. And then you go watch your favorite TV show.

That’s a pretty simple explanation of mindfulness

But why should we practice mindfulness?

Well if you have ever looked after a small child you probably spent a lot of time telling that child to pay attention. The irony here is that children are always paying attention they are always paying attention just not to the things we big people tell them they should pay attention to. In some ways I think children are some of the most mindful people that I know of.

Paying attention to what you are doing means that you might be a little safer - if you are running a power tool or mowing the lawn you want to be paying attention. If you are chopping an onion you want to be paying attention.

And mindfulness is more than paying attention

Mindfulness is not new. I don't think Thoreau would have taken a year in the woods at Walden pond if being mindful was an easy thing to do. We like to think that somehow, we in this modern era have cornered the market on distraction. We may have more things to distract us than our grandparents but I think mostly we have different things to distract us.

We like to think that mindfulness takes time and therefore we cannot do it.

I might be preaching to myself here. I struggle with staying in the moment being mindful. I have a mind that LOVES to consider all the possibilities, all the complexities. I have a mind that would like to run at the speed of a racehorse but even race horses have to rest.

Because mindfulness does not come naturally to us it can feel like it takes time. And the phrase take the time to me implies that I am taking the time from something else - I should be writing my Board report but instead I take that time and spend it on being mindful.

We think of time as something that is finite and concrete. Something that can be saved or spent, or created. And that is false. Time moves on at its pace independent of us. We cannot stop it, move it, create it, destroy it. As far as science can tell at this point time as we live in it really travels in one direction. Maybe that is why we talk about spending it or wasting it. Once the now is past it feels as if we gave it away. However, we can be aware of it.

Being mindful while I walk the dog takes no more time than simply walking the dog. And I might use my time more efficiently be mindful because if I am not looking at my phone while walking the dog I am less likely to trip, or get lost, or not notice that the

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dog is now off his leash. Practicing mindfulness takes effort and I think that is what people really mean when they say they do not have the time for it.

I once read a book entitled *You Are Here: Why We Can Find Our Way to the Moon, but Get Lost in the Mall*. I read it because I have a horrible sense of direction. Those folks who can find their way easily mystify me. I am always turning the wrong way in the mall. Evidently there is a trick I never really learned or used - when you go into a store take a look to the left or right note what stores are there when you come out you are more likely to remember which way to turn when you come out of the store. Animals that don't get lost tend to pay more attention to their surroundings.

To a certain extent we can choose what we pay attention to. I know this is shaped by how your body works. I have a friend who has a serious case of face blindness. They simply cannot remember faces no matter how much attention they pay they are not going to be able to do that. To a certain extent what we are able to focus on will be shaped by who you are and how your body is unique. However, each of us has some use of our senses and we can use those senses to pay attention to be mindful. I am reminded of this story

The Cricket Story (Source varies, many versions exist on the web)

Once two friends were walking down the sidewalk of a busy city street during rush hour. There was all sorts of noise in the city; car horns honking, feet shuffling, people talking! And amid all this noise, one of the friends turned to the other and said, "I hear a cricket."

"No way," her friend responded. "How could you possibly hear a cricket with all of this noise? You must be imagining it. Besides, I've never seen a cricket in the city."

"No, really, I do hear a cricket. I'll show you." She stopped for a moment, then led her friend across the street to a big cement planter with a tree in it. Pushing back some leaves she found a little brown cricket.

"That's amazing!" said her friend. "You must have super-human hearing. What's your secret?"

"No, my hearing is just the same as yours. There's no secret," the first woman replied. "Watch, I'll show you." She reached into her pocket, pulled out some loose change, and threw it on the sidewalk. Amid all the noise of the city, everyone within thirty feet turned their head to see where the sound of the money was coming from.

"See," she said. "It's all a matter of what you are listening for."

When we are mindful we are turning our attention to something and really noticing it. In this day when we are not so much predator or prey using the practice of mindfulness can help us not only stay focused not only calm down, it helps shape us.

It comes down to this really - what you pay attention to shapes you, affects you. Do you want to be the person who cannot hear the cricket but can hear a dime being dropped on the ground? Neither one is wrong and neither one is right. A practice of mindfulness will mean that you are choosing what to listen to what to be attentive to.

In the Time for all ages the queen did not think that she needed to pay attention to the impact of her action or inaction and eventually war broke out. It is important for us to not only to be mindful about the world around us it is also important for us to be mindful of our impact on the world around us.

But what happens when you stop and pay attention to something. You slow down you get out of your own mind you deeply consider the other and I think this leads to kindness, reverence a deep regard of something else or someone else and awe

Sharon Salzberg put it this way

We need mindfulness and kindness now more than ever. And [the two are related](#). Paradoxically, many of us feel an increased sense of fragmentation and compartmentalization in our lives given the networked world we are living in. The antidote to these feelings is mindfulness — gathering our dispersed attention again and again. The practice of shepherding our attention back to the present — even an incalculable number of times — helps us find the power to be kind to ourselves. We can let go of our laundry list of work agenda items once we get home to be with our family members, even if our Google calendar gives us a ping. We may be compelled to ruminate or obsess, but a commitment to mindfulness, to being present, is [a gesture of kindness to ourselves](#). We react to our compulsions with compassion. We open up, and feel a subtle movement of our hearts... When we really tune in to our experience in each moment, the result is feeling a sense of connection between all of us — not a connection that has anything to do with iMessaging or emailing, but something deep. <https://onbeing.org/blog/a-new-vision-of-kindness-starts-with-paying-attention/>

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That connection to something deep is reverence and its partner is awe. That is something worth paying attention to.

In a world without end may this be so.