THE Mindfulness JOURNAL

Daily Practices, Writing Prompts, and Reflections for Living in the Present Moment

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Why Mindfulness?

"Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of the present experience. It isn't more complicated than that. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without either clinging to it or rejecting it."

Sylvia Boorstein

The concept of mindfulness is very simple.

When you are mindful, you are intentionally aware of the present moment. You consciously direct your awareness to whatever you are doing, thinking, or observing.

Making tea.

Looking out the window.

Having a conversation.

Folding laundry.

Working on a project.

Exercising.

Journaling.

In addition to being purposefully aware, there is another element of mindfulness—the practice of non-judgment.

Non-judgment means you observe your experiences, thoughts, and feelings from a distance, without labeling them as good or bad, right or wrong. This detachment from judging the moment but simply experiencing it removes the filter of appraisal, which pulls us away from the actual experience.

Left to its own devices, the brain automatically judges things as right or wrong, good or bad, useful or not useful, and so on. This judgment occurs so quickly that our moments are tainted by our thoughts about them before we can fully process the experience.

Adding *non-judgmental awareness* to your mindfulness practice helps remove these filters so you can fully and authentically experience the moment. In addition, our judgments about our thoughts often cause us unnecessary anxiety. Avoiding this suffering is another compelling reason to leave judgments by the wayside.

At first, it will be hard to be a detached observer of your experiences, and simply experience them. But the more you practice mindfulness in daily life, the more adept you become at living purely in the now.

You might wonder why you should bother with this practice at all. Why do you need mindfulness in your life?

As we say in our book, *10-Minute Mindfulness*, "For those who are frequently pulled away by the usual preoccupations of daily living (and isn't that most of us?), mindfulness affords a richer appreciation of the moment and a larger perspective on life. It also helps us alter our habitual responses by pausing long enough to choose how we act."

Being more intentional in our choices is reason enough to embrace mindfulness habits. But science has confirmed there are many additional physical and emotional benefits. Mindfulness practices have been researched extensively, and shown to:

- Reduce rumination and overthinking.
- Decrease stress by lowering levels of the stress hormone cortisol.
- Improve memory, concentration, and performance.
- Help maintain emotional stability.
- Improve relationship happiness.
- Reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Improve sleep.
- Protect against mental illness.
- Provide pain relief.

With the repetition of mindfulness activities, you will create real changes in your brain function and structure. Just as exercise habits will change your body, mindfulness habits will literally reshape your mind.

PRACTICING

Mindfulness Daily

"In this moment, there is plenty of time.
In this moment, you are precisely as you should be.
In this moment, there is infinite possibility."

Victoria Moran

The skills involved in mindfulness aren't brain surgery, but the practice itself is harder than you might think. The ability to incorporate mindfulness into our daily lives is something that requires daily awareness. You first have to remember to do it, and then you need to create strategies for incorporating this practice into your daily routine.

That's where this journal comes in.

The practice of journaling is an excellent mindfulness practice itself, because you are encouraging your mind to be present with your writing. It forces your brain to slow down to better organize your thoughts and consider the big picture.

With *The Mindfulness Journal*, you'll get a double dose of daily mindfulness—through the mindfulness activity outlined in the daily prompts, as well as your time spent journaling about the activity.

Writing about your experiences with mindfulness will help you master the practice, reflect on your thoughts and experiences, and provide a permanent record of your efforts at deepening the amount of purposeful intention in your life.

Most of the mindfulness practices we provide take very little time—most require 10 minutes of effort on your part. Then you will spend a few minutes writing about your experience with the practice. Sometimes you may only write a few sentences. Other times you'll be inspired or invited to write more.

You will need to set aside time during your day to both work on the mindfulness practice and journal about it.

HOW TO USE

The Mindfulness Journal

"There is something about journal writing that causes us to meditate, to recommit, and to receive spiritual impressions in the process of such pondering."

L. Edward Brown

This journal provides a total of 365 daily writing prompts divided into 52 weekly mindfulness topics. This arrangement gives you seven days to immerse yourself in each topic. It is designed to awaken you to mindfulness in various natural moments throughout your day, as well as with some activities that may be new for you.

This will be a process of self-discovery as you try various ways to practice mindfulness and write about your experiences. It will help you discover what specific activities work best for you and your lifestyle. We invite you to keep your mind and heart open, even if some of the practices seem strange or simplistic. There is a purpose behind each topic, activity, and related prompt.

The practices presented in some of the writing prompts require little more than thought and reflection. Others require performing a specific action or series of actions, either in the moment or during your day. Some journal topics are more suited to morning action and writing, while others are better for evening or right before you go to bed.

