



The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom
Volume 5,1 (1/2011)

Connecting the Dots Between Neuropsychology and Positive Parenting

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My young granddaughters and I had a picnic at the local botanical garden where we took turns being the troll as we played Billy Goats Gruff at the bridge. It was a sunny, relaxing, fun day.

Later, as we headed back home, four-year-old Alexa tripped and fell. She screamed at the top of her lungs, despite my attempts to calm her. The advice of child psychiatrist Dr. Bruce Perry¹ came to mind: “To calm a frightened child, you must first calm yourself.”

With this in mind, I took several deep breaths and assessed the injuries of this frightened child: a little blood above her elbow and some near the tip of her finger.

Arousal Continuum

I recalled Dr. Bruce Perry’s “Arousal Continuum.”² When we are exposed to trauma, we move along a scale from Calm to Alert, and then to Alarm, Fear, and Terror. Alexa had bolted from the “rest and digest” Calm (parasympathetic nervous system) part of the brain to the “fight-or-flight” Terror (sympathetic nervous system/amygdala) part of

the brain at lightning speed. I needed to help her de-escalate and regain a sense of calm and equanimity. I soothed her as she screamed, “I want my mommy!” With her arms around my neck and legs around my waist we trudged up the hill to my home. “I want my mommy!” she yelled. I hoped the neighbors wouldn’t call the police!

My reminders to use her “indoor voice” worked until we were inside my condo. There she screamed again, especially as I cleaned and dressed the wounds. We then sat on the floor and I held her in my arms. Suddenly, she looked at her finger in amazement, looked at me, and declared, “It doesn’t hurt anymore!” A timely call from mom helped her fully deescalate. The storm had passed. She took a deep breath and was ready to play.

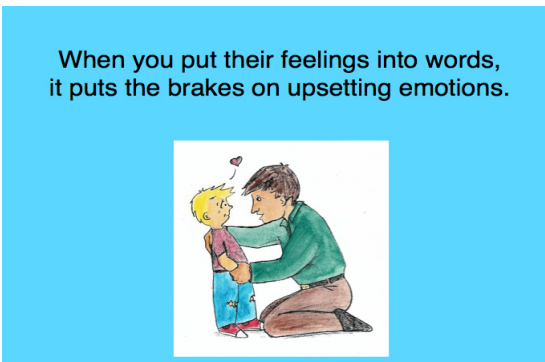
Parents can help de-escalate their children’s powerful emotions, as well as recover from trauma. Here’s another example: As I was biking down Vail Pass in Colorado—14 miles downhill—I downshifted to negotiate a turn. Suddenly I heard a piercing scream. A girl had flipped off her bike ahead of me. I stopped to try to help. Her mother soon arrived at the scene. Calmly she examined the wound. “Honey,” she said, “it’s road

1. Dr. Bruce Perry, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*

2. Ibid.

rash.” Instantly the screaming stopped as the girl processed her mother’s words.

This story illustrates what I teach in my presentations: *Putting a child’s feelings into words puts the brakes on their upsetting emotions.*



Emotions are contagious. When parents “catch” the child’s distressful emotions—Alarm, Fear, Terror—it makes matters worse. When the adult’s amygdala is triggered, she becomes less capable of dealing with the problem.

Instead, calm yourself first. Then breathe deeply in order to put the brakes on the amygdala and

engage the neocortex. Then you are then better equipped to calm and comfort the upset child and deal with the situation.

Hard-wired for Connection

Humans are hard-wired for connection to other humans. We are programmed to want to belong to something bigger such as family. Parent-child connectedness is the “super-protective factor.” In other words, nothing has more power to protect children from harm than one’s family.

Positive families can prevent anxiety disorders, depression, teen pregnancy, alcohol, drug abuse, and suicide. They can curb the epidemic of narcissism by helping children move through the “it’s all about me” stage to the “we/us” stage.

