

Mindfulness: Having a Beginners Mind

The main tenet of being mindful is to pause and focus while viewing the world as a part-to-whole interconnected process. The consequence of not recognizing our mutual interdependence with nature and others can and has led to stress, which is linked to a compromised immune systems and other health threats. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk who helped popularize Mindfulness, urges us “to be fully alive, to be mindful you need a beginner’s mind,” or as Shunryu Suzuki asserts in his classic *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* (Shambhala Publications: New York, 1970,) “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s, there are few.” Through being at the beginning we have the opportunity to form an attitude that emphasizes strong confidence in our original nature. “If you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself.”

When I was a new teen driver, one of my father’s best friends was

Frank, the auto mechanic. He was a true Buddha with a shop downstream from the Great Falls in Paterson, New Jersey. Frank had the most serene smile I had ever seen. His face and hands were spotted with grease and his chaotic but organized shop along the river was full of practical meaning. He also was a handyman of sorts who always knew what tools and capabilities he had. One day I frantically drove my 1958 candy apple Chevy Bellaire to his shop when I heard a troublesome noise. Another mechanic gave me an estimate that was far more than the value of my beloved car. Frank was more interested in seeing how I was doing. We sat for what originally felt like a long while on a tree stump staring at the river’s flow. He smiled continually. When he eventually looked under the hood of my car, he embodied a sense of knowing how all things were interconnected and related. Me, my car, his garage and the river. He reached into his tool box pulled out some unrecognized items, tightened a few bolts, adjusted the fan belt and said “enjoy

yourself, no fee!” My car ran perfectly and I felt that I had learned a life’s lesson.

Nature works systemically. It manifests in ecological or holistic thinking which allows us to better understand not only how nature works, but how our own mind, body and environment functions. The alternative is to define our world as consisting of fragmented separate parts. This is seen in such situations as denial of global warming, or at times unneeded medical procedures. When we are mindful, using a beginner’s mind, we become creative and unstuck. When we don’t we are vulnerable to illness and other dysfunctions.

I am convinced after all my years as a psychotherapist and homeopath that most presenting symptoms are a consequence of being at odds with nature. You have everything to gain by pausing, widening your lens and seeing the many interconnections that are at our fingertips to resolve problems with a beginner’s mind. And most of all, not messing with “Mother Nature.”

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By Dr. Kenneth Silvestri

Psychotherapist and Certified Classical Homeopath in private practice in Montclair, NJ and Nyack, NY; Contact 973-214-0540, drkennethsilvestri.com, or drkennethsilvestri@gmail.com