**Mindfulness and Sacred Space in our lives**

Marais, Dirk. (July 2001). **Mindfulness and Sacred Space in our lives.**

*Thoughts about connecting with your own inner and outer self in order to build own capacity and strength.*

As you start reading this article on the Internet, notice the sensation of the keys of the computer on your fingers when you touch them, or if you have printed the article, notice the sensation of the paper on your fingers, the texture, the weight and the colour of the paper. Now shift your attention for a few moments to your breathing. Observe the breathing – what happens when you breathe in? – notice the sensation of air flowing past your nostrils, and a slightly different sensation when you breathe out. Observe this for a while, follow the flow of your breath, changing nothing, simply noticing the sensation of breathing as you are in the moment… This is the essence of mindfulness practice – to be in the moment, to consciously pay attention to the here and now, from moment to moment. There is a Zen story where a student asks his master: "Master, how do you put enlightenment into action? How do you practice it in everyday life?" The master replies: "By eating and by sleeping." The student: "But everybody sleeps and everybody eats." The Master answers: "But not everybody eats when they eat, and not everybody sleeps when they sleep".

**Of Vision Quest Africa**

Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn, the Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, University of Massachusetts School of Medicine in the USA, says that nearly all people today suffer from serious attention deficiency. We live in a world that has become so reactive, fast and obsessed with results and high performance that indeed we don't eat when we eat and we don’t sleep when we sleep! The tragedy is that we don't realise what price we are paying, we don’t realize that we have lost something of vital importance to our basic happiness and wellbeing! And very few people today re-discover what they have lost, because the paradigm that dominates out thinking allows very little opportunity for this to happen.

To turn this distressing reality around is no easy task – there are just no quick fixes to heal us from this attention deficiency. The most appropriate place to start is with the cultivation and promotion of mindfulness practice – not only as a technique for stress release but as a way of life. Through the cultivation of mindfulness we can reach greater awareness and acceptance of mind, emotions and spirit. It is a process of working non-judgmentally with whatever we are experiencing in the present moment. This allows us to access internal stillness, energy and healing potential as we learn to respond creatively to the pressures, stress and conflict of our day and time.

**Mindfulness and Sacred Space**

"Sacred space" can be described as space you consciously create to connect with your own inner and outer self in order to build own capacity and strength – conscious decisions you take to make sure that your batteries remain charged!

If mindfulness is about consciously paying attention to our experiencing life in the here and the now, then sacred space can be described as time/space we plan and structure into our lives to make mindfulness a greater reality. At the same time we can say that by creating space and time for personal capacity building and connecting it to mindfulness we will ensure that the "sacred spaces" in our lives will not be penetrated by the values that cause attention deficiency. This space/time you create to connect with your inner and outer self is called sacred space, also because it is so important – it is priority space. The world we live in places so many demands on us that very often investing time in ourselves are seen as indulgence. We only have to look around us to see how many continue to buy into this trap. Stephen Covey said: "The single most powerful investment we can make in life, is an investment in ourselves, the only instrument we have with which to deal with life and to contribute." Covey uses the metaphor-story of the man working non-stop sawing down trees. The man is challenged by a passer-by who suggests that he stops and sharpens his saw, to which the reply comes: " I have no time to sharpen my saw, I am too busy." It seems so obvious that this is a really obtuse thing to say, and yet in real life that is exactly what we so often do!

