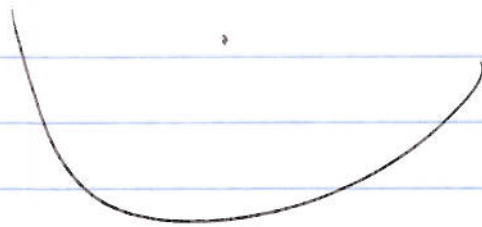


# MyQuest

Here is a Portion of the Welcoming Packet I created for Mindful Living, a group I started here at old colony.

Please read it and let me know what you think

Happy Questing to you all!



## MINDFUL LIVING

Mindful Living is a group designed to bring incarcerated people together so they can help each other meet the challenges of prison-life in a fulfilling way. We may be incarcerated but that does not make us powerless. Our lives and our personal and spiritual development are still in our hands; no person, system, or authority can take that from us. Believe it or not, we can lead meaningful and fulfilling lives that make a difference. We can learn ways to enjoy life while we meet the challenges of this environment. It is up to us to claim responsibility for our experience of life, and we can do that by using the power of mindfulness and our freedom to choose.

What is the freedom to choose? Viktor Frankl (survivor of a Nazi death-camp) once wrote: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

We are always free to choose how we respond to any situation. We always have the choice to respond in a way that reflects the best of who we are, and no one can take that freedom from us. Through these choices we create our own experience of life. When we use our freedom to choose we are no longer the victim's of an unjust system or an unfair life; rather, we become empowered co-creators of our own destinies.

Never underestimate the power of our freedom to choose: it creates our experience more than any environment or circumstance ever could.

As powerful as our freedom to choose is it is useless if we don't remember to use it. This is where mindfulness comes in. It is when we are mindful when we are able to break the bonds of habit and make new, empowering decisions.

In Mindful Living we will explore Buddhist principle, spiritual life-skills, and relevant psychology to find ways we can lead more rewarding and meaningful lives while incarcerated. Mindful Living is open to anyone with a sincere desire to improve his life. All religious backgrounds are welcome. Mindful Living is an open



community based on respect, tolerance, and the sincere desire to improve one's life.

We invite you to join us in reclaiming our lives no matter what the circumstances are. Life is a Quest, and by no means does being incarcerated have to stop us from living out that Quest. In fact, it is in trying times that we find the greatest opportunity for personal growth. So come to learn, come to meet positive people, but most of all, come to give your best in achieving your personal and spiritual goals.

#### KEY PRINCIPLES OF MINDFUL LIVING

Mindfulness - is the state of being aware of yourself and your environment in the present moment. When being mindful we focus our attention on what is happening in this ever-present now. In this way we empower ourselves to lead more purposeful, peaceful, and rewarding lives. Most people live in a state of dissociation, continuously absorbed in distracting thoughts that dull their awareness. In such a state we don't live our lives, our lives live us. We are condemned to carrying out conditioned reactions as if we were controlled by an auto-pilot program - which isn't far from the truth. Mindfulness is the key to breaking out of this dissociated state because only when we are mindful can we choose a response that isn't dictated by our conditioning. We must be aware and present-minded if we hope to make purposeful decisions. Mindfulness is the key to change.

Not only does mindfulness empower us to make authentic decisions that reflect our goals, but mindfulness brings vibrancy back into our lives. When mindful we feel more energetic, colors seem brighter, and sounds seem sharper. We feel more...alive. A mindful way of life is often more peaceful, thoughtful, and enjoyable. This may explain why it is the cornerstone of so many spiritual practices.

Personal Responsibility - It's true that life can often seem unfair, that people sometimes treat us badly, and that tragedies will befall us, but this fact by no means diminishes our need to take full responsibility for our lives. A core principle of Buddhism is that we are fully responsible for everything that happens to us and

for the quality of our lives. Many people often buy into an attitude of blame and victimhood. We often hear people say, "I can't lead a better life because....", or "My life is miserable because....", and finish those statements by blaming childhood experiences, authorities, or economic status for why their lives aren't the way they would like them to be. And you know what? They aren't exactly wrong but they aren't right, either. It may be true that unfair events or circumstances have caused us a lot of pain, but as long as we choose to blame those things - things not within our control - for the quality of our lives, we guarantee ourselves more pain. Only when we choose to take full responsibility for our lives - as unfair as that may seem - can we begin to change our experience. We only have the power to change those things we are responsible for, and if we choose to give away our responsibility by blaming outside forces, then we are choosing to hand over our greatest power. That's the real tragedy.

Become responsibility addicts, and claim responsibility for every aspect of your lives. In this way we empower ourselves to lead the kind of life we desire. It is up to us to create the experience of life we want. This is a hard step for many people to take whether they are in prison or living in the outside community. Some people find a sort of comfort in being able to blame all their problems on outside sources, this way they don't have to try. Afterall, it's out of their hands, life has dealt them a raw deal. Such an outlook only guarantees more of the same.

Take a stand, and reclaim your life by taking full responsibility for it today!

The creative use of our freedom to choose - Many people overlook the awesome, divine-like power that is inherent in our ability to choose freely. What's so special about our freedom to choose? Well check this out. This freedom is so powerful that it creates our experience of life even more than the circumstances and events of our lives do. This fact is little known among most people. It is a common assumption that the things that happen to us and the circumstances we are in are the biggest factors in creating our experience of life. This misunderstanding is the cause of the



greater portion of most people's suffering. This false belief causes many people to relinquish their greatest power when they are facing difficulties - the times they need it the most - virtually assuring their failure. Here's an example:

Two men come to the same prison, and they share similar sentences as well as life situations like family and finances. Both men are the same age. One man, we'll call him John, is miserable. Everyday he argues with administration, grumbles about how terrible his life is, and wastes his time by getting caught up in all the prison drama. The other guy, we'll call him Mike. hates being in prison too. But he decides that there isn't anything he can do about it, so he might as well use his time to his advantage. He gets involved with programs, is educating himself, and he tries to help out the guys around him. He feels like he is useful and has direction. Although he doesn't like prison, he isn't miserable and finds value in his daily experiences.

Now if you were to ask John why he was so miserable he would likely tell you how the prison sucks, how badly he is treated, and that he should be miserable, after all, he's in prison, right? But Mike is having a totally different experience even though he shares the same circumstances as John does. The reason for this is that how we choose to respond to circumstances creates our experience more than the circumstances themselves do. Of course circumstances do affect us, but how we choose to respond affects us in a far more impactful way. This is great news because we have little control over circumstances that are already happening, but we have full control over how we choose to respond. This means that we are the main contributors to our experience of life - not circumstances or events. That's awesome!

It is essential that we claim responsibility for our freedom to choose. If we are willing to open our minds and be creative we can create a deeply meaningful and rewarding experience of life no matter what the circumstances are.

Remember this: You are always free to choose a response that reflects your goals and values, that reflects the best of who you are. In this way you create your experience, seize the day!  
**MINDFULNESS, PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE CREATIVE USE OF YOUR FREEDOM TO CHOOSE.** These are the keys to Mindful Living.