

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

A Taste of Mindfulness

In order to get a picture of what mindfulness entails, let's begin with some direct experience. Throughout the book, I'll be suggesting exercises for you to try. For some of the more involved exercises, I will describe them in the text and also provide a soundtrack to guide you through them. (See the Resources page at the end of the book for instructions on how to download the soundtracks.) I really encourage you to take the time to do the exercises, using either the written instructions or the soundtrack. Understanding mindfulness can't happen solely on an intellectual level. Just as you can't learn to swim by only reading books about the mechanics of swimming, you must experience mindfulness in order to begin to understand what it is all about. Some of the exercises will be challenging. There is a delicate balance here. I encourage you to try to stick it out through the challenging parts while also keeping in mind that mindfulness is not about hurting yourself or causing yourself undue suffering. If an exercise is too intense or uncomfortable, stop. Open your eyes. Take a walk. Play with the dog. You might want to try coming back to that exercise later, but nothing is gained by forcing yourself to do something that is harmful.

Our first exercise in mindfulness will be to bring mindful attention to a regular activity of daily life, an activity that many of us often do while our attention is directed elsewhere.

Exercise—A Taste of Mindfulness: Eating a Grape

- Begin by picking one grape from the bunch. As you do, notice the feel of the bunch of grapes as you select and pick one of them. Notice the sensation of pulling the grape away from its stem.
- **TOUCH** Using your sense of touch, explore the grape. Notice its texture, its weight, and whatever sensations arise as you roll it in your hand. If you feel comfortable doing so, notice how it feels against your cheek, the back of your hand, your forehead, or other parts of

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the body. Take plenty of time to explore the grape with the sense of touch. As best you can, try to simply feel whatever sensations are there without labeling them in your mind.

- **SIGHT** Now, using your eyes, explore the grape in as much detail as you can. Look at the color of the grape. Is it all one color? What different colors are present? Look at the highlights and shadows, noticing how they transition one into the other and change as the grape rolls in your hand. Notice the shape of the grape. Notice whatever you can by using your sense of sight.
- **SMELL** See if there is any smell associated with the grape. As you hold the grape up to your nose, notice if there are any sensations in your mouth at the same time. Notice what thoughts you might be having.
- **MOVING** Now take the grape and move it to your mouth. As you do so, notice the sensations of movement in your arm and hand. Moving your arm slowly and deliberately may help in noticing. Notice the sensation in your fingers, the changing sensations in your arm as it moves. Rest the grape against your lips without putting it in your mouth just yet. Notice the sensations as you move it across your lips.
- **TASTE** Place the grape in your mouth but don't take a bite. Let it rest in your mouth and experience the sensations that arise as it does. Move it across your tongue, your cheek, the roof of your mouth. Notice both the grape and the sensations of movement.

Now, take just one bite of the grape. Notice whatever occurs. You might pay attention to taste, to texture, even to the sound of biting into the grape. Notice salivation. And notice how your mind reacts as you take only one bite.

Thoughtfully, chew the grape. Slow this process down more than you usually would. Notice how the flavor and texture change, if they do, as you chew. Notice how the tongue, teeth, and jaw work together in the chewing movement.

Now swallow the grape. Again, notice the physical sensations of swallowing. Is swallowing an event or a process? Notice when you know the grape has been swallowed.

- **REFLECTING** After you have swallowed the grape, sit quietly for a moment, reflecting on your experience. What was it like to bring your complete attention to eating one grape? What did you learn about eating and grapes and the reactions of your mind in the process? While it may seem odd to take this much time to eat a grape, imagine what it would be like to bring this same level of awareness to hugging your child, to talking with your partner, to listening to your client, to watching a lingering sunset, to making love.