

Foundational Attitudes of Mindfulness

The foundational attitudes of mindfulness can help you stay true to the spirit of this practice. Mindfulness puts the typical Western way of approaching things on its head. We think we know what we need and where we want to get, so we try to control things to make them turn out "our way". We may be tempted to sit down to meditate with the intention to calm and control our minds. But trying to control the mind only makes it more active. Mindfulness asks us instead to suspend our goal of achieving peace and happiness and to simply meet things as they are. It seems paradoxical — doing through non-doing? And yet, by bringing our attention to each moment, with mindfulness and equanimity, the mind settles on its own, and our ultimate goal of peace is achieved...without trying to reach it!

Mindfulness requires no less than a radical rotation in consciousness. The following is a glossary of foundational attitudes that will help you explain how to build a strong mindfulness practice.

Non-judging: Non-judging requires that you become an impartial witness to your constant stream of reactions to life. We tend to label and categorize almost everything we see. We may react automatically to what we see, but we are seeing through our own prejudices and fears. Non-judging reminds us to just watch whatever comes up, including our tendency to judge.

Patience: Patience acknowledges that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. We give ourselves room to have our experiences without trying to rush through them to get to "better" ones. Patience also helps us accept the mind's tendency to wander, while reminding us that we don't have to get caught up in its travels.

Beginner's mind: Our thoughts and opinions prevent us from seeing things as they really are. They are based on past experiences and lead us to think that we know more than we do. Yet each moment is new and therefore contains unique possibilities. Beginner's mind asks us to see with a clear and uncluttered mind.

Trust: Trust means resisting getting caught up in the reputation and authority of others. Instead, we are invited to honour our own feelings, intuitions and experiences. While teachers and books can provide signposts, only you can take responsibility for knowing yourself.

Non-striving: Almost everything we do is for a purpose. Although meditation requires a lot of work of a certain kind, it has no goal other than for you to be yourself. It asks you to try less and be more. The best way to achieve your goals is to back off from striving for results

and instead focus on seeing and accepting things as they are, moment by moment. With patience and regular practice, movement toward your goals will happen by itself.

Acceptance: Acceptance simply means that you are willing to see things as they are. It doesn't mean that you have to like everything or that you have to take a passive attitude and abandon your principles and values. You are much more likely to know what to do and have the inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening, than when your vision is clouded by judgment, desire, fear or prejudice.

Letting go: Letting go means putting aside the tendency to hold onto some experiences and reject others. When we observe our mind grasping or pushing away, we remind ourselves to let go of those impulses. In this way, we can become an expert on our own attachments and aversions — we come to understand their consequences in our lives. We also come to know what happens when we do let go.

Commitment: In addition to these attitudes, you will need to bring motivation to your practice. A strong commitment to knowing yourself and enough self-discipline to persevere in the process are essential to developing a strong meditation practice and a high degree of • mindfulness.

Reference:

Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1990