

Peace

HOPE

Inspiration

MyQuest

Current Events - I would like to share with you a portion of the "Welcome Packet" that I give out to new members of the Mindful Living group. In Prison guys need all the help they can get and the Mindful Living group is my way of trying to help my fellow prisoners.

Recently we received a donation of CD's that feature guided meditations and lectures on leading a life of Mindfulness and compassion. Thank you so much (you know who you are :))

Some other good news. I may have found an organization that is willing to send out Mindful Living Start-up Packs for inmates across the country so they can start groups in their prisons. I'm also writing a self-help book that could also be used as the curriculum for a course. This organization may distribute this to inmates across the country for free as well. It's all very exciting!

Anyway, enjoy this partial glimpse at the Mindful Living welcome pack and, as always, Happy Questing!



Namaste

Mindful Living Agenda

6:50 p.m. - Ten to fifteen minutes of meditation/quiet reflection. Please use this time to release any tension or negative energy that may have built up over the course of the day. Take this opportunity to center yourself and enjoy the quietude.

7:05 p.m. - Group reading on this week's subject. Throughout the reading we may stop to discuss certain points and share how we can apply the principles to our daily lives. Everyone is encouraged to participate in the discussion. The group is only as effective as your level of participation allows.

7:30 p.m. - Break. Feel free to browse our wide selection of books, and enjoy some green tea. If any books interest you please fill out the book sign-out sheet.

7:40 p.m. - Group resumes with a five minute meditation/quiet reflection period. After the meditation we will resume the group discussion.

8:15 p.m. - Gratitude meditation. Each member is encouraged to share at least two or three things he is grateful for. This is a great way to remind ourselves that we do have things to be grateful for, and it ends the group on a positive note.

8:25 p.m. - Close with the Mindful Living affirmation:

This I know,

When I am mindful I am free to choose how I respond to all situations, and it is through these choices that I create my reality. Today I choose to be the change I seek in the world; today I choose to create a reality that reflects the best of who I am. So be it!

Core objectives and group rules for
Mindful Living

The core principles of Mindful Living include:

Mindfulness

Personal Responsibility

The creative and responsible use of our freedom to choose.

Group Objectives include:

To provide an open discussion forum for those seeking to improve their lives. Mindful Living aims to share ways we can use mindfulness skills as well as other life skills to lead more enjoyable lives, lives of inner freedom and personal empowerment. By empowering ourselves through the use of these skills we no longer depend on outside circumstances to define our lives.

In order to ensure a positive and effective learning environment the members of Mindful Living agree to uphold the following standards:

1. We respect each other. This means we allow every person the right to his opinion. We don't talk over each other. We don't yell at each other. Threats, insults, and violence of any kind will not be tolerated. The Mindful Living group is open to anyone with a desire to improve his life.
2. Confidentiality. We agree not to discuss what people share in the group outside the group environment.
3. We keep the focus on ourselves. We focus on how we chose to respond to a situation rather than focusing on the other person's behavior. If we need to "vent" we do so with the idea that we are responsible for how we choose to respond, and it is up to us to resolve issues properly.
4. Open spirituality. Many of the principles discussed in Mindful Living can be related to Buddhist principles, but these principles are useful to anyone from any religious background. We celebrate religious diversity and welcome people of all faiths.
5. We maintain a calm, peaceful environment. Yelling, negativity, arguing - leave these qualities at the door when attending the Mindful Living group.

Print Name

Sign and date

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. After all, 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 similiar 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.