

## Three Stages of Mindfulness, Part 3

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### Practice

**Mindfulness as Mystical Consciousness** is the third and deepest stage of mindfulness. We might call it purity of heart in which our whole being is possessed and transfigured by the divine, in which each word and thought takes place within the context of the Divine. Mindfulness at this level expresses a high degree of attunement. It is an act of love, or what is called infused contemplation, where our experience of the Divine arises because the Divine has already called us to love. When we cling to the divine without any forgetfulness, in those illuminative moments when we glimpse and understand reality, we have had an immediate experience of the divine presence and we experience reality in a state of exuberance and joy. It is a moment of co-mutuality, without separation, or non-dual.

In this state of transformed consciousness, we understand memory as mystical union. Our memory is not just the site of retrieving information, as in the mind. The mindfulness that is transformed consciousness is a mystical experience of ultimate reality. This is why prayer and meditation are so vital to the spiritual life, because they are the means of directly experiencing the Divine Presence. In this state, your soul becomes a mirror of Divine Mystery; your presence is healing. Your being becomes transformative for the consciousness of other beings, because you have touched and experienced the holy light.

When does one experience this? When you have been praying ceaselessly. When you have been meditating ceaselessly. Prayer and presence are intimately related and therefore mindfulness as mystical consciousness is not something done with your will or with your mind. It is a fragrant touching of the divine in the center of your being. Maybe you never will be able to express in this life what you feel, what you experience, but you are able to pass it on.

We tend to think of ourselves as sinful. Why am I not ordered? Why can I not control myself? What is wrong with me? The mystics tell us that this deep level of self-awareness and self-order comes about through an act of grace. Instead of focusing on ourselves and our foibles, and being angry at ourselves because we are not ordered, we can pray for grace. We can meditate on our capacity to be given the gift of fidelity, the gift of not forgetting. Thus, we must learn to practice ceaseless prayer and asking the spirit for help: *show me, guide me, empty me*. This becomes a giving over of our will instead of a suppression of the will. In this transformed state of consciousness, our infidelity is healed—our unfaithfulness to ourselves and to others is transformed by an act of grace.

Such mystical surrender finally leads to a transformed, divine, consciousness. Here, not only is your awareness of the world raised, but your conscience—your moral fiber—is raised. Life becomes simpler and more innocent. You return to the innocence that you lost, or you thought you lost, and to experience the grief resulting from a fear that you would never be blameless again. But now you are able to confront your pain because you realize that the true self is never lost, and you have the courage to heal your tribulations.

Mystical gentleness engenders in us repentance and compunction—a conscience that realizes all life is holy—and causes us to feel in our whole being how we violate holiness. It also provides the means to reconcile our heedlessness, the things we do every day where we just lose our minds for a moment, or we are not paying attention. We have to raise our consciousness, but also our conscience—our moral fiber. If we do not understand our moral fiber, we are not going to recognize it in someone else. We cannot guide someone else if we cannot guide ourselves. We cannot help someone to raise their level of moral virtue if we are morally inept, morally inattentive, or shoving our foibles “under the rug,”

covering them with something that appears clean but underneath harbors garbage and debris. If we are not going to be honest and truthful with ourselves, then we may as well stop the charade.

The term, *metanoia*, helps to explain my meaning. Its historical usage can be traced to Greek philosophy, signifying to “turn one’s life around, or repent.” Its most prominent representation is found in Saul’s conversion recounted in Acts. This famous story of Saul’s journey on the road to Damascus illustrates the power of repentance and transformation of conscience. As the story goes, Saul (who later becomes Paul) hears the voice of God ask: “Why are you persecuting me?” Struck blind by the intensity of the divine encounter, Paul undergoes a profound change of being or *metanoia*. Referring to a mystical, life-changing transformation of heart, mind, and conscience, *metanoia* means to literally turn your life around—not just a change of your intellect (I don’t want to think or believe this anymore), and not just a change of your emotion (I don’t want to feel this anymore), but a change of your will. Through repentance your will is surrendered to God’s will, with a concurrent change of conscience and, most importantly, a change of heart.

True *metanoia* is about the discernment of those inner secret impulses and ideas that we have that may seem innocent to us, or that we may think are innocent, but that in fact are dangers leading us away from our life in God. *Metanoia*, transformation is about the diagnosis of self-truth. Have I really put the Divine at the center? What are my motives for doing what I am doing? Are my motives really for the divine or are they self-aggrandizing? Do I have a hidden agenda, and why does it matter that I know the difference? It matters that you know the difference because if you seek to be free, if you seek a life of holiness, you have to know the difference between false motivations and true motivations—motivations that lead you closer to spirit and motivations that lead you away from spirit.

Mindfulness is, in the end, a high state of mystical awareness, a sensitive attunement to the gentle mercy and glorious gift of being. It is the inner discipline applied to daily life events, which moves the soul closer to the abundant, exuberant, silent, glorious freedom of being fully alive.