

Seven attitudes that support mindfulness practice (adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living), and some relevant quotes.

1. Non-Judging. The mind is a very busy place, and a good deal of what goes on there is judgment. Paying attention to the constant judging of each part of our experience, in ways great and small, we can miss out on what is actually happening, attending instead to the story in the mind. Non-judging means witnessing our own experience impartially, including witnessing the activity of the mind, noticing what is there without getting carried off by it or needing to change it. You don't have to believe everything you think!

2. Patience. Mindfulness practice unfolds in its own time. Learning to calm the mind, like all natural growth and learning, can't be rushed or forced. We need to cultivate "patience to wait until our mud settles and the water is clear."

3. Beginner's Mind. We are accustomed to bringing so much thinking and judgment to our experience that we often assume we already know what is happening, and what will happen next – the expert's mind. If we observe carefully, we find that this is rarely true – we really don't know. Beginner's mind means approaching each moment, each experience with openness to what is there, without limiting our attention to what the mind already expects. It allows us more choices in each moment, since we have not narrowed our perceptions and thereby narrowed our possible responses.

4. Trust. When it comes to your own experience, the only authority is you. We can learn to trust our own senses and our own instincts, learn to listen to the wisdom of the body and the wisdom that arises in silence, not just the wisdom that arises in thinking. Ultimately, any instructions you are given are only suggestions. You alone can make the practice yours.

5. Non-Striving. Almost everything we do is intended to get us somewhere, make us different in some way. In mindfulness practice, trying to accomplish something, anything, can quickly become a source of more thinking and judging, and another obstacle to noticing our moment-to-moment experience just as it is. In mindfulness practice, our only intention is to notice where we already are, to be who we already are.

6. Acceptance. Acceptance means that we can recognize the truth of our experience, instead of distracting or misleading ourselves with ideas of what we want or expect our experience to be. This doesn't mean being passive or never trying to change anything. It is only by first accepting things as they are that we can begin to see our habitual reactions; we then have some choice over how we respond to what comes up.

7. Letting Go. We all have our preferences, our likes and dislikes. If we get caught up in holding on to pleasant moments, trying to prolong or repeat them, or trying to rush past or ignore unpleasant moments, we very soon lose track of what is present. This constant holding on to our stories about what we want our experience to be is the source of a great deal of internal stress. Instead, we can recognize that our experience is changing in each moment, and let go of each moment, each experience, as it passes. That is the only way we can be awake and fully present in the next moment. We have only the present moment to live.

Another take on beginner's mind:

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength."
- Rachel Carson

Another way of thinking about acceptance
(non-believers can substitute "the cosmos" for "God"):

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."
- Marianne Williamson (often erroneously attributed to Nelson Mandela)

On letting go:

"What good will it do you to think, "Oh, I have done evil, I have made many mistakes"? It requires no ghost to tell us that. Bring in the light, and the evil goes out in a moment."
- Vivekananda

Two amazing comments related to mindful awareness

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." Viktor Frankl

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." - Viktor Frankl