

Midweek Pause: Consistency



“Each step may seem to take forever, but no matter how uninspired you feel, continue to follow your practice schedule precisely and consistently. This is how we can use our greatest enemy, habit, against itself.”

– Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche,
“Tortoise Steps”

Consider: how mindfulness practice extends to all aspects of our life. Being **mindful** is being awake and aware in all daily activities and this includes how we care for ourselves. How we eat, how we move through the day, how we sleep and so on. The example of tortoise steps is so powerful. By placing our awareness on our self-care and take consistent steps we can change our old habits of unconsciousness. The changes we implement may feel slow and heavy but it is consistency that will lead us to being mindful in all we do.

Do: choose one facet of self care that you have allowed to fall from your consciousness. Bring it to mind now and place it in your awareness as you take several cleansing breaths. What is one steady step you can take this week and remain consistent with? Write this down, keep it by your bedside and

honor yourself by committing to it through days of doubt. Make it part of your mindfulness practice because all of life is our practice.

Midweek Pause: Perspective

“...Imagine what the world would be like if we could come to see our likes and dislikes as merely likes and dislikes, and what we take to be intrinsically true as just our personal viewpoint.”

—Pema Chodron

Consider: how we can get in our way when it comes to good health. We become stuck within our own preferences that are based on one viewpoint, ours. When we begin loosening our grip on our likes and dislikes and accept this one viewpoint is like looking at the world through a keyhole we may be able accept that there are other ways to heal.

What viewpoint might you hold tightly, is it your **dislike** to move or your strong **like** of a certain food you cannot part with? Use this mindful pause and the week ahead to play with the idea that there are a multitude of viewpoints on that one subject and you can grasp yours with all your might or create space enough to bring others into your sight.

Do: Start each morning this week considering that view and using ten cleansing breaths to create some space around it. Commit to doing this exercise with curiosity and just see what develops within.

Midweek Pause–Collaboration



“The work of meditative thinking is a collaboration between these two natures—the seer that remembers and the seen that always forgets. As in rowing, if you pull more on one oar than the other, you go round in circles, and, as in rowing, all I can see is what I have passed as I press forward toward a point that is hidden behind me.”

– Carl Lehmann-Haupt, “The Path of Writing”

Consider: What a beautiful analogy a rower can be for our lives. Finding balance in your movements to keep moving forward and avoiding moving in circles. Might there be an area of your life that you feel that you are going round in circles? While it may feel safe there is no possibility for freedom until you can break through the fear of moving toward a point that cannot be seen .

Do: Close your eyes and find your breath, following your natural pattern bringing to mind a situation or relationship that feels stuck. What is needed to allow you to press into what you cannot see? Stay with your breath now and continue to move deeper into that collaborative space, between the known

and the unknown.

Midweek Pause–Freedom

“The chains of desire pull us into a life of frustration and suffering, while renunciation cuts those chains. Renunciation, though often understood to mean ‘giving up,’ is, more accurately, the willingness to experience things as they are, not as we want them to be. Here you discover true freedom, the deep, quiet joy that has always been present in you.”

– Ken McLeod

“You Can’t Always Get What You Want”

Consider: The desires you have now that may be causing you to suffer. What might you be longing for that is keeping you from the experiences of the moment? There is a freedom that can only be achieved by loosening our grip a bit on what we yearn for and relaxing into the present time.

Do: Take a quiet moment and reflect on your deepest desire. Without bidding it farewell, simply move your attention to this moment. With each breath come closer to what you are experiencing right here and now. Stay with your breath, taking in this moment with all of your senses, until you can feel the joy in being that is always within.

Midweek Pause—Peace

“The peace that we’re looking for is not peace that crumbles as soon as there is difficulty or chaos. Peace isn’t an experience free of challenges, free of rough and smooth, it’s an experience that’s expansive enough to include all that arises without feeling threatened.”

– Pema Chödrön, **Practicing Peace**

Consider: How when rushed and pressed for time we only allow a teeny-tiny space for change of plan. It is exactly in this narrow space that we feel threatened. What if you made that space just a bit wider?

Do: Today when the day you thought you were going to have disintegrates before you have stepped out the door, take a deep breath, again and once again. Do this until you can touch the space inside of yourself that is expansive and big enough to take on the bumps and disappointments that make up real life. Then go ahead and head out that door.

Midweek Pause—Choose

“If you have embarked on this journey of self-reflection, you may be at a place that everyone, sooner or later, experiences on the spiritual path. After a while it seems like almost every moment of your life

you're there, where you realize you have a choice. You have a choice whether to open or close, whether to hold on or let go, whether to harden or soften, whether to hold your seat or strike out. That choice is presented to you again and again and again."

– Pema Chödrön, **Practicing Peace**

Consider: how often you shut down and close without giving another chance.

Do: The next instance today that you feel yourself close up, whether it be to a person or an idea or thought take a breath and pause. Follow a few cleansing breath cycles allowing yourself time to realize that you do indeed have a choice. Your response is not fixed—you can choose. Reach down into your heart and find some softness and remain open.

