

# COVID-19 Mindfulness and Stress Reduction

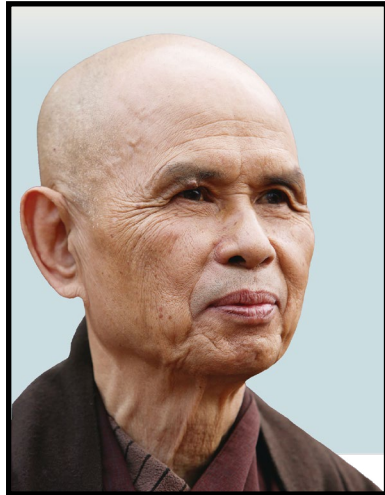


**Watch the effects of your thoughts  
as they ripple into your awareness.**



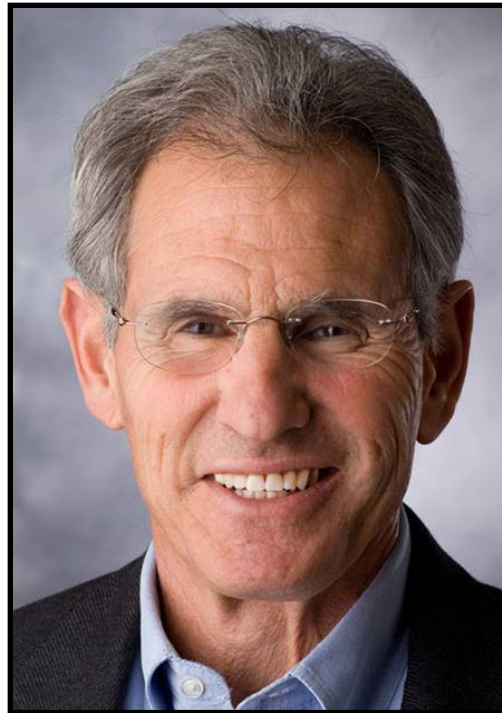
The Defining Moment Foundation

# MINDFULNESS

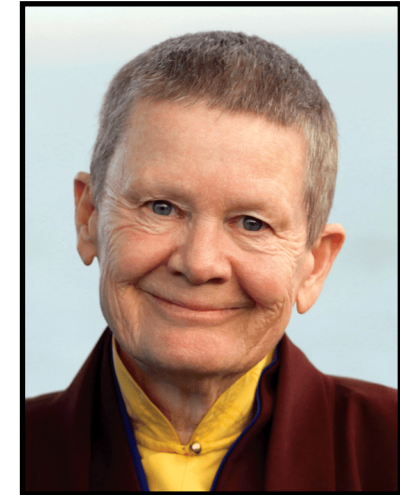


**Thich Nhat Hanh**

Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist monk, peace activist, and founder of the Plum Village Monastery in Southwest France.



**Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn**



**Pema Chodron**

Beloved Buddhist teacher, author, nun and mother.  
Gampo Abbey,  
Nova Scotia Canada.

**“Practicing bringing your attention to whatever arises in the present moment and noticing it without judgment.” - Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn**

**Mindfulness stems from eastern practices, particularly Buddhism.** There are many Buddhist themes in modern-day mindfulness, such as **Meditation, Breathing Exercises, and Being One With The World.** Dr. Kabat-Zinn, is a Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, he founded its world-renowned Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Clinic in 1979, and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society in 1995. **His research brought mindfulness into the mainstream.**

# How Mindfulness Can Benefit Your Mental Health And Give You More Peace During COVID-19



## What Is Mindfulness?

**Mindfulness is about what you're doing right now.** It is the act of cultivating full awareness of the present and what is going on inside of you at this very moment. When you practice mindfulness, you realize that the past can't change and that the future is uncertain, so you only need to rely on the present. **A mindful person has all of their senses focused on where they are and what they're experiencing right now.**

# How to Cultivate Mindfulness



**By paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and being non-judgemental.**

“People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don’t even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.” - **Thich Nhat Hanh**

# To Reduce Stress: Cultivating 5 Mindfulness Essentials



## By Being On Purpose

- **It takes a conscious decision and effort by one's mind and brain, to pay attention to what's happening in the present.** Such choices and efforts are required over and over again, since we are continually pulled back into habitual ways of processing information and responding to things.
- **Too often we're on "auto-pilot,"** not even trying to pay attention to what's actually happening in the unique situations and interactions that make up our lives.