For generations the connection was reinforced when families ate meals together. Yet now, unfortunately, fewer than half of Americans eat daily meals with their family units. Mountains of research indicate that dinner together at least three times a week is the most important ritual a family can adopt. It has powerful benefits: kids have a greater sense of well-being and they take part in fewer risky behaviors. Eating meals together has further enormous benefits:

- It strengthens relationships and boosts family cohesiveness
- Everyone learns to get along
- It encourages brain development, especially development of language skills and emotional intelligence
- It improves eating habits
- Children have higher academic performance

Greetings

The Wise Brain Bulletin offers skillful means from brain science and contemplative practice – to nurture your brain for the benefit of yourself and everyone you touch.

The Bulletin is offered freely, and you are welcome to share it with others. Past issues are posted at <http://www.wisebrain.org/tools-and-skills/wise-brain-bulletin>

Rick Hanson, PhD edits the Bulletin, and it’s designed and laid out by the managing editor, [Michelle Keane](#).

To subscribe, please contact Rick at drh@comcast.net.

Psychiatrist and author Dr. Thomas Lewis³ states: “Anything that promotes emotional connection has a healing effect on the brain and nervous system.” And when the brain is whole and cared for, we can respond to situations more with reason and logic than with pure impulse.

The Brain

The recent explosion of brain research can help parents improve their relationships with their children. When moms and dads (and other caregivers) understand the very different functions of the brain, they can be more understanding, compassionate, and effective.

The **amygdala**, from an evolutionary perspective, helped humans keep a lookout for dangerous tigers. The amygdala (also known as the primitive Lizard Brain) is hardwired to focus on negative information and react intensely to it. It constantly worries, “Am I safe?” while always looking out for danger.

Fear is the most primal emotion. When triggered, the irrational, emotional brain floods our bodies with hormones and chemicals that compel us to fight, flee, or freeze. In the face of danger, we may be unable to think straight—quite literally “out of our minds.” A red alert packs a wallop and hijacks the Thinking Brain.

“Moment to moment, the amygdala spotlights what’s relevant and important to you: what’s pleasant and unpleasant, what’s an opportunity and what’s a threat. It also shapes and shades your perceptions, appraisals of situations, attributions of intentions to others, and judgments. It exerts these influences largely outside of your awareness, which increases their power since they operate out

of sight.”⁴

The **neocortex** (common to all mammals) serves as the center of higher mental functions for

The Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom

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humans. When parents engage with children, read to them, teach them, and play with them, they are enhancing brain development. Youngsters then learn social and emotional skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

“Brain development is use-dependent: you use it or you lose it. If we don’t give children time to learn how to be with others, to connect, to deal with conflict and to negotiate complex social hierarchies, the areas of their brains will be underdeveloped.”⁵

Mindfulness meditation, therapy, and other practices can help tamp down the revved-up amygdala and keep it from hijacking the Thinking Brain.

If parents understand that the source of irrational explosive outbursts in young children is the Lizard Brain hijacking the Thinking Brain, it helps them to respond with compassion, comfort, and reason instead of reacting with anger.

3. Dr. Thomas Lewis, *A General Theory of Love*

4. Rick Hanson, Ph.D., *Buddha’s Brain*

5. Dr. Bruce Perry, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, page 239

The leadership style of parents influences the activity and reactivity of the amygdala. Democratic / Authoritative parents proactively engage the neocortex with teaching, as well as comforting the agitated amygdala when

necessary. Autocratic parents who use threats and punishment to control children, and permissive parents who are disengaged or absent, easily slide into reactivity. Unaware, they can provoke a volley of reactions that activate the amygdala without having the knowledge or tools to put on the brakes.

The Brain Tilts to Fear and Negativity

According to Dr. Rick Hanson, when not in pain, hungry, upset, or chemically disturbed, people usually default to The Five C's: Conscious, Calm, Contented, Caring, and Creative. However, as humans evolved, they developed the capacity to be easily driven from that 5-C home base by tigers, "paper tigers," other threats, and bad news.⁶

As a result our brains have a "negativity bias," which is like Velcro for the bad stuff and Teflon for the good stuff. In other words, the brain is tilted toward survival and fear, and tilted against happiness.