Midweek Pause—Nourish

"Breathe in such a way that you are nourished."

– Thich Nhat Hanh, **How to Eat**

Consider: The act of breathing. It is so automatic that we rarely stop to consider what the breath is doing for our body. The thought that it is actually nourishing is profound. Thich Nhat Hanh goes onward with this simple quote to say that we don't only nourish ourselves when we breathe mindfully but we actually nourish those around us. It's a win-win.

Do: Gift yourself and those whose lives you touch with ten mindful and nourishing breaths right now. Soak in all that each has to offer by following it through your body from the

tip of your nose to deep in your belly. With each one feel your mind slow and your body relax. Imagine all who just benefited from that exercise, not to mention a more relaxed you.

Midweek Pause–Shift

“Every mindful moment in which generosity displaces greed, compassion takes the place of hatred, and insight dislodges delusion is a moment in which we are awake.”

– Andrew Olendzki, “A Tough But Not Impossible Act to Follow”

Consider: What a beautiful world this would be if we would each choose to do our part replacing the negative emotions that arise. Whether that emotion is directed at your partner, your child, or the grocery check, that conscious shift on your part can change everything.

Do: Catch yourself today as negativity in the form of greed, anger, or impatience takes a hold of your thoughts. Realize you have a choice. As the emotion rises place your focus on your breath and the opposing positive emotion rather than the story line that reinforces the hate, anger, or greed. Stay there until you are awake and present.

Start Living Well in 2015

If you already feel the weight of your New Year's resolution, how about trying something a bit more sustainable? Simply consider experimenting with one new idea each month that would support your overall health and well being. Need some ideas? Here's just a few to prompt your own creativity:



Be...

...kind to yourself and start out each day attending to your own needs so you can be more available to others.

...your authentic self, anything else drains your energy and leads you off the path you were born to follow.

...present so you don't miss the gift of the moment while you are planning tomorrow.

Find...

...a new place or two to experience nature. Austin is bursting with opportunities to be out of doors right in our city limits and there are countless more once you leave town. Check out this guide to Texas State Parks and this recreation guide by the Lower Colorado River Authority.

...a restaurant or two that you enjoy AND can eat healthy. Here are three of my go to favorites: Koriente, The Steeping Room, Counter Culture. Each will go out of their way to help you stay gluten and dairy free.

...a like minded colleague who shares your desire to lead a healthier lifestyle as a walking and/or sack lunch buddy.

Try...

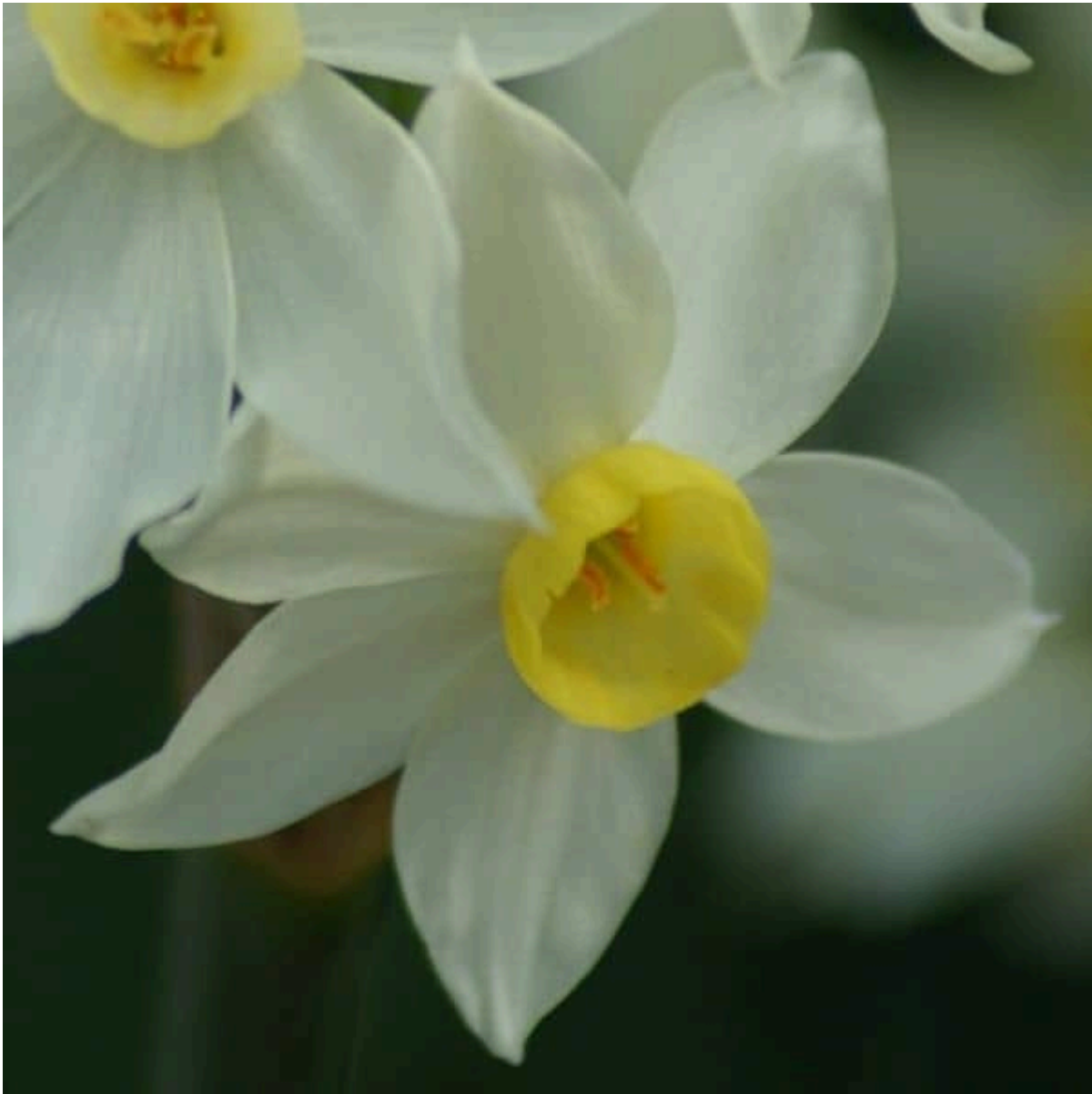
...a new weekly exercise class whether its yoga, pilates or

