

WTM RETREAT – EATING MEDITATION MARCH 18, 2017

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Mindfulness can be defined as **intentionally cultivating awareness of the present moment**. There are multiple objects that one can use as the anchor for attention. Let us explore how eating can be the focus for mindfulness.

How many people just eat and do nothing else? So often eating is something that is done while you are doing something you consider to be more important. We watch TV, read the newspaper or a book, check our emails or talk to someone else as we eat. As eating tends to be a stationary activity it makes it easier to do something else at the same moment.

How many times have you eaten a meal and never really tasted it?

“Eating is just an action we perform while we are doing something more interesting.” We are missing the opportunity to have delight in the present moment. That can be a very difficult thing to do as we are so conditioned and addicted to do something “better.” Eating is immediately associated with another activity.

With mindfulness we are trying to cultivate **AWE** in each moment. AWE is **Awareness With Engagement and Enquiry**.

The first component of AWE is engagement. One definition of engagement is “to attract and hold fast.” We want to bring **FOCUSED** and **SUSTAINED AWARENESS** to the present moment.

Normally when we are eating there is a brief knowing and staying with the experience. We take a bite of our food but are not really interested in how it tastes and all the associated factors that we will discuss. There is no lingering to savor the moment. We are putting our toe into the water but not totally immersing ourselves.

With **ENGAGEMENT** we are trying to bring a committed focused and sustained attention to the process of eating. One wants to be fully present to what the senses are presenting to you.

First if we are going to cultivate engagement of mindfulness of eating the easiest and most profound thing to do is just **eat and do nothing else**. What a novel idea! This forces us to attend to eating, which is the present moment.

Another approach is to deliberately **slow down** and put what you are eating down between each swallow. Put your utensils down between each bite as well.

One can also look at your watch and say that I cannot finish my meal before 15 or 30 minutes. Sometimes we inhale our food and it is finished in a flash. You need to slow the process down and appreciate what you are doing.

One can use a cycle of inhalation of exhalation of the breath as a timer to slow you down. Decide for yourself how many breaths you want to take for the act of chewing and swallowing each morsel.

Now that one has brought attention to a specific experience can you cultivate a way of looking that is curious and interested?

With the ENQUIRY of mindfulness there is an intentional active process of exploring what is present. What does intention, aversion, desire, taste etc. really feel like? How does one experience it in the senses, body or mind?

We can also reach out to what we are experiencing and deliberately look for specific properties. We may be interested only in how we are experiencing the present moment in our breath, body, thoughts or emotions.

Mindfulness has this amazing capacity of the "OBSERVER EFFECT." When we are really focused on what we are doing this impacts and changes what we are observing and our relationship to it. It seems to quiet down what we are experiencing, we are less identified with it and it extinguishes faster.

Can there be **continuity** of practice?

Bring awareness to all the **transition** movements and thoughts associated with eating. Can you be mindful of how you walk to the table, open your bag, take out your sandwich and prepare yourself to eat?

There are so many other things associated with eating.

Why are you eating? What is your relationship to food? Have you ever looked at the **intention** that is behind why you are eating? Are you eating because you are hungry, bored, is it just the time that people eat dinner, someone offers you food, you pass an ice cream shop and suddenly you have an urge to eat or is eating being performed to meet or fill an unmet need? Is eating a way to deal with some unresolved personal issue?

It can be helpful to explore your intention of why you are eating.

How does your mind and body **react to the food** even before you have placed it in your mouth?

Can you bring awareness to the **desire, aversion or indifference** as you start to eat and when you finish what you are eating? Wow. Tuna salad. How great. Or peanut butter and jam again!

When you have sat down at the table and are finally prepared to eat bring awareness to everything that is unfolding? What do you **choose** to eat first? Why?

Can you bring awareness to the **physical movements** of eating such as your arm reaching out, picking up a utensil, picking up the food, placing it in your mouth, the act of chewing, the act of swallowing and placing your hand down at your side? There are so many components to the process of eating that you can bring your attention to.

As you bring the food to your mouth pause. Observe and **look** carefully at the food? What do you see? What do you smell?

Can you observe what **tastes** arise as you eat? Where do you taste it? Does it change? Do they last? Linger and enjoy it.

What does your **mind say** about the food you have just eaten? Is this something that you enjoy? Do you want more? Do you want less? What is the commentary by the mind?

Are you distracted? Are your **thoughts off somewhere** else as you eat?

When you recognize that you are lost in thought can you practice mindfulness and bring yourself back to the present moment of eating without any judgment or criticism?

When do you say that you have had **enough**? What decides that? Are you full? Are you compelled to finish everything that is on your plate as you were taught as a child? Are you enjoying it and have a desire for more? Are you distracted and just eat mindlessly as your thoughts are off somewhere else? Does eating fulfill some unmet need?

When you are finished eating follow **the transitional physical movements** as you put away your lunch.

What are the thoughts that arise now that you are **finished** eating? Are you thinking of what happened earlier, planning for the future or in the present moment?

Have you ever wondered who or what is making all those decisions involved in the mechanical process of eating, the intention behind what you do and the commentary around eating?

This is a wonderful exercise in trying to develop being in the present moment and our relationship with the present moment.

We miss so many important moments during the day as we are just not aware. As soon as our minds are not anchored we go into a **default mode** that is a mind of planning, remembering, evaluating and judging.

The **only true moment that exists is the present moment**. Why not enjoy what is present rather than be lost in our multiple delusional thoughts?

One has the opportunity to bring mindfulness to everything that you do. One can be mindful without it just being sitting in a formal practice. Mindfulness can be practiced all day and eating provides a perfect opportunity to do this.