"Given the negativity bias of the brain {and culture}, it takes an active effort to internalize positive experiences and heal negative ones. When you tilt toward what's positive, you're actually righting a neurological imbalance. And

6. Ibid. #2

you're giving yourself today the caring and encouragement you should have received as a child, but perhaps didn't get in full measure."⁷

Just to level the playing field, therefore, we must tilt *toward* being positive to ourselves and to our family, toward good feelings and good experiences. "We need to help ourselves see the world clearly, not ignoring the actual threats that are out there, but waking up from the paranoid trance that thinks it's always Threat Level Orange."⁸ In other words, we need to accentuate the positive.

Positive parents may not understand this evolution of the brain, but they commit to uplift themselves and their children. Instead of focusing on what's wrong, they catch their children being good. They help them notice their successes and celebrate them. The dinner conversation—"So, how was your day?"—focuses on the good stuff, while also acknowledging and addressing the bad stuff when necessary. Comments such as, "What are you grateful for?" engage the whole family in self-esteem enhancing connections.

We have to counter the negative tilt of the brain, the media, and the culture with positive attitudes and positive words. Encouragement, caring, and support are essential for balancing out the negative and creating a happy and healthy life. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson⁹ states: "Positive experiences can

7. Ibid. #2

8. Interview of Rick Hanson on Bookmarkd

9. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*

also be used to soothe, balance, and even replace negative ones.”

One way to expand positive feelings is to post pictures of vacations and other fun experiences on the refrigerator. They can stir up happy memories of events long after and help members savor the family connections.

Good feelings increase the likelihood of other good feelings, so much so that good days can be the standard—expected and experienced. Positive feelings have far-reaching effects. They increase optimism, resourcefulness, and resilience, and they can counter pain and trauma. When bad days happen, they are dealt with and resolved, so life can return to the positive.

The Brain as Historian

The brain is our personal “historian.” It downloads everything, especially our experiences during the first five years of life. A baby asks, “Am I safe?” “Are my needs met?” “Can I trust?” Keen observers, they take in everything that happens to them. When their needs are met, they are calm and comfortable. When their needs are not met, they are distressed and they cry. Their trust is shaken. For better or worse, everything is recorded.

“When things go right early on, they will tend to continue to go right and even to self-correct if there are minor problems. But when they go wrong at first, they will tend to continue to go wrong.”¹⁰

Children learn about themselves by how they are treated. When parents find the good in children and reflect that, children discover the goodness in themselves. They see themselves as good

10. Dr. Bruce Perry, *ibid*.

kids. When children are treated with respect, understanding, and compassion, their self-esteem benefits and they tend to repeat those behaviors. Gandhi commanded, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”¹¹ This is true both in families and in the rest of the world.

The brain is also the social organ of the body and the primary organ for directing one’s quality of life.

Brain Development and Parenting

Parents more than anyone else have the power to shape children’s lives. The first five years are criti-

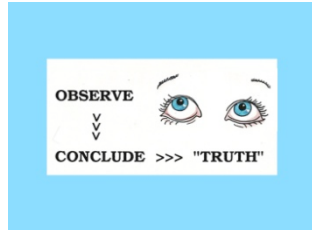


cal for brain development, especially for emotional and language development. The day-to-day interactions between parent and child shape the child’s brain.

Love, positive attitudes, and positive actions

11. Mahatma Gandhi

shape the brain positively. Fear shapes the brain negatively. Children whose needs are not met, or who experience early neglect or abuse, are more likely to become aggressive. The root cause of bullying and other problems, therefore, may be harsh and punishing families.



Everything is observed and recorded. Children take it all in and conclude, “I can trust...” or “I cannot trust.” “I’m okay”, or “I’m not okay.” Their conclusions become their “Truth,” their beliefs about themselves and the world.

When children experience love, comfort, attention and positive care, they conclude that they are loved and the world is a friendly place.

When children experience neglect, harshness, and pain, they conclude that they are not safe and they cannot trust. They feel distress and fear. The cumulative experiences, especially during the early years, shape the development of the child’s brain.