For this reason, we suggest you read through the weekly topic and related journal prompts before you begin each week. This will help determine the best time of day to practice the mindfulness habits, and when to write about them.

We encourage you to journal about your mindfulness habit as soon as possible after you practice it, so that your feelings and reactions are fresh on your mind. Because you will be practicing and writing at different times during the day, you may find it harder to stick to your journaling habit if you need a regular routine.

You may find you need to commit to a specific time that is consistent day after day to work through this journal. If this is the case for you, skip any weeks that require you to change your journaling time, and save them for later when you have more fully established the habit of working on this journal.

You don't need to follow the weekly order of topics the way they are presented here. You can move from Week 1 to Week 32, then back to Week 5 if you wish, depending on what you wish to focus on. It is helpful to work the full seven days of topic-related activities so you can delve into each topic. But it is also fine if you want to randomly choose a different prompt from a different topic every day. This is your journal, after all, so use it in the way that feels best for you and your goals.

"A blank page is no empty space. It is brimming with potential...
It is a masterpiece in waiting—yours."

A.A. Patawaran

WEEK 1

Daily Gratitude

"When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive— to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love."

Marcus Aurelius

Buddhist monks start the day with chants of gratitude for their blessings. Native American elders begin their ceremonies with prayers of gratitude to mother earth and father sky, to the four directions, to the animal, plant, and mineral brothers and sisters who share our earth and support our life. Tibetan monks and nuns offer prayers of gratitude for the suffering they have been given, saying, "Grant that I might have enough suffering to awaken in the deepest possible compassion and wisdom."

Gratitude is a mindfulness practice that opens you to joy, compassion, and appreciation of the life that sustains you. Begin your morning with awareness that you have awakened to a new day, a blank page full of promise and potential. Before you begin your morning routine, take a deep breath, close your eyes, and focus on all you are grateful for in your life based on the daily prompt.

Best time to journal: morning

Day 1

I reflect on the people in my life who have made me feel loved and supported. I feel grateful for...

Day 2

I am mindful of the strengths, skills, and aptitudes I possess that have helped me become who I am. I feel grateful for...

Day 3

I remember all the mentors who have shown me the way and inspired me. I feel grateful for...

Day 4

I am mindful of the home I live in and how it provides a safe and peaceful haven for me and my family. I feel grateful for...

Day 5

I consider the work I do in a career or at home, and how it impacts my life and well-being. I feel grateful for...

Day 6

I am mindful of the beauty of nature, of all living creatures, and the world around me. I feel grateful for...

Day 7

I reflect on all of the lessons I have learned in life so far, and how they have helped me grow and evolve. I feel grateful for...

WEEK 2

Body Awareness

"Attention to the human body brings healing and regeneration. Through awareness of the body we remember who we really are."

Jack Kornfield

Most mindfulness practices begin with your body by drawing your attention to your breath and the quality of sensation. In ancient Buddhist teachings of "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness," the first teaching is "mindfulness of the body," which involves becoming familiar with and even loving the body. Body mindfulness anchors you in the here and now.

Your body can reveal so much about your inner world if you pay attention to it. Every tight muscle, aching joint, and anxious breath gives you a clue to the worries and challenges you carry inside of you. Through body awareness, you have the power to release both the physical and mental distress, as you breathe relaxation and healing into each part of your body.

Best time to journal: *anytime*

Day 1

I visualize a bright and healing beam of light flowing down from the sky, through the top of my head, filling my body with energy and grounding me to the earth. My body responds by...

Day 2

I scan my body for any aches, pains, or tension. I notice these feelings and how I might be resisting them. What are these aches and pains telling me about any mental distress or behavior changes I need to make? What mental resistance to these feelings do I need to drop?

Day 3

I am mindful of the ways my body causes me shame, embarrassment, or unhappiness. How often do I focus on what I hate about my body? How can I show my body more compassion? Today I will write a letter of love and gratitude to my body.

Day 4

As I sit quietly, I notice each breath I take, following the intake of air through my nose and into my lungs, and the slow exhalation as I release the air through my nose. As I repeat this mindful breathing for several minutes, I notice my body...

Day 5

I take a few deep breaths and focus attention on my energy level in my body. Do I feel tired, restless, sleepy, or depleted, or am I energized and invigorated? My energy level is telling me...

Day 6

I focus on all of the organs, muscles, and bones in my body and what their purpose is for my health, sustenance, movement, and sensations. As I focus my attention on these parts of my body, I feel...

Day 7

I sit quietly, take a few deep and cleansing breaths, and perform a relaxation body scan. Starting at my toes, I focus attention on each part of my body, breathing relaxation into each area. I move from my toes upward, relaxing each body part until I reach the top of my head. My body responds by...