

Experimenting with Mindfulness

We use *mindfulness* to discover and learn about automatic habits and beliefs. We want to study the habits and ideas that organize our experiences. Since most of what we do and feel and think is habitual, these habits are very close to who we think we are. Habits reflect our images, assumptions, and beliefs about the kind of world we live in and who we are, or need to be, to live in it.

By experimenting in mindfulness - we cultivate a particular kind of attention and awareness – *mindfulness* - simply noticing our present moment experience, without judgment.

In mindfulness, we are not just reacting. We are also noticing our reactions. We are participating as observers of our own behavior. We are our own witness. We're cultivating that part of the mind that can simply witness whatever we are experiencing, body sensations, emotions, impulses, even thoughts or memories.

In mindfulness we are open to what's happening around us and within. It is a state of consciousness in which we turn our attention to the flow of our experience, with the added and unusual condition that we have no intention to control what happens.

This is a state sometimes called *choiceless awareness*. It is a way of opening to and welcoming whatever comes into our field of awareness, without preference. For most of us, this is not our usual state of consciousness. The Sufi poet Rumi described it this way:

The Guesthouse (Rumi)

*This being human is a guesthouse,
every morning a new arrival –
a joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows
who violently sweep your house
empty of all its furniture
still, treat each guest honourably.*

He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.*

*Be grateful to whoever comes, because
each has been sent as a guide from beyond.*