The Keys to Positive Parenting —Comfort, Teach, and Play¹²

1. **Comfort.** Children need their parents and caregivers to be there for them, to meet their needs, to have empathy and compassion, to calm them when distressed. Comfort helps them feel loved, valued, and secure. Attention and affection soothe and reassure the child. Basic for feeling connected, comfort soothes and reassures and calms the amygdala.
2. **Teach.** Parents and other adults teach children in two ways. They explain, instruct, educate, coach, and read to children about values and appropriate behavior, about nature and about life. The neocortex—the Thinking Brain—engages and develops positively. The other way children learn is through modeling their elders. They learn 90-95% by copying how their elders think, get along with others, and solve problems. What they see is what they do. “Children follow our example, but we have got to set it,” says Michelle Obama,¹³
3. **Play.** When moms and dads actively play with their children, everyone benefits at many levels. Parents are the most important people in their child’s world, and the best toy the child has. Kids are the best toys the adults have. Through playing together (especially outdoors in nature) they explore and discover the world, and their role in it. Fun and silliness reduce stress, strengthen bonds, and bring happiness into family life.

12. Comfort, Play & Teach, a registered Trademark of Invest in Kids, Canada

13. Michelle Obama, interviewed on the Ellen DeGeneres Show

When you comfort, play with, and teach your child, you establish the foundation for lifelong positive and respectful relationships with your children. Children and parents are continually learning and growing individually and together. These are characteristics of positive parents who use the democratic leadership style.

As adults we have the brain that was shaped by our history. If we were raised with deficits and dysfunction, we are not doomed. Although patterns tend to repeat over generations, and we tend to become like our parents, brain research reveals good news.



Plasticity Enables Transformation

Positive parents understand that their own early experiences are a blueprint for their lives. This awareness often sparks the resolve to do better for their children. They commit to changing the negative patterns of their childhood so that they don't inflict damage onto their beloved children. When parents learn new skills, they can actually heal themselves in the process of creating a healthier family.

In order to do this, we must make the connection to our own childhoods—to the events that have shaped our lives. When we honestly assess and evaluate these events, we are empowered to do better for our children. This process starts with good intentions, but good intentions are not enough. We need to learn from old mistakes—both our own and those of our parents—and refuse to repeat them. *Repeat the positive; repair the negative.* Plasticity of the brain makes it possible to not pass on disorders and dysfunction from one generation to the next.

We can “get over” negative patterns, “change our minds,” re-train our brain, and transform our family life. Instead of repeating the mistakes—our own and those of our parents—we can repair them. Changing family patterns is heroic work. It takes vision, dedication, and hard work. And there is a tremendous payoff for yourself, your children, and even your grandchildren. “The more we heal ourselves, the less our children will have to heal themselves,” states Michael Brown in *The Presence Process*.

The plasticity of the brain reveals that *you can teach an old dog new tricks—if the dog really wants to learn*. When you change your mind and thoughts, you engage the plasticity function and literally change your brain. This is great news for parents who want to learn “new tricks” and better ways to raise their children. Stated simply by Paolo Coelho,¹⁴ “Changing the way you do routine things allows a new person to grow inside of you.”

Skilled, tranquil, positive parents enhance brain development, character development, and mental health in children, thereby nurturing their intellectual, emotional and social development.

When parents understand the Lizard Brain's

¹⁴. Paolo Coelho, *The Pilgrimage*

tendency to resort to panic, fear, and irrationality, they can take steps to not flip out with stress, and to comfort and calm the irrational outbursts of kids. The more we develop and cultivate the Thinking Brain in both ourselves and their children—while calming and comforting the Lizard Brain when it intrudes—the better our relationships will be.

Be on Your Own Side

We live in a bewildering culture during stressful times. Many parents are stretched, stressed, and under-supported. Being off-balance feels unpleasant; it tries to get our attention with subtle discomfort; or commands our attention with alarm, panic, or disease. The craving to rebalance is “a call to restore equilibrium before things slide too far and too fast down the slippery slope.”¹⁵

Here are a few ways to calm the mind and body and soothe stress and agitation.