# By Being In The Present Moment



- **Most of us, most of the time, are absorbed in memories of the past or visions and plans for the future.**
- **For most people it is rare to be aware, without some amount of distraction or multitasking, of what is actually occurring in the present moment.**
- **Particularly when strong emotions arise,** people often respond not to situations as they are, but to reactive perceptions and thoughts based on painful experiences in their past. In the most extreme instances, one may not be **“here”** in the present, but **“back there,”** reliving the past through responses to present situations.

## By Being Non-Judgmental



- **This is one of the hardest things to achieve.** We so often react intensely to our experiences, particularly unwanted experiences, and to our initial responses to them.
- ‘This is horrible!’ ‘What an idiot!’ ‘How could I do that?!’ ‘I can’t take this any more!’ ‘Here I go again.’ **You know the ways you can instantaneously and automatically judge situations, other people, and your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors – often in a chain reaction of increasing judgment and distress.**

## By Paying Attention



- **How much of the time are you really paying attention to what's happening in your life** as opposed to thinking about something else, remembering things, imagining possible futures, and acting out habitual patterns or, more accurately, reacting to people and situations based on old habits of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving.
- **Paying conscious attention can be especially hard when a current interaction reminds us of past hurts or betrayals** – and before even realizing it, we can automatically and defensively respond as if those old experiences were happening again.
- **All of us have our habitual patterns, our vulnerabilities to automatic reactions based on past experiences of hurt, our 'buttons' that can get 'pushed.'** This is particularly true when we are already stressed and/or in a hurry. Truly paying attention in our lives is a challenge for anyone.



## **By Calming the Mind during this Pandemic and Beyond**

**There are several ways that mindfulness can help to calm and quiet the mind, which increases the occurrence of positive feelings like enjoyment, appreciation, gratitude and general happiness.** Similarly, by cultivating positive emotions, particularly ones involving kindness toward yourself and others, you help calm your mind. You can learn to make this healing and happiness promoting cycle work for you.

## **By Slowing the Pace of Thoughts**

**The more one practices just noticing thoughts and bringing attention back to the breath or other current sensations in the body, the more ‘gaps’ occur between chains of thoughts and the individual thoughts within them.** Your thoughts become less compelling and demanding of your attention and energy. The continual **inner ‘chatter’** and images of the past and future don’t go away, since that’s the nature of the human mind. But they do **‘settle down.’** This effect is often experienced after only 10 or 15 minutes of **mindful meditation** and the attention to one’s breathing.

