

Chapter 9 | Lesson on Mindfulness and the Power of Acceptance

FEAR NOT! TAKE A DEEP BREATH!

Mindfulness is a natural response to dangers.

We are wired to freeze before we decide to fight or flight. The moment of "freezing" makes all the difference between life and death.

According to Viktor Frankl: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."



You have the power to determine what to focus on and how to respond to any situation.

According to my analysis of the evolution of coping (Wong, 1993), we have been evolved from "fight or flight" to more cognitive and more flexible ways to coping with dangers, such as using creative, proactive, collective, existential, and spiritual coping.

Prayer and mindfulness are examples of spiritual coping (see <http://growmindfulness.com/>). But what is mindfulness? According to Berkeley's Center for the Greater Good (<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition>):

"Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens. Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there's a "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel in a given moment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future."

Mindfulness can turn your fear into calmness and sadness into joy. But it does not come easy; you need to practice the following spiritual skills, represented by the acronym OCEAN:

Open-mindedness. Focus on the present with an open mind. Pay attention to the present moment, as life unfolds. Pay attention to what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch right now.

Describe what the water tastes like when you drink it, or what you see when you regard the person who stands before you. Your ability to focus determines what you will find. Openness means the absence of biases and prejudice.

Compassion. See others as people like you. We are all struggling with our problems. We are all on the same train, heading to the same destination—death. When you see others as members of the same family coping with the stress of life, your heart will sense compassion.

Empathy. People are complicated and difficult to understand. When you feel annoyed with someone, remember that they may have their reasons for behaving that way. Others may feel the same way about you because they don't understand your intention and reason. Empathy simply means I try to understand you by trying to be in your shoes.

Acceptance. Accept life as it is. Accept others as they are. Accept yourself, warts and all. (Please see write up on the power of acceptance.)

Non-judgement. Take a deep breath and see what is going on without judgement. You can do that only by "self-detachment" or "self-distancing" according to Frankl. Look at each person with a fresh pair of eyes, without all the past baggage of painful memories, problem-saturated stories, and strong emotions of love or hate.

When you practice the above skills, you will find it easier to practice other skills included in BRAMMT.

This may not make sense to you and contrary to what have learned about strength and happiness, but hear me out, and you may be pleasantly surprised. Did you know that there was a forbidden fruit after all, and the consequence of eating it was deadly?

COVID-19 was a disaster waiting to happen, because we have ignored the fundamental truth that there are inherent limitations to human beings. When we play the role of God and entertain the false confidence that with science, wealth, and power we can do anything, there will be a global catastrophe sooner or later.

Now COVID-19 has brought mighty nations to their knees in order to awaken us to the truth that needs to be recognized; that we need to live within human limitations and we are morally accountable to a higher power, whether you call it God, Jesus, Buddha, or Nature.

That is why I have been a weeping prophet in the last 4 decades, warning people of the dangers of the broad way of positive illusions and shallow happiness, and the need to follow the narrow path of the Logos, the Way, or the Positive Psychology of Suffering (PP 2.0) (See Wong, 2019).

Paradoxically, there is power and freedom in accepting our limitations, frailty, and vulnerability. I know what I am taking about because I have spent my entire research career on learning how to develop resilience, hope, and mental health through accepting stress, sickness, suffering, aging, and death.

My keynote at the Australia Positive Psychology Conference many years ago was on Acceptance and wellbeing (Wong, 2012). I hope that more positive psychology researchers will pick up this topic.

We may have the best cruise ship, the fastest computer, and all the pleasures money and technology can offer, but if we don't recognize our limitations, vulnerability, and inevitable suffering; and if we don't want to cultivate the necessary virtues of humility, responsibility, compassion, and faith in something bigger than all of us; we will not find true happiness and we will not flourish in any sustainable way.

One of the basic principles of developing a resilience mind and mature happiness is acceptance. The moment we accept and embrace our limitations, vulnerabilities, and suffering is the moment we will be free from anxiety, fear, shame and guilt. Acceptance is one of the gates we must pass in order to survive and thrive.

Here are a few things that you could reflect on:

1. Do you believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel?
2. Can you see a silver lining surrounding the dark cloud over you?
3. Do you feel better when you share your vulnerability with someone?
4. Are you willing to accept the help or support from others?
5. Are you willing to pray for God's help in a dangerous pandemic?
6. Are you preparing yourself for the possible loss of a loved one?
7. Are you able to face your own mortality with calmness?
8. Are you prepared for the possibility of testing positive?

When you are able to accept the worse case scenario with a smile, you would then be liberated from all your fears and you would be ready to live freely and fully.

Coping Schemas Inventory-Revised (CSI-R)

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To what extent do you usually use each of the following strategies to cope with _____?