- Deep, full, slow inhalations are a good place to start.
- Hugs can help. My young son described it well: “Emotional CPR: One hug. One deep breath. Repeat.”
- Recall being with a beloved friend. It can help re-balance an upsetting experience.
- Be on your own side. Be your own best friend, loving and supporting and nurturing yourself. Take good care of yourself. Your life is in your hands.

“Transformation introduces infinite possibilities for joy, adventure, love, and delight which bring lightness and continual renewal to the soul. Life itself becomes its own reward.”¹⁶

Louise Hart has an Ed.D. in the prevention-based field of Community Psychology. As a young mother she was determined to not pass on her own harsh, fear-based upbringing to her three children. She studied healthy family systems in graduate school and devotes her career to enhancing parents’ ability to raise healthy children and have fun in the process.

Louise is the author of *The Winning Family: Increasing Self-Esteem in Your Children and Yourself* and *On the Wings of Self-Esteem*. A thought leader in positive parenting and social and emotional learning, she spoke at over 400 venues, including many Army bases from West Point to Pearl Harbor, and from Germany to Japan.

Learn more about her work at <http://www.upliftprograms.com>.



15. Ibid. #9

16. Dr. Louise Hart, *On the Wings of Self-Esteem*

Be Simple and Easy, Just Rest in Awareness

Excerpted from *Living This Life Fully* by Mirka Knaster, (c) 2010. Published by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston.

Introduction

Anagarika Munindra, a Bengali Buddhist meditation master and Pali scholar, was an illustration of what neuroscientists are now able to confirm through sophisticated technology: By training the mind, one can change the brain so that positive emotions become enduring character traits, rather than just occasional states. He was one of those rare individuals who demonstrate seamless integration, rather than conflicted separation, between daily life and spiritual practice. Through his attitudes and behavior, he held out the potential of what is attainable: to be at home in this body, in this place, in this time, under these conditions; happy and at peace with oneself and in harmony with others.

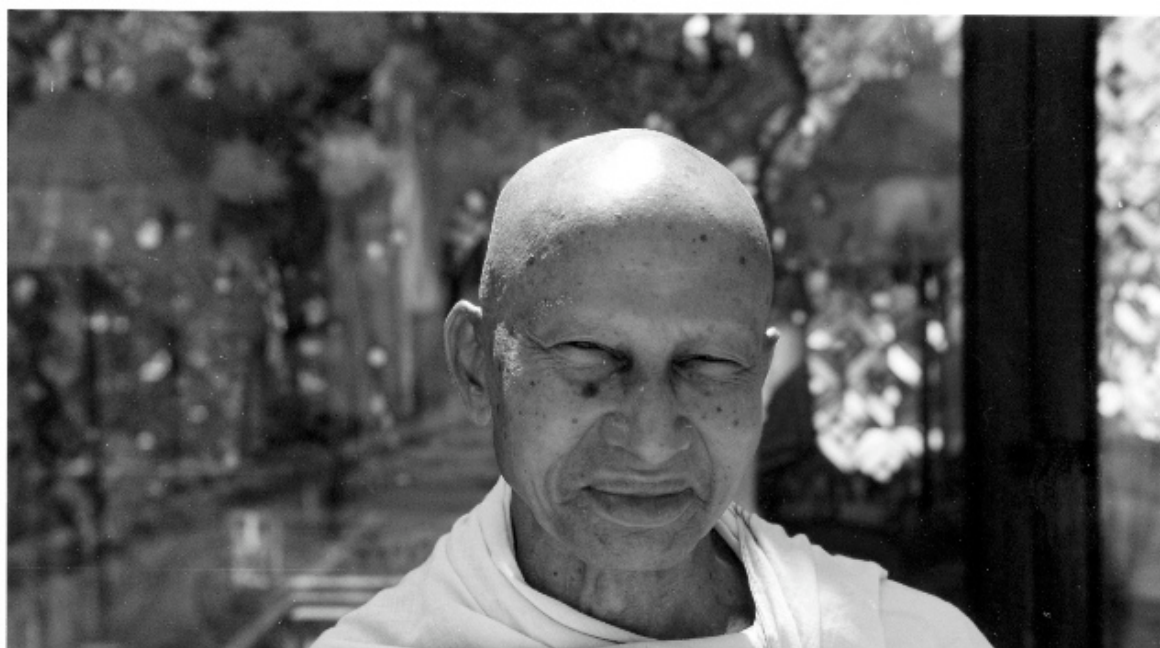
A grandfather of the mindfulness movement, Munindra inspired such notable Western teachers as Daniel Goleman, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, Ram Dass, Lama Surya Das, Sylvia Boorstein, Larry Rosenberg, and many others worldwide in psychology, education, law, and health care. The following excerpt highlights one of the qualities he embodied, a quality manifested by a “wise brain”: equanimity. It results from understanding the nature of reality and steadying the mind so we can respond to life’s challenges in a balanced way, neither soaring too high nor falling too low.