**Practical examples/suggestions for Mindfulness practice and the creation of Sacred space in our lives:**

* Start the day with a time of silence, connecting and accessing the inner energy and wisdom that we all have. Make that indeed a sacred space, guard over that time, don't compromise on it. Practice "mind over mattress" and get up a little earlier. You start your day from a departure point you choose, which will create an awareness in you that says: "I start my day, others don't start it for me!" It makes a tremendous difference to start off feeling, and affirming to yourself, that you are in charge of your life, that you live in an abundant universe with infinite opportunities and possibilities, that you are special: " Who do you think you are? A superstar? Well, right you are. And we all shine on. Like the sun and the moon and the stars. We all shine on." (John Lennon)
* Whatever you do, do it with your full attention. Be fully present in the moment. Stop trying to do two or three things at the same time, if it is not really necessary – and practice this from the most mundane to the most important. Break away from habits like watching TV while you eat and at the same time listen to your son reading his lesson for the next day. When you listen to your son's lesson give him your full attention. When you eat enjoy your food.
* Practice mindfulness in your work – and work when you work. Stop taking work home. Be productive and finish work at work, so that when you arrive home you can do "home-things" with the same mindfulness. People who develop the habit of making home an extension of their office – but then decide to change this – and make a commitment to themselves to finish by, say 4.30, very often discover that this has an amazing effect on how their productivity increases at work.
* When others talk to you give them your full attention. Listening is at the heart of good communication. Mindfulness is the basis of good listening. So often while someone talks directly to us, we are already working out how we will answer, or our minds wander of to issues at work or somewhere else and the person does not have our full attention. Mindfulness can have massive implications for building relationships with loved ones as well as colleagues.
* Make time and space for life-reflection. To create space to contemplate your experience is often seen by some as "navel gazing" and living in the past, but it is not. Kierkegaard said: "Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward." In order to connect to our purpose in life and live the future we prefer, we have to learn from our own experience. A wonderful and powerful tool to create real sacred space in this regard is to keep a journal where you capture important experiences, learnings, insights, dreams etc. Polly Berends said: "Everything that happens to you is your teacher. The secret is to learn to sit at the feet of your life and be taught".
* Develop a joy for learning and living. Joseph Campbell said the most important reason why we are in this life is to experience life! That is exactly what mindfulness is about – to fully experience every moment of what is called life. Therefore, live! and allow those around you to live – but realise that experiencing life and learning go hand in hand, and only when we develop a joy for both learning and living, do we find the answers to life's questions. Therefore be a student of life every day – read, listen, observe and learn also from your inner teacher, your intuition and your Soul.   
    
  In this regard be very aware of "synchronicity", the perception of meaningful coincidences, which Jung called "a law that operated to move humans beings toward greater growth in consciousness." Synchronistic events happen all the time and can have great significance in our lives. Too often, though, we do not even make the connection, because we have not learned to observe and apply such coincidences in finding answers to the challenges in our lives, primarily because we do not practice mindfulness.
* Finally, have sacred space and the discipline in your life to regularly sharpen the saw – spiritually, mentally, social-emotionally and physically. Make time for all these levels and don't forget the obvious aspects like exercise, healthy eating, drinking enough water and getting enough sleep.

**Conclusion**

The advantages of living mindfulness practice and creating sacred space are infinite. Research done by the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre shows that patients have benefited remarkably from learning to practice mindfulness. Some of the conditions covered in the research included heart disease and hypertension, chronic pain, irritable bowl syndrome, anxiety and panic disorder, depression, psoriasis, chronic fatigue syndrome, cancer and HIV/ AIDS. Mindfulness and creating sacred space have powerful curative advantages, and yet it is much more powerful in prevention. Not only does it bring us closer than ever to our optimum level of happiness, but it also brings peace and calmness in which we learn to appreciate life more as we experience it on a much deeper level. It instills in us an attitude that helps us to cope with the most difficult situations in life; it brings wisdom beyond the understanding of our rational minds; it connects us to sources of energy that we did not even think could exist. A sceptic will say: "But if I have to spend all this time creating sacred space and practising mindfulness, when will I ever have time to do my work? " The answer is simple – by creating sacred space and practising mindfulness, you improve the quality of everything in your life – including your work. It is simply the reality of sharpening the saw. No matter how hard and "smart" you work, if you do not make space and time to sharpen your saw, eventually you will not be able to do your work! Nothing will have a more profound influence on the quality of your life – personal and professional – than starting to create sacred space through mindfulness practice. By creating sacred space through mindfulness in your life – in time your whole life will become a sacred space. If we all start doing that our world will become a sacred space. Shola Arewa says: "We all have a role to play in positively changing the world in which we live. We each hold within ourselves unique qualities that we brought into this world….these gifts help us see the soul purpose of our existence." In order to live this purpose and make our contribution, we have to be our best selves – and to be our best selves, we have to protect, nurture and jealously guard over the sacred spaces we create.

**About CDRA's Nuggets**

In CDRA, through our work and reflections, we generate many ideas, only a few of which find their way into publications. This is true of so many development practitioners out there. So we have decided to experiment and invite you to join us in publishing a "Nugget" each month, . The essential features of a Nugget are:

* A Nugget is a brief piece of writing, a story, an original poem or a question - unpolished, on any topic from our or your development practice, that strikes us as worth putting out onto our website, to stimulate thinking and to encourage discussion.
* Anyone who has a social development practice is invited to contribute by writing and submitting a nugget. See the guidelines below.
* You are also invited to read the Nugget presented on this page each month and to email us with a response, which we will publish below the Nugget as they come in to us, with your name and email address.
* In addition you are invited to subscribe to the Nuggets. This means that you will be emailed the new Nugget each month, saving you from having to access the web yourself.
* In addition we undertake, with the emailed Nugget, to let you know of anything new that has been published on our website, as well as to keep you informed of any new developments, courses etc.. We promise not to overload you!