

Mindfully Incarcerated

By Daniel Labbe

Connection in a World of disconnect

In Prison it's all about keeping your edge over the next guy. No one wants to seem weak, vulnerable, or like he isn't on top of his game. Personal interactions often feel more like competitions, and the winner is the one who outshines, outsmarts, or outwits the others. I hate this, even though I find myself pulled into it time and time again. The problem is that in an environment where social masks and fear of vulnerability rule it's nearly impossible to connect with people. Everything is a game or a facade, and long-term immersion in such an environment has a hallowing effect, ~~cooperates~~

Luckily I've learned that there is a way of being mindful that provides warmth, intimacy, and connection even in the harshest of places. Without this skill I would have become a husk of a human being, filled only with masks, woundedness, and desperate loneliness. Scary.

For me, feeling disconnected is a warning sign. It tells me to pay attention and connect, otherwise I will likely resort to distracting behaviors like watching T.V., binging on junk-food, or ~~stop~~ gossiping. None of this sounds all that bad, but if left unchecked things can go south quick. Drinking, drugging, and illicit sexual affairs became common coping strategies when this sense of disconnection became overwhelming prior to my incarceration. ~~stop~~ My mental and emotional struggles and many of the crimes for

2

which I am now incarcerated have their roots in my inability to address this sense of disconnection.

In a way, Prison was the worst and the ~~best~~ best place for me to deal with disconnection. It is the worst place because of its coldness, its shallowness, and its cruelty. But it is also the best place to learn how to deal with disconnection, because, either you learn to deal with it or you become the walking dead; whatever humanity you once had becomes submerged beyond recall.

Mindfulness was and is the key to get connected in a world of disconnect. When I'm feeling the need for intimacy and connection I take my focus out of my head - the world of thoughts - and place it in my body. I focus on my breath and how my stomach rises and falls with each inhale and exhale. Once I'm grounded in the breath I broaden my awareness to include my whole body and eventually ~~the~~ the environment surrounding me. When thoughts or impulses to do something else arise I ~~simply~~ simply notice them and let them be without reacting to them.

Very quickly I find myself relaxing and a sense of vibrancy fills me and the world around me. Colors pop out and sounds crack with crispness. It feels safe here and very much alive. From here I choose an activity - anything, the more ordinary the better - and I do it with mindfulness. I feel whatever I'm touching and pour myself into the flow of action. You can't imagine the intimacy and connection that such mindfulness

(3)

Daniel Labbe W85867
30 Administration Rd
Bridgewater, MA 02324

Leave a
comment or
write me

brings. You have to experience it for yourself.

It is in these moments that I feel most alive and can see the beauty of life most clearly. From here I can then bring this warm, grounded presence into my interactions with others. Sometimes this kind of presence allows others to feel safe enough to take off their mask, and for a moment there is a connection, there is truth and authenticity, and yes, even vulnerability. The power of mindfulness never ceases to amaze me.

I'm still waiting for approval to conduct the 10-week mindfulness workshop I'm putting together. Either way I'm writing up the material and will be posting the chapters (I call them Explorations) here.

I appreciate the comments and thanks to Boston-rocks for transcribing my last post and to each of you who has taken the time to transcribe a post or leave a comment. I write this blog to share my experience of finding healing and growth through mindfulness in this difficult environment in hopes that someone will find some hope or strength in it. I also want others to know the power of mindfulness based rehabilitation and how effective it is for those living behind the wall. If mindfulness can help a guy like me turn my life around in a place like this than it can help you out there in whatever situation you're going through. There's hope for us all.

Peace.

Not dealing with my problems has caused a lot of pain in this world, and those I love. Finding healing so I don't cause any more suffering is the most compassionate thing I can do.