When mindfulness is there, all the beautiful qualities are nearby.

—Munindra

For Munindra, the practice of mindfulness was not a mystical state but a mundane act that anyone could and should do in any moment. He emphasized:

Everything is meditation in this practice, even while eating, drinking, dressing, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking. Whatever you are doing,



everything should be done mindfully, dynamically, with totality, completeness, thoroughness. Then it becomes meaningful, purposeful. It is not thinking, but experiencing from moment to moment, living from moment to moment, without clinging, without condemning, without judging, without evaluating, without comparing, without selecting, without criticizing—choiceless awareness...It is a way of living. It should be integrated with our whole life. It is actually an education in how to see, how to hear, how to smell, how to eat, how to drink, how to walk with full awareness.

For many students, Munindra's best teachings took place outside the meditation hall. "One of the nice things about him was he was just very ordinary in how he taught you," says Daniel Goleman. "You would walk into the bazaar with him and go to the post office. He was the epitome of mindfulness all the time."

"He was always pointing out details," says Akasa Levi. "'Notice how the lemons are stacked. See how the vendor does that, where he puts the bad ones and keeps the ripe ones.' We'd be walking along, and my mind would be running, and he would say, 'Oh, look! See the little flower!' He would bend to look at it and say, 'See, it grows like this.' He would lightly touch it, taking me out of my head and back to the earth, back to what was right there. You could say he distracted me back to the present moment. He was very good and very soft with that. Munindra would say, 'Pay attention. Be mindful of all the details.' He would stick the word mindfully into just about every other sentence he uttered."

Mind and Mindfulness

"Mind and mindfulness are two different things," Munindra used to explain.

Mind by nature has no color. When it is colored with greed, we call it "greedy mind." When anger arises, at that moment, it is called "angry man" or "angry mind." If there is no mindfulness, mind is influenced by this anger. Anger has the nature to pollute the mind; it creates poison. But mind is not anger; anger is not mind. Mind is not greed; greed is not mind. Please remember this. Mind has no nature of liking or disliking. "Mind" means "knowing faculty," "cognizing faculty."



Munindra would then describe mindfulness:

Mindfulness is a different thing: alertness, awareness, remembering, heedfulness. It means not to forget, just to be aware, to be mindful of what is going on. When you are asked to walk on a [narrow] one-bamboo bridge over the river, you have to be so careful on every step. Once you forget, there is every possibility of falling down. If you

lose your mindfulness, you will hurt yourself or kill yourself. So, in reality, mindfulness means not to forget what is going on at the present moment—in thought, in word, in deed.

Munindra noted that though the mind is “always there, always working,” we are not always mindful. He said, “Many times you will see that mind is not with you, you are not with the mind. Mind is somewhere else, thinking something else, while

[the] eating process is going on mechanically, unmindfully.” According to Munindra, there is only one way to conduct all activities—with moment-to-moment awareness.

The Benefits of Mindfulness

Jack Kornfield states, “Munindra didn’t divide life from meditation.” And that is why he was such a vital model for people East and West.

