



Mindfulness: Being in the Here & Now

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

The other day I was walking early in the morning. Really, that is the only time that the weather in Chandler lends itself to being outside while not in a pool. It had just rained the evening before so it was especially pleasant, breezy and cooler than it has been.

Definitely an anomaly but a wonderful treat as I walked through my neighborhood. I have a route I take most mornings and as I entered one of the cul-de-sacs, I was treated to a beautiful sight. There were large, puffy clouds, mostly gray, but shining behind them was the most beautiful salmon color. And right in the middle, was the moon, clear as day. I stopped and took a picture on my phone, gazing at it even as I recorded my thoughts. It is moments of beauty like this that keep me grounded and in the moment. They inspire me and encourage that mindfulness.

Being mindful and intentional is both challenging and crucial to leading a successful life. At least in my opinion. I know that I get caught up in my phone, my emails, my texts and work. I don't look up and engage in a conversation with my children or my husband as often as I should and when I don't, I feel like I'm breaking the connections, the intentionality in my relationships.

It is not that it is difficult to be mindful. There are no special qualifications that are needed. There are even a limited number of rules. But the biggest obstacles include the overwhelming number of responsibilities that get in the way. The things that take your attention away from being in the moment and grounded.

Making a list

Whenever I want to be organized and really focus on the task at hand, I make a list. What are the supplies I need? What are the steps I need to take? What needs to happen first, second, third? Depending on the intended outcome or the actual activity, the list can be physical - written down or mental - running through the steps in my head. A penny for your thoughts is a little quip my husband uses with me when he can see that I have zoned out. This is usually me, making that list in my head.



My mindfulness steps

I don't write down my plan for my mindfulness journey. This is definitely a mental list I create but its importance is still paramount to my wellbeing. Intentionality, In the Moment, Breathe - these are the steps I take to get me where I need to be. For me, there is no timetable; each step doesn't need to be carried out for a prescribed amount of time. The steps don't necessarily need to happen in a specific order either.

Intentionality

I do have to say that I need to be intentional with this process. It doesn't just happen for me and definitely takes practice. It takes forethought, focus on what I want to do, what I want to accomplish, what message I want to send out to others and to the world.

I need to really visualize where I am and where I want to go. It can be as simple as deciding what I want to make for dinner (although, if you read any of my previous WOWs, you know that this is the bane of my existence!), focusing on the solution to a problem at work, or playing with a child. You may wonder about this last one, 'playing with a child.' Why would you need intentionality for that? Don't you just play?

As a teacher and even as a parent, when I am with a child, I want to be intentional with my interactions. It might be just to have fun, and that is OK. But that doesn't mean that I can't build their vocabulary or model appropriate behavior. It definitely means that I want to have a positive interaction with them and if I can contribute to their growth and development at the same time, then that is a bonus I relish.

What can you do to stay in the moment?

So when I am intentional about my purpose, I clear my mind. It sounds so easy when I write it down, but it is probably one of the most difficult things for me to do. Even when it is time for sleep, my mind continues to have one more thought and quieting the noise, the 'what do I need to do next?' really takes an effort to silence. I focus and try to direct my thoughts to that one purpose, letting go, observing my surroundings, making eye contact with my conversation partner.



Breathe

I find this becomes one of the most important pieces of getting there. The deep breath in. The holding for a count of 5 or 10. The purposeful exhale, counting as I go. Even as I write, I am doing this part now, and I am feeling more grounded already.

Are all the steps necessary?

No. Again, this is my process. Yours will look very different. You may use these as a guide. You may pick and choose. You may create your own. Even when I want to be mindful, be intentional, be grounded, I don't use all of my steps. Playing with a child, for me, usually doesn't require the breathing part, beyond the normal in and out to keep me alive. I use all of my steps in more difficult situations, especially if I am feeling agitated or am facing a difficult situation.

Do it your way, but just do it

I have spoken before about Shabbat and how I turn off all electronic devices. This weekly ritual brings me peace, brings me shalom. It gives me a weekly vacation to be mindful, in the moment, with myself, my family, with HaShem. Take the time, soon, to begin this journey. You will thank yourself, I promise.

Shabbat Shalom