



THE SHOCK OF THE FALL



MIND

With the coming of September we are tempted to hold on to the passing summer and to resist the coming autumn. The periods of warmth as things cool down remind us that the seasons are in transition and prepare us for the change to come. Why hold on and lose the present experience of how September invites us to see the pause between the seasons?

When we hold onto the way we want things to be, rather than witness how they really are, we gradually become separated from our own truth. Without the honesty to stay in the present we miss the transitions that are happening all the time: perhaps the changing dynamics of a relationship, the maturing of children, our changing role in life and the inevitable evolution of our own body and mind. Whatever it is, if we are not present, catching up with reality can be quite a shock.



How many times have you heard someone say, "I never saw this coming"?

How do we lose contact with our truth?

With busy lives it's so easy to drop into the seduction of multitasking and functioning by habit in the name of efficiency. Implicit is the assumption that this time will be just like the last, so the habit we have developed is fine. We get so used to this way of behaving that we are often happily planning the next task whilst completing the present one. In that way we are not really present and certainly not listening to ourselves or what we are doing.

Filling in the gaps...

We can extend this quite literally into our conversations. We listen just enough to confirm our opinions and frequently fill in the gaps with our own expectation and explanations. We rest in the comfort of our habitual response to a particular topic and rarely allow ourselves to hear what is actually being said.

Could we be different?

Next time, resist the urge to fill in the gaps, allow the space for silence and wait until the person you are talking to is truly finished. Check in periodically to ensure that what you understand actually reflects what was in fact said. Remember, if that person has said something difficult or challenging, to share this is often only done after gauging your receptivity and that could easily be in the last 10% of a conversation.

Ignoring the language of our own body...

When we listen to our body we open up to an experience of the present which is completely non-verbal and real. We tune into the feel of things rather than the thought of things. As we become more familiar with this we can see when the feel our body is at odds with how we think about something. Trust what your body says, and grow into the experience of holding the sensations in your body softly however uncomfortable or unpleasant this feels initially, treating them as a sign post pointing to what needs attention, rather than something to turn away from. You might only have time to softly smile to yourself, but notice how this tunes you into the present and an awareness of your body. Listen for any strong sensation and softly hold this without trying to change it. If you have more time then try the following:

Checking into the weather in your mind...

We can go through the whole day unaware of how our mind is until it finally bursts through our busyness into consciousness derailing us and sabotaging our efforts to stay in balance. Alternatively we can chose to check in to see how our mind is from time to time. When we do this, we are often surprised by what we find, a sense of agitation when we thought all was fine, or a brewing resentment when we thought we'd let something go or a calmness behind a feeling of being OK. By checking in we give ourselves the opportunity to press the reset button and realign how we thought we were with how we really are.



The key to this process is honesty; the honesty to look fearlessly at how we are. We do this with the following mindfulness three-tiered approach:

Firstly observe the content of your mind: what is going on in there? It can be confusing to try to put this into words, so try allowing an image to convey this. You may be able to do this without prompting. Others find asking the following helpful:

'What is the weather like in your mind?' Detail is not required, nor complex interpretation, it's just like a glance out of the window to decide whether to put a coat on or not.

Secondly just know if this feels pleasant or not or neutral.

Thirdly cast your mind through your body being aware of any sense of blockage, restriction or strong sensation. If you find somewhere then as you breath in, let this sensation fill your mind, and as you breath out gently smile, softening the reaction to this sensation inside your head and softening around the edges of this sensation in your body not with the expectation of changing it but as a process of acknowledgement and acceptance of how it is. Then move on just one breath in each place.

Now redirect your attention to your breathing, wherever it is clearest to you. As best you can stay with this awareness, as your breath comes in softly smile and as it goes out smile again. Continue for 8 to 10 breaths.

Now expand your attention to include the whole body, the feeling of your clothing, temperature, sense of ease or tightness, facial expression. If you find some sensation draws your attention allow yourself to softly hold this sensation in your awareness as if you were gently holding a giant snowflake and soften any reaction in your body or mind by softly smiling. If your attention is no longer pulled toward this return to a whole body awareness of your breathing.

After 8 or 10 breaths return to whatever activity you were doing.

So just as we can value September for its unique quality of transition, we can also acknowledge and value our own transitions for what they tell us. Learning to listen in this way we will be less shocked and derailed by changes that follow.

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WRITTEN BY

HUGH POULTON

HUGH IS LEADING A DAY OF MINDFULNESS, YOGA AND WALKING IN THE COTSWOLDS ON 28TH SEPTEMBER. ALSO IN 2014/15 WILL BE THE LAUNCH OF MINDFULNESS TRAINING FOR YOGA TEACHERS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT YOGAUNLIMITED.CO.UK. FB AT YOGAUNLIMITED