Kamala Masters greatly benefited from Munindra’s approach to mindfulness in everyday life. When she was a young mother struggling to raise three children, her time was limited, but Munindra did not let her family circumstances be an obstacle to practicing mindfulness. When he found out that she spent a lot of time washing dishes, he immediately seized the opportunity

to teach her mindfulness at the kitchen sink. He instructed her to have a general awareness of washing the dishes: the movement of her hands, the warmth or coolness of the water, picking a dish up, soaping it, rinsing it, putting it down. “Nothing else is happening now—just washing the dishes,” he said. Then he told her to experience her

posture. He did not insist on her moving slowly or observing every detail of every moment. Instead, she was to exercise general mindfulness of whatever was occurring as she cleaned the dishes.

Standing next to her, Munindra would occasionally inquire, “What’s happening

now?” When she replied, “I’m worried about paying the mortgage,” he would suggest, “Just notice ‘worried,’ and bring your attention back to washing the dishes.” When she told him, “I’m planning what to cook for dinner,” he repeated, “Just notice ‘planning,’ because that’s what is in the present moment, and then return to just washing the dishes.”

...By practicing diligently, she soon realized its advantages. “Doing this ordinary task with intentional mindfulness has helped me to notice and experience many things more clearly,” says Kamala. “The changing physical sensations, the flow of thoughts and emotions, and my surrounding environment are all much more alive. This practice helped collect my mind so that it was not so scattered. It has required me to develop more perseverance, patience, humility, clear



intention, and honesty with myself. These are no small things. Just from washing the dishes! The resulting enjoyment of being more fully present with life is a rare treasure in this world.”

Instructing Kamala in how to wash dishes mindfully was only one part of the training. Munindra also noticed that she passed through the hallway from her bedroom to the living room many times each day, so he suggested it as an ideal place for mindful walking. From the threshold of her bedroom door, he directed, “Every time you step into this hallway, see if you can use the time as an opportunity to be present with the simple fact of walking. Just walking. Not thinking about your mother or about the children . . . just experiencing the body walking. It might help you to make a silent mental notation of every step. With each step, very quietly in your mind you can note, ‘stepping, stepping, stepping.’ This will help you keep your attention connected to your intention of ‘just walking.’ If the mind wanders to something else, as soon as you notice that it has wandered, make the silent mental note, ‘wandering mind.’ Do this without judging, condemning, or criticizing. In a simple and easy way, bring your attention back to just the walking. Your practice in this hallway will be a wonderful training for you. It will also benefit those around you because you will feel more refreshed.”

Kamala recalls that it did not seem like much...but every day as she walked back and forth through that hallway on her way to do something, she had a few moments of clear presence of mind—unhurried, unworried, at ease with life for those precious ten steps. And she extended mindfulness practice to all the household chores—washing clothes, ironing, wiping counters.



For Maggie Ward McGervey, mindfulness has led to a greater appreciation for the body and the mind: “Munindra spent a lot of time focusing on the senses, whether it was noticing a tickling sensation on your hand, or the feeling in your throat. It grounded me in my body in a way that was really important. I can still remember how he would coach us to simply notice and label the thoughts and sensations that came up for us during meditation. He would repeat the labels twice: ‘thinking, thinking’ or ‘itching, itching.’ He would say, ‘Just watch the sensation.’ That’s fused into me now. If I feel panicky because I’m late for something or feel annoyed, then I can simply go back and realize that it’s just a thought. It affects my life a lot less. If I stub my toe and feel the pain, I immediately go to realizing that it’s just nerves and sensation. I can cut out the ripple effect of the anger and frustration and see the emptiness of it.”

Munindra explained how this works:

Unpleasant feelings are most prominent to us because, when we experience pleasant feelings, we don’t mind. But when we experience the unpleasant feeling, we don’t like it and we condemn. We have to observe it. We have to penetrate it. We have to understand it. When you keep the mind there, then you will see that it is not static;

it is a process, and afterward, it disappears. But don't expect it to come or to go. If you expect, then you have to be aware of the expecting mind. Not clinging, not condemning, not hoping. Whatever comes up, see the thing as it is, at this moment, without liking or disliking. If you like it, you feed it with greed; if you dislike it, you feed it with hatred. Both ways, the mind is unbalanced, unhealthy, unsound. [The] object itself is neither good nor bad. It is our mind which attributes the color—it is good or it is bad. We are influenced by that and then reaction comes. Be gentle with everything that comes up. Keep the mind in a balanced state. Be fully alert.