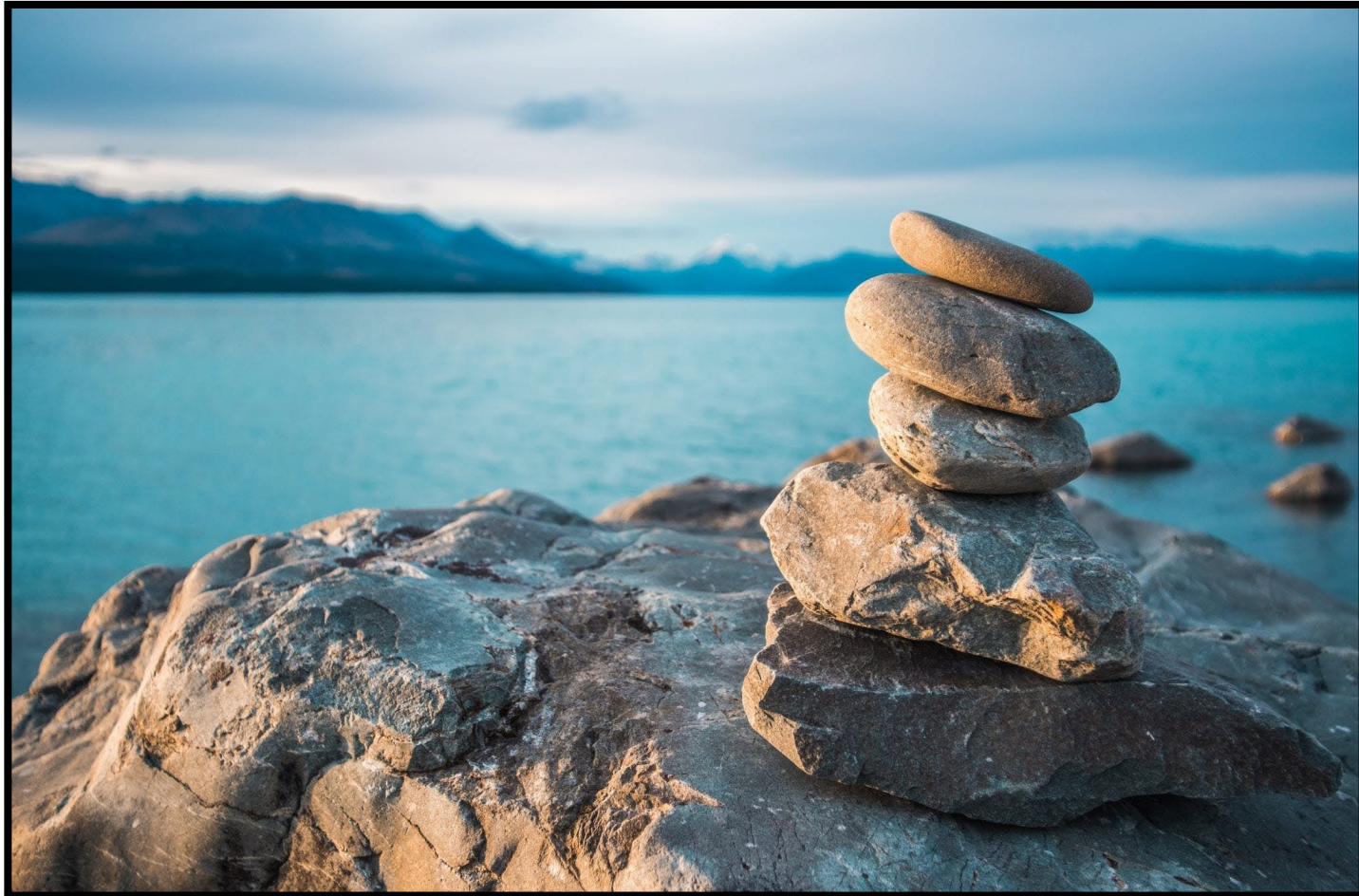
# What Can A Mindfulness Symbol Tell Us?



**This mindfulness symbol illustrates the concept of mindfulness in a way that's easy to understand.** It may appear to be simple, but it has a deep meaning.

**This symbol works as a reminder.** When you see it, you remember to be in the present and to be more mindful of your surroundings. In fact, the symbol itself is the perfect example of what the present moment looks like. First, consider the vertical aspect of the symbol. Time is often represented by horizontal lines moving from left to right or past to future. This vertical form indicates that time has stopped, **representing the here and now**, while the 360-degree view around it hints at the fullness of the **present moment**. In this case, it falls and ripples out from the vertical form to add to the richness of the symbolism.