cross-fit that will provide you with a like-minded community to support your commitment.

...cooking at home 5 nights out of 7. Here's why Mark Bittman says this may be the most radical step you can take.

...to experiment with a new recipe a week to add to your repertoire. I love perusing Pinterest with tags for plant based or gluten free + dairy free meals or for the vegetable I decide to feature.

Midweek Pause—Embrace



“Even when you think you have your life all mapped out, things happen that shape your destiny in ways you might never have imagined.”

– Deepak Chopra

Consider: Applying the lesson in this quote on a daily basis by acknowledging each morning that all the highly structured plans that lay before you are just that and in each crash or crumble may be a plan better than you could have created yourself.

Prepare: Close your eyes for a moment and think back to a time when you experienced an outcome so different from your plans, yet so much more rewarding. Remember the magic when, just for

a moment, you felt a power greater than your own at work? How could you experience just a bit of that each day? How can you create room in your daily plans for this to occur?

Do: Upon awakening each morning, BEFORE scanning your mental to do list, ask for the ability to remain open to what will occur and have gratitude for how the events of the day may play out.

Midweek Pause—Mindful Eating



“Mindful eating can cultivate seeds of compassion and understanding that will strengthen us to do something to help hungry and lonely people to be nourished.”

– Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace in Every Step

Consider: That the act of eating mindfully is a simple, easy practice that we have the opportunity to engage in at least three times a day. Consider your last meal. Maybe it was just a few moments ago. How did it go? Do you remember what it

tasted like, how it smelled or who was eating with you? Thich Nhat Hahn invites you to pause when food is placed before you, look at those around you, smile, then look down at your food and allow it to be real.

Prepare: While every meal presents a new opportunity for practice you may wish to choose one meal a day and commit to observing these short yet powerful moments of mindfulness. Make a commitment today to practice at your very next meal.

Do: When the next plate of food is laid before you take in the moment, your companions, and the food with all of your senses. You won't need more than a few seconds, just enough for a few deep breaths to connect with those being nourished and those who long for nourishment.

Photo by Cala on Unsplash

Midweek Pause—Be

“Just as a clay Buddha cannot go through water and a wood Buddha cannot go through fire, a goal-oriented healing practice cannot permeate deeply enough.”

– Darlene Cohen, “The Practice of Non-preference”

Consider: The magnitude of this message. It is a huge concept to absorb, especially when one is dealing directly with chronic pain or illness. Because we live in a goal oriented society, the verb that guides us is DO not BE. Our practice however calls for us to be and to accept that this is how it

is today, whatever the circumstances may be. So when our present moment is filled with discomfort, whether that be physical or emotional, and the urge to DO arises, pause. Place your awareness on the experience of each of your senses (sight, touch, smell, sound, taste) and attempt to BE in that moment beyond the pain, realizing there IS more to that moment than pain.

Prepare: Shifting such a deeply ingrained response is hard work. Really hard work. What we want to do is allow the pain to be louder and greater than any other given experience and we are driven to DO something to fix it. Some days it will feel impossible. Remember each day is a new opportunity and the first step is to merely catch yourself and your response. Actually changing the response to pain can be supported by this 10 breath technique. Practice with it now recalling a recent emotionally painful experience or with physical pain you are experiencing, closing your eyes and counting each individual breath.

Do: This week, when a painful emotion or physical pain arises catch yourself in the instinctive reaction to DO and let that serve as a reminder to step into mindful breathing, allowing yourself to BE. Taking in all of the experiences that come with being, all you see, all you feel, all you smell, all you hear, all you taste.