Kamala Masters once asked him whether he got angry. He told her,

Yes, anger comes, but there is a sign, a signal. There is a feeling; it's uncomfortable. So when there is that sign, do not let it [anger] come out of your mouth, do not let it go into your actions. You just let it pass. Be mindful—watch it, [noting to yourself,] “anger, anger, anger.”

Munindra also made clear that anger is not an unchanging block of emotion. Caitriona Reed paraphrases his advice to someone who talked about repeatedly getting angry: “Notice the anger, and notice it's not the same anger. You say you keep getting angry, but just notice carefully and you'll see that every time it's a different anger.”

Another gain derived from mindfulness is having more energy available because attention is not divided. According to Gregg Galbraith, when Munindra was involved in something, he was fully into it: “When Munindra was eating, his attention would be totally with that. When he was talking, he would talk. But you didn't really see him spreading his attention to a lot of different things. He had this quality of just being there in the moment. If you were going to buy him a ticket to travel to Europe, he would get very engaged in it: ‘What's it cost? Where do you stop? How long will it be?’ He wanted to know every little detail. And when it was done, he would put it out of his mind.”

Gregg once asked Munindra, “How can you always be in the moment when there are things to take care of in the world? You have to think of the future. If you're going to go to a school, you've got to enroll and do this and that.” Munindra told him that you simply do whatever it is—plan a trip, eat dinner—but once you are finished, you do not spend time thinking about it. You go on to the next thing.



Just Remember This

Munindra's simple instructions still have the power to support his students. Erica Falkenstein remarks, "In times of stress, I always hear Munindra-ji saying, 'Moment to moment,' and it helps me focus." What prompts Oren Sofer is recalling Munindra's words after his talks: "Just remember this—everything should be done mindfully."

For Munindra, mindfulness illuminated a clear direction for building the future:

In every moment—sometimes happiness, sometimes unhappiness, sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes disturbed, sometimes concentrated—one's duty is just to be mindful, not to be stuck to any phenomena, and not to react...always to be mindful and equanimous. Awareness and equanimity, these two factors go together.

In this moment, depending on how you respond, you can create a different future—one of happiness. That future will eventually become this present moment. And this present moment will become the past. In this way, it is possible for your life to be surrounded by more happiness, in the past, the present, and the future...If you are mindful, you can choose how to respond. If you are not mindful, your life is run by reactivity. It's up to you.

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Words of Wisdom

Where there is love there is life.

Indira Gandhi

*While we try to teach our children all about life, our
children teach us what life is all about.*

Anon

Children learn to smile from their parents.

Shinichi Suzuki

*Children will not remember you for the material things
you provided but for the feeling that you cherished them.*

Richard L. Evans

*The child must know that he is a miracle, that since the
beginning of the world there hasn't been, and until the
end of the world there will not be, another child like
him.*

Pablo Casals

*In family life, love is the oil that eases friction, the
cement that binds closer together, and the music that
brings harmony.*

Eva Burrows

The family is one of nature's masterpieces.

George Santayana

*No matter what you've done for yourself or for
humanity, if you can't look back on having given love
and attention to your own family, what have you really
accomplished?*

Elbert Hubbard

*Just because somebody doesn't love you the way you want
them to doesn't mean they don't love you with everything
they got.*

Anon

Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky.

Conscious breathing is my anchor.

Thich Nhat Hanh

*The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most
fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain
ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to
look at ourselves honestly and gently.*

Pema Chödrön

*Each place is the right place--the place where I now am
can be a sacred space.*

Ravi Ravindra

*Like a child standing in a beautiful park with his eyes
shut tight, there's no need to imagine trees, flowers, deer,
birds, and sky; we merely need to open our eyes and
realize what is already here, who we already are - as
soon as we stop pretending we're small or unholy.*

Bo Lozoff

*A bird cried jubilation. In that moment they lived long.
All minor motions were stilled and only the great ones
were perceived. Beneath them the earth turned, singing.*

Sheri S. Tepper

Fare Well

May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.