# COVID-19 and Stress Reduction



**“Mindfulness can benefit your mental health by giving you more peace and less stress”**

# Nine Ways Mindfulness Helps with Stress



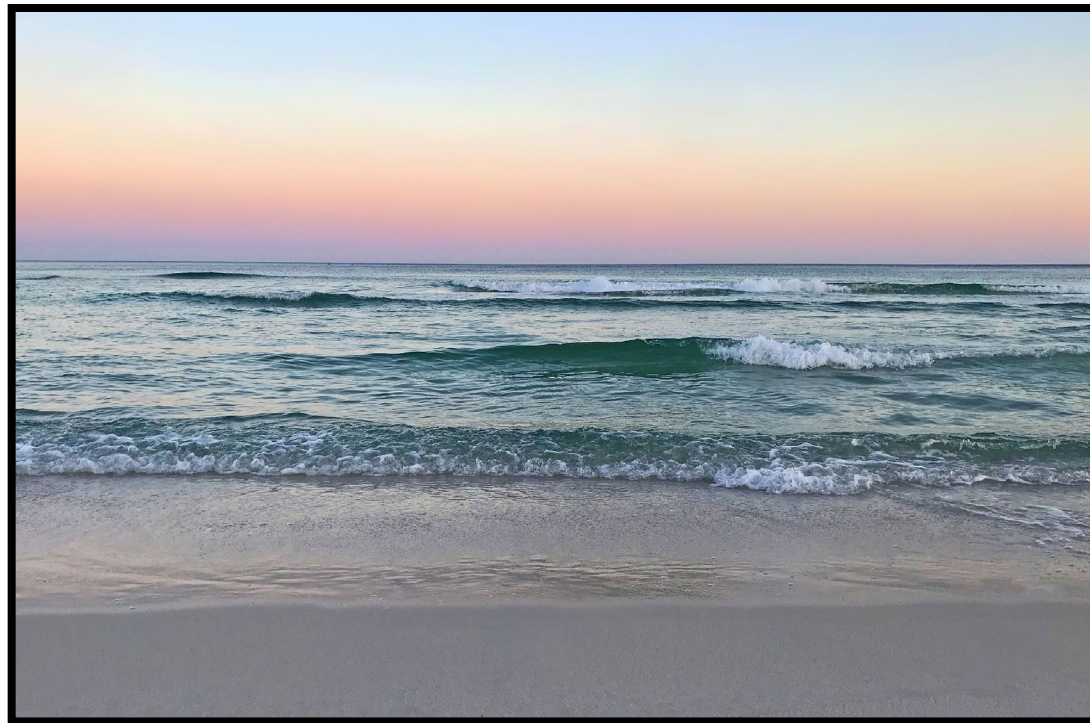
- 1. You become more aware of your thoughts.** You can then step back from them and not take them so literally. That way, your stress response is not initiated in the first place.
- 2. You don't immediately react to a situation.** Instead, you have a moment to pause and then use your "wise mind" to come up with the best solution. Mindfulness helps you do this through the mindful exercises.
- 3. Mindfulness switches on your "being" mode** of mind, which is associated with relaxation. Your "doing" mode of mind is associated with action and the stress response.
- 4. You are more aware and sensitive to the needs of your body.** You may notice pains earlier and can then take appropriate action.
- 5. You are more aware of the emotions of others.** As your emotional intelligence rises, you are less likely to get into conflict.

6. **Your level of care and compassion for yourself and others rises.** This compassionate mind soothes you and inhibits your stress response.
7. **Mindfulness practice reduces activity in the part of your brain called the amygdala.** The amygdala is central to switching on your stress response, so effectively, your background level of stress is reduced.
8. **You are better able to focus.** So you complete your work more efficiently, you have a greater sense of well-being, and this reduces the stress response. You are more likely to get into “the zone” or “flow.”
9. **You can switch your attitude to the stress.** Rather than just seeing the negative consequences of feeling stressed, mindfulness offers you the space to think differently about the stress itself. Observing how the increased pressure helps energize you has a positive effect on your body and mind.



# Benefits of Mindfulness during COVID-19

- **Mindfulness lowers your stress.** Worrying about the future or fretting about something you did in the past isn't going to change anything. Instead, you need to address your stress in the present. **Mindfulness** can help you release your worries about the past or future, so you can handle stress more effectively.
- **Mindfulness allows you to be a more empathetic person.** While practicing mindfulness, you become more observant of the people around you. You see what they're doing, and you learn how to see their points of view. This makes you more likely to help people in need or, at the very least, express compassion whenever possible.