In making your rating, use the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at All	A Little Bit	A Moderate Amount	A Considerable Amount	A Great Deal
(Never)	(Rarely)	(Occasionally)	(Often)	(Always)

Please circle the appropriate number for each coping strategy:

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| 1. Rely on others to do what I cannot do myself. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Do something about the situation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Wish that I could undo the past. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Express my feelings and thoughts. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. Confront the problem by taking appropriate actions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. Do what is necessary to maintain a personal relationship with God. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. Believe that I can communicate with God. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. Run away from the problem or situation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. Do what is necessary to fulfill the requirements of the situation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Accept what has happened because eventually things will work out as well as can be expected. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. Break down the problem into smaller steps and work on one at a time. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. Learn to live with the problem, because nothing much can be done about it. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

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| 13. Confront and understand my own feelings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Accept/tolerate life as it is and make the best of it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Learn to accept the negative realities of life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Suppress or avoid facing my own emotions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Air my complaints and frustrations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Feel guilty for what has happened. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Practice controlled breathing techniques. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Change my negative attitude toward this problem into a positive one. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Change my pace to suit the situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Rely on people who have successfully coped with the problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Take the problem into my own hands by fighting back. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Look at unavoidable life events as part of my lot in life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Engage in mental exercise (such as imagery) to reduce tension. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Share my feelings with a confidant. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Try to reduce my anxious thoughts. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Seek help and direction from God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Actively seek out information on my own. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Wish that I were a different person. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. Feel ashamed for my inadequacies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. Put off doing something about the problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. Accept the present situation because no matter how bad things are they could always be worse. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. Wish that a miracle or something fantastic would happen. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. Believe that God will answer prayers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. Believe that there must be a purpose in the suffering I experience. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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| 37. Make a plan of action and follow it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. Look to others for moral support. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. Ignore the problem and pretend that it doesn't exist. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. Avoid thinking about the problem or things that are upsetting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. Wish that the situation were different. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. Believe that God watches over me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 43. Mentally transform the situation into something less threatening. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 44. Rely on available connections to solve the problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 45. Follow religious principles. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 46. Try not to focus on likely negative outcomes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 47. Practice muscle relaxation techniques. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 48. Change my attitude in view of this problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 49. Feel sorry for what I have done. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 50. Be determined and persistent in attacking the problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 51. Seek emotional support from others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 52. Receive practical help from friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 53. Restructure my actions in light of the problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 54. Pray to God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 55. Depend on the experts and follow their advice. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 56. Look at the humorous side of this problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 57. Try to look at the problem from a new perspective. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 58. Rearrange my activities to accommodate the situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 59. Believe that there is meaning and purpose to the things that happen to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 60. Release my pent-up emotions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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| 61. Double my effort to change the situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 62. Don't worry about the past or the future, accept each day as it comes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 63. Develop better time management skills so that I will be more efficient in the future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 64. Blame myself for what has happened. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 65. Believe in an almighty God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 66. Believe that valuable lessons can be learned from undesirable experiences. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 67. Depend on friends for emotional/moral support. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 68. Believe that God will execute final justice. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 69. Derive meaning from my past. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 70. Remind myself that worrying will not accomplish anything. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 71. Practice meditation techniques to reduce tension. | | | | | |
| 72. Depend on opinions of people who have experienced similar problems. | | | | | |

For the scoring key, please refer to the "Measures and Scales Scoring Keys" section.



Numbness may be a sign of new deepness in acceptance. It is alright to feel numb or nothing in some situations. What would be the normal emotional responses, when bad things (whatever that may be) keep on happening to you, again and again, with no end in sight?

Initially, you might have felt angry; you might have even tried to fight back in protest, but that only made things worse. Eventually, to conserve what ever energy you still have, you would give up, become helpless, and feel numb or nothing.

At that point, you had no more tears, no more voice, no more strength to respond to any attack, as if you were emotionally dead. But

you are not dead yet, as long as you still have a little residue of the defiant human spirit.

It is alright to feel numbness, which protects you from more pain. When the whole weight of the horrors, tragedies, and sadness of reality is crushing you, how else could you feel? Your tears have run dry, and you have lost your voice.

From the perspective of logotherapy or meaning therapy, you can even turn numbness into something good. As you dig deeper and deeper inside yourself for a solution, or crying out to God for help with increasing desperation, eventually you may feel grateful that you are still alive; you may laugh at the madness and insanity of educated human beings; you may discover some meaning that makes your suffering bearable.

Finally, you may reach a new depth of acceptance, accompanied by feelings of serenity, self-compassion and forgiveness and say to yourself, "That is O.K. even I lose everything, I still have something precious that cannot be lost."

Your numbness is now transformed into deep life satisfaction and joy, which no longer can be easily perturbed. Such enlightened resignation may be a sign that you are near the secret garden where can you walk with God.

Next time, when you are able to maintain your composure and refuse to let people get under your skin no matter how unreasonable or how bad they are, congratulate yourself, because you have mastered self-control and emotional regulation through the practice of acceptance. Your numbness in response to insult is indeed a sign of maturity.

Emotional numbness, even surrender, does not have to be a sign of weakness. It can be a strategic retreat to conserve energy and avoid needless pain and sacrifice given the hopelessness and helplessness of the situation.

However, when you are strong enough to feel the pain, you will be more determined to find a way to overcome the negative forces, whether it is sickness, injustice, or your own limitations.

Life is protracted struggle. It is perfectly alright to lose a battle in order to win the war.

