

Mindfulness for Holistic Management

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Abstract

During my conversation with the organizers of the conference on the theme 'Spiritual Paradigms for Surmounting Global Management Crisis' at School of Management Sciences Varanasi, few questions were raised on mindfulness which I thought must be answered and shared through this article.

What is Mindfulness and how it has become a movement?

Attention, attention, attention, these are the three words that a Zen master uttered before her maha-nirvana (death), as her parting message to the world.

The words from awakened masters have power to remain in the ethereal world and keep working for the emancipation of human consciousness for eons. The enlightened masters from the Vedic period have always sent forth the clarion call, “Ye children of immortality, arise, awake and be free.”

In a world flooded with information and knowledge, man now struggles to find the right direction and path to be free from the clutches of self-created illusions of mere materialistic pleasures and their consequent pains in order to live a life of peace and happiness.

Man has always searched for peace outside, while it is only available inside. The outer world of technology has developed much over time, but our inner development needed its due “attention.” The time is ripe as we are passing through a shift of consciousness from religious fundamentalism, to a more scientific-based, rational approach, and finally to the very core essence of all religions, which is practical, pragmatic, proactive spirituality. There was a time when meditation was considered a religious monastic approach to life, but today it has transcended the boundaries of religions and nations, and is universal language.

But in pure essence, “meditation” is more a state of the being than a practice. The practice by which one can get into that state of calm, peaceful, tranquil space within is Mindfulness. It is nothing religious, but pure attention and alertness about everything that we all do so that we are fully absorbed in it. Most often the reverse is the reality. Most people get used to their specialized knowledge or skills, and become mere robots and lose contact with the true “doer” within. Mindfulness is the tool to be rooted to the Core while dynamic in the periphery.

Mindfulness is now a movement all over the world, whether neuroscience, or psychology, health or education, military or the political arena, the need to be mindful and focused on one thing at a time is felt as the panacea to all the evils of externalized, materialistic life on earth. We, in our un-mindful or mind-less state, have done enough damage to humanity and to the environment and never before has mankind been so fearful of the impending destruction of the planet as he is now! The need for a holistic management of life is felt world over and Mindfulness is found to be the safest and simplest practice to achieve that.

How can Business as a whole and issues of Sustainability in particular could be addressed by Mindfulness?

Mindfulness encompasses the whole of life in its totality. In simple words, you can eat unmindfully, or you can eat mindfully, and you know the gross difference between these two. You are breathing this moment, and of course there is no need for you to be aware about your breathing, it does not need “you.” Your breath is more mechanical, but you can bring your focus to your breath and breathe mindfully. Simply observe your breaths, your incoming and outgoing breaths. Surf your breath, let the mind dwell in the breath, and you will see that in a few seconds, even in the midst of a difficult external situation, you will attain a calmed state of mind. This is the magic of being mindful of every little chore of our daily life.

In order to have sustainability we need to recognize all humans, not as a person with a head and hands, but more precisely with a heart and emotions. With the tremendous explosion of information man's knowledge has expanded but wisdom is missing! In today's world, for a business to survive, it can no longer copy the evolutionary concept of survival of the fittest, but requires a transformational concept of survival of the *wisest*. You can't keep on stuffing people in the business world with curricula, models and competencies; instead you must strengthen their emotional resilience from within. We need to recognize that we don't have to stuff people with outside knowledge for all that every businessman or executive needs is already there, inside of them, as potential power that only needs to be rekindled and unleashed. The leadership development agenda has to have its primary focus on developing the “successful inner life.”

I have developed a course called *A COURSE IN MINDFULNESS* for the business leaders and executives titled Corporate Resurgence. *The whole focus of the training is to help people grow from INSIDE OUT.* This is indeed the seed for true sustainable development in any field of human endeavor.

How can Mindfulness lead to general wellbeing and youth emergence in particular?

Mindfulness is to lead life being conscious of the infinite gifts that each one of us is showered with every moment and the ability to allow the *universal flow of energy* and

intelligence to manifest through us. It is to reach a point of *less effort, but more productivity*, to be an achiever without being continually stressed and drained. People who are trained in the art of the inner life of mindfulness always enjoy better health, both of body and mind. As most diseases are born in the mind, the psychosomatic imbalance can be checked, once a person learns how to calm the mind when emotional turmoil appears in the mental environment. Wellness is a state of being. Nature has blessed us all to heal ourselves of most of the illnesses that happen in the body through healing energy that is innate in our very physical system. But an unregulated life exposed to accumulating stress throws this natural order into chaos, resulting in physical and mental illness. We know very well how stress-related diseases (termed as lifestyle diseases) are mounting with every passing day and how it affects the productivity and efficiency of the corporations as well as our social and family life.