- **Mindfulness improves your senses.** Our senses can be such a gift. Sight can help us paint a beautiful picture, and it's such a joy to hear the voice of a loved one. Even the things you touch are beautiful - with **mindfulness**, you can find greater enjoyment in texture, softness, and everything in-between. **Mindfulness** helps you experience more of the world around you through your senses.
- **Mindfulness can improve your overall mental wellbeing.** It's important to address mental health at any age, but it's particularly important as you get older. Practicing **mindfulness** can help keep your brain sharp as you age.



# Overcoming Anxiety: The Remarkable and Proven Power of Mindfulness



**It is hard to believe that something so beautiful in its simplicity could be so powerful, but that's exactly what mindfulness is, and now science can't stop talking about it.** Mindfulness has a profound capacity to heal and strengthen the brain against anxiety.

Research that analyzed 19 separate mindfulness/anxiety studies found that mindfulness was associated with **robust and substantial reductions in symptoms of anxiety.**



# How Does Mindfulness Work in Overcoming Anxiety?

- **Mindfulness changes the brain.**

**Anxiety happens because the amygdala, a part of the brain that is there to keep you safe by noticing and responding to danger, gets a little overzealous in hitting the panic button. When the amygdala senses trouble,** it immediately surges your body with oxygen, hormones and adrenalin to give your body what it needs to run from the danger or fight it. **The amygdala doesn't care if the danger is real or not, it just wants to keep you safe. This is called the fight or flight response.** It's hardwired in all of us and it's what has kept us alive for thousands of years. Sometimes though, the amygdala thinks there's a threat and fuels you up even though there's no danger. **Without the need to run or fight, the fuel builds up and that's the reason you feel like you do when you have anxiety.**

Throughout our entire lives, we can nurture and change our brain. **Practicing mindfulness** has proven to be a powerful way to do this. **Mindfulness** has repeatedly been found to change the structure and function of the brain, particularly an anxious one.

- **Provides an anchor for an anxious brain.**

**An anxious brain spends a lot of time in the future preparing for the ‘what ifs’.**

Mindfulness trains and strengthens the brain to stay in the moment. Of course, there will always be times when it is important to think about the future or the past and mindfulness doesn't interrupt this. What it does do, is give you back control over when to be influenced by what-ifs and when to let go. Even though anxiety feels very much in the present, and it is, it's driven by memories of past events or thoughts that are anchored in the future.

- **Stops anxiety clamoring for your attention.**

**Anxious thoughts are stubborn thoughts.** The more you tell them to be nice, the more they'll worry you. Fighting anxiety when you're in the thick of it is like thrashing around in a current. It makes things worse. Anxiety is a fight or flight response, remember, so the more you fight your anxious thoughts, the more your brain will fuel you up for the fight.

**Mindfulness stops the fight.** It strengthens your mind to observe your thoughts and feelings without fighting them or changing them. With a regular practice of mindfulness, the brain learns that it's okay to let thoughts and feelings come and go.

# Mindfulness Meditation Benefits



## Mindfulness has the Power to Transform our Lives and our World

**Bare attention:** Attending to sensory experiences that arise with an object of attention, without distraction.

- **For example, when attending to your breathing with bare attention, you just notice the sensations of breathing and nothing else.**

# Practicing the Life-Changing Art of Meditation



## Mindfulness and COVID-19

- **With practice, bare attention can be applied to all bodily and emotional responses,** including those triggered by very painful or traumatic experiences. For example, a person might attend to the sensations in their chest, throat, and face that arise when someone raises their voice in anger and reminds them of a hurtful parent or step-parent. Focusing on emotions as bodily events while ‘dropping the story’ of verbal thoughts and remembered images and sounds can attend with **Bare Attention** to what is actually happening in the body now, in the present moment. This opens new opportunities for learning about the emotional and bodily responses, accepting these as conditioned reactions that arise and pass away, and responding to them in new ways.

# Mindfulness Meditation

**Try for five or ten minutes at the start and work your way up to longer when you're ready.** Position yourself so that you feel supported and comfortable. When you're ready, close your eyes and focus on your breath. Feel the air as it flows in and out of your body. When your mind wanders, which it probably will, gently come back to your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings and sensations come and go. You don't have to do anything with them.



