

Communing With Nature Through Mindfulness

By J. Logan Cross

We are now in a time where it is advisable to stay in our residences except for essential activities. We have been encouraged to avoid areas where people typically congregate including parks, preserves, and numerous other outdoor recreation areas. This has been very frustrating, and sometimes depressing, for those of us who enjoy communing with nature and/or engaging in outdoor recreation. While we should all be patient and cautious in our return to public outdoor spaces, you can engage with nature at almost any time or setting. You can do so by applying the practice of “mindfulness” to observe and appreciate nature. It also provides a release from regrets of the past and/or concerns about the future. For these reasons I encourage you to give mindfulness serious consideration and a test run during these strange times.

Mindfulness is a psychological practice where one fully focuses on the “here and now” to the exclusion of thoughts of the past or future. This focus should be sustained for a period of time to allow for full appreciation of the setting, conditions, and sensory experiences. It can be performed with the eyes closed or open depending on the setting and conditions. When practicing mindfulness one should focus on the positive aspects of the current situation and setting. By excluding thoughts related to the past and/or future one is released from worries and concerns that interfere with the experience. For many years I have used mindfulness to enhance my appreciation of nature and gain a release from extraneous concerns. Today it provides me with a valuable tool for coping with the isolation created by the current pandemic.

The version of mindfulness I have employed is simple and can be mastered with a modest amount of practice. It is something you can incorporate into your daily life to enhance your current experience and provide a much-needed release. You can begin by pausing to observe or sense natural phenomena while excluding thoughts of the past or future. It can be as simple as stopping to appreciate the natural splendor of the leaves fluttering in the breeze. It could involve pausing to listen to the breeze, the birds singing, and/or insects communicating. These types of experiences can be had in almost any setting, but it requires a conscious effort to pause and focus. Due to the ease of application and versatility of mindfulness, it seems like a valuable way to shift from a case of the blues to feelings of contentment and appreciation.

The increasing interest in mindfulness has given rise to many variations of the practice and debate among purists as to which is best. It has also spawned debate regarding the distinction between mindfulness and meditation. I am of view that mindfulness can be enhanced through meditation, but meditation is not essential to practicing mindfulness. While you can engage in mindfulness with no training, there are phone and computer apps to help enhance your mindfulness skills and experience. I am now utilizing such an app to help me augment my abilities to apply and utilize mindfulness.

I encourage you to learn more about mindfulness and how it can be used to enhance your appreciation of natural phenomena and life in general. It has particular relevance, and opportunities for application during a time when traditional methods for connecting with nature have been restricted. Though I focused on mindfulness in this piece, there are many ways you can use your mind and thoughts to commune with nature and enhance your experience. If you wish to learn more about ways thought processes can be used to enhance engagement with nature, let us know.