Youth today is bubbling with energy and dreaming to be rich and successful. It is good, but the downside is they are not trained to handle failures. Their emotional resilience is very poor. The increasing incidences of addictions to drugs and alcohol, as well as increased depression and suicides only prove youth's inefficiency to manage their inner environment. They are technically highly skilled, but lack simple skills of life management or emotional management. In my CIM program (Course in Mindfulness), which I conduct for students, youth and corporate leaders across the globe, I have incorporated practical tools for self-transformation, elevating each individual to their highest potential.

I think simple techniques that are passed down to us from every spiritual tradition help us to slow down, to pause, to reflect, to center, to find the inner core where the infinite potential only awaits our attention and love to blossom into fragrant flowering. Once the youth are trained to tap this Source within, they will not frantically look outside for everything they are dreaming for in life, and will eventually learn to balance between the Inner and the Outer, which is the ultimate wisdom that can grant the state of *sthithaprajna*, equanimity. Life then is not just a stressful challenge, but instead a playful celebration surrounded by the glow of success in every possible term.

I remember my *Stress Management Through Mindfulness* workshop at MIT, Boston, when I took the students and faculty through the guided meditation and also simple Chi practices. The students and faculty were overwhelmed with the impact of it and shared with me that it was an experience to be, for the first time, face to face with one's *Inner Self*. Yes, that is what is wanted and that is what the mindfulness training gives us, face-to-face experience with the inner silence where peace abides in abundance. It also helps growth of consciousness that is fundamental to true *Wise Management*.

What has been your experience so far with corporates and youth while running your course in Mindfulness?

Those who attend these sessions are always thrilled to discover what has been lying dormant within the recesses of their own head and heart. For the course in mindfulness is a blend of Western scientific research and the Eastern metaphysics. The idea is to ignite the passion for the inner search, and also excel in the dynamics of life in all its facets.

I have experienced that the top-level executives are high pressured, but mostly indifferent to their mind-body-soul connection. They love their job, they love to scale high in corporate ladder, enjoy the high profiles and social status, but they lack self-love. By self-love I don't mean ego, vanity or arrogance, but the loving care for one's physical well being and spiritual connectedness. As a result I have seen them suffering from hypertension, diabetes and many stress related ailments and above all, an unhappy family life, for they are most often not so successful in balancing between their lives at home and at work. But when they go through my Course in Mindfulness, they seem to open up to a new possibility, a new horizon. It is like a new window opens to their inner and outer worlds. It gives them tools to manage their anger, frustrations and occasional emotional lows. As a result they are able to have better leadership qualities as they are calmed and poised from inside.

My interaction with the youth in schools, colleges, universities, and educational institutions all over the world has given me the greatest joy ever. Youth is like a fresh flowing creek. They are vibrating with energy and every time I motivate them to the power of their positive mind and also the infinite power of their Inner spirit, they were overwhelmed with joy. Usually they have lots of questions and that is the interesting part of the seminars, it makes it so lively and experiential.

The feedback has always been very positive, as if they were waiting for such food for their mind and soul. It has helped them to mindfully explore the direction or the path of their own lives.

How can management education be enriched through Mindfulness trainings?

Management Schools are the training ground for the future leaders in every field of human endeavor. A true leader needs a holistic orientation of life. Mindfulness prepares the ground for the growth of consciousness that sharpens attention, and expands awareness to be more inclusive and integrated in life. Each of the business schools should have regular mindfulness training sessions, where students can participate in the discussion and practice of mindful breathing and meditate together to anchor themselves to their inner, inexhaustible reservoir of energy and intelligence.

The regular practice of mindfulness will calm them down and help them attain a better focus and clarity of mind. It will help them to be emotionally non-reactive, and develop the intuitive capacities of connecting to the higher forces in Nature. Then they will become

innovative leaders without suffering from the vanity and egocentric imbalance.

Mindfulness always gives birth to insights and wisdom. At a time when the brain is stuffed with so much information and knowledge, it is extremely important for the youth and budding leaders to have the ability to discern the ethical from the unethical, sacred from the profane, and only a wise person can do that. Wisdom grants the power of insight to discern greed from needs. Many of the iconic leaders in the world stage fall from grace due to the mindless acts of surrendering to the greed of the lower mind. Mindfulness practice generates that consciousness which always guides an individual to steer the course of life by being anchored in the Spirit Soul within.

It is essential that we realize that life flows inside out. It is essential that we practice the principles that are foundational to life. The youth all over the world are ready for this shift of consciousness. They are seeking and searching. Hence, it is the right time for each Management School all over the world to bring the Wisdom from the world of science and spirituality within the reach of the younger generation. Then they can become co-creators in the emergence of the new world in the making, where hate and violence will dissolve, competitiveness will give place to a complementary force, for the cohesive growth of humanity as a family. A world where each person will have enough to be happy, a world where the widening, painful gap between the rich and poor will be bridged, a world where no child will go to bed unfed, where the environment will be protected and peace will permeate the air in the space all around us.