**Be mindful of your breathing.**

**Slow deep breathing is like a massage for your brain.** Try inhaling for 3 seconds, hold your breath for 2 seconds, out for 3 seconds. This will help to restore the balance of carbon dioxide and oxygen that has been knocked out by short, shallow breathing. It's also a way to initiate the relaxation response, which reverses the fight or flight response and eases the awful physical symptoms that come with anxiety, nausea, a racing heart, tense or shaky arms and legs, flushed face.

**Mindfulness is just experiencing the moment as it is.** It's where you let thoughts and feelings come, and then you let them go, without hanging on, to figure out what they mean. You'll probably find that when you first start, your mind will wander off in all sorts of directions. This is completely normal. Your brain has been doing what it does your entire life and it's likely to take some convincing to be still.

**Be mindful of your other senses.**

**Move outside of your mind.** Interrupt your anxiety by moving to outside of yourself, just a little. What do you see? What can you smell? What can you feel? Notice the ground beneath you. Or the breeze on your skin. What can you hear? Stop, listen and connect with the world around you. This will help to ground you and to direct your anxious mind to somewhere that isn't as overwhelming for you.

**Be mindful of the things that happen to you every day.**

**There will be opportunities for mindfulness dotted throughout your day.** Notice how things feel – your clothes against your skin, the feel of the water against your skin in the shower, the sound of stillness, the ground beneath your feet and the sounds and smells around you as you walk. **With mindfulness it doesn't matter what you're doing, but whatever you do, be all there.**

# How Mindfulness Can Help During COVID-19

**Acceptance:** Accepting the *reality* of one's current experience.

## Potential Benefits for You

Reduce Stress and Anxiety

Improve Attention

Help Cultivate Self-Awareness

Help Cultivate Self-Regulation

Help Improve Relationships

Helpful Self-Care Tool



Developing an observing mind that watches your own daily experience, notices your automatic patterns and gently redirects attention to the present moment is the beginning of growing a **“mindfulness muscle”** to help you navigate the winds of change and stresses in your life. **Always say “yes” to the present moment. Surrender to what is. Say “yes” to life, and see how life suddenly starts working for you rather than against you.**

# Mindfulness in Classrooms and Making it Part of Everyday School Curriculum

## Mindfulness Each and Every Day



**With stress in children in the United States at high levels, incorporating mindfulness into school curriculum is imperative.**

If children are going to be in an environment like a classroom, why not help them actually get into an **alignment, calmness, clarity and emotional regulation** where they can be open to what is available for them, then you create a community of learning.



# Mindfulness Practice for Kids

“Self distraction is at absolutely epic proportions and it’s not the iPhone, it’s the thought of I wonder if anybody texted me. There’s always this digital domain, this virtual reality, and kids are even more challenged to pay attention than we were when we were young.”

- Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

- **Squeeze Muscles:** Starting at your toes, pick one muscle and squeeze it tight. Count to five. Release, and notice how your body changes. Repeat exercise moving up your body.
- **Belly Breathing:** Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Slowly breathe in from your stomach (expand like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (deflate).
- **Mindful Meal:** Pay attention to the smell, taste and look of your food. No multitasking.
- **Meditation:** Sit in a relaxed, comfortable position. Pick something to focus on, like your breath. When your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your breath.
- **Blowing Bubbles:** Notice their shapes, textures and colors.
- **Coloring:** Color something. Focus on the colors and designs.
- **Listening to Music:** Focus on the whole song, or listen specifically to the voice or an instrument.

# Mindfulness: The Present Moment

## The **Present** Moment

What does it mean to be **present**

the word “**Present**” can mean a gift, and it also describes what is happening right now, in the moment

Sit quietly and pay attention to what is going on right now using your five senses.

Reflect on you experience below:

Right Now I See

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Right Now I Hear

---

Right Now I am Touching

---

Right Now I Smell

---

Right Now I Feel

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**Openness to Experience** - Rather than dreading and shutting out your own feelings and experiences because you think you can't handle them, you welcome with curiosity any thoughts and feelings that naturally arise, knowing they are merely sensations in the moment and the next moment can be different.

**Mindfulness: The Present Moment**