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The Way of
Effortless Mindfulness

A REVOLUTIONARY GUIDE FOR LIVING AN AWAKENED LIFE

BOOK EXCERPT

The Next Stage of Mindfulness

Most of us love the feeling of effortlessness. Some of the happiest times in our lives happen when we flow with the silent music of life. The sight of a dancer, athlete, or bird moving with ease and grace inspires us. What if you could learn to shift into a level of mind in which suffering could be relieved and wisdom, love, and joy naturally uncovered? What if you could discover a reliable way to access a sense of safety and open-heartedness that shifts us out of the confusion we have been so tightly caught in? What if awakening—shifting your consciousness into a more compassionate way of seeing and being—were something you could learn? What if there were an art, a science, and even repeatable methods to live from effortless mindfulness? My experience is that there are! This reality has been reported by ancient wisdom traditions and by many people I've met, and it's possible for you.

Effortless mindfulness is both a natural capacity and a skillful way to connect with ourselves and others. It is a way of being mindful from a different level of mind than we are used to. There is more to effortless mindfulness than meditation. Effortless mindfulness is primarily an off-the-meditation-cushion way of weaving together contemplation and compassionate actions. Effortless mindfulness begins by opening to a natural spacious awareness in order to become more wise, embodied, and creative. A new ethical motivation springs from the realization of a loving interconnection with all of life.

When I teach effortless mindfulness, I'm often asked, "How do I know when I'm really doing it?"

What does effortless mindfulness feel like?" Each person experiences a different facet of the diamond of effortless mindfulness as it shows its qualities to us freshly each time. A glimpse of effortless mindfulness might initially feel like any of the following:

- You feel relief.
- Your mind is wide open and without an agenda.
- Your thoughts are less prominent or have moved into the background.
- You are free of worry, fear, and judgment.
- You are able to effortlessly focus on something, without concentrating.
- Your center has moved from your head to your heart.
- You are resting as a field of seamless awareness that is outside and within your body.
- You feel aware from the Now and able to be aware of the past, present, or future when needed.
- Everything seems to be flowing easily, happening naturally without any effort.
- You experience a sense of joy and well-being not related to what is happening.
- You are aware from boundless, interconnected, loving presence rather than a detached point of view.
- You feel aware from nonconceptual awareness rather than thought.
- You know all is well, with nothing missing and nothing to push away.

Introducing Mindful Glimpses

One of my main techniques for connecting and experimenting with effortless mindfulness is through what I call *mindful glimpses*. Many people have told me that this is one of the simplest, most elegant, and effective ways to learn effortless mindfulness. A glimpse is a type of shifting, letting go, dropping, or stopping to allow a natural clarity and connectedness to emerge. Glimpses are the initial effortless effort of opening, surrendering, resting, or turning awareness around to find our open mind and open heart. They are “micro-meditations” or “rest stops” where we can refresh or reboot our whole body-mind system. A glimpse is not an insight from our conceptual mind; it is the direct experience of the essential peace, love, and wisdom that’s always been here. It is a paradigm shift, an identity shift, a shift of consciousness to a new view and a new you that feels true. In Tibetan Buddhism, glimpsing is sometimes called “flashing on awakened heart-mind.”

A mindful glimpse is similar to a Zen *koan*, a simple inquiry that can’t be solved through logic and that takes you out of your conceptual mind and small self. Unlike a koan, a glimpse does not start with thinking. It starts with awareness unhooking from thought. The effortless mindfulness glimpses I offer in this book can be done with eyes closed or open anytime during your day. They initially take from ten seconds to ten minutes to do, but they shift you into a new operating system that allows you to enjoy their continuous benefits. The primary way of practicing effortless mindfulness is *small glimpses, many times*.

You can see glimpses as invitations to pause and shift your awareness, to have a chance to taste the peace beyond conceptual understanding. Several of my students have told me that dropping into one small glimpse has been as life changing as going on a long meditation retreat. I have found that different glimpses work well for different people depending on their learning styles. So if one glimpse in this book doesn’t click for you, no worries. Just keep reading and try the next one.

When we do traditional sitting meditation, it can take a long time for the mind to settle. In contrast, here’s an example to give you the direct experience of the immediacy of a glimpse.

GLIMPSE **Wordless Awareness**

1. Allow your awareness to move from reading these words to hearing the sounds around you.
2. Now shift from hearing sounds to an interest in the open, objectless space all around.
3. Rest into this alert wordless awareness. ■

After you have read the mindful glimpses in this book, I suggest you record the ones you like best in your own voice, at a pace that seems right for you, and then listen to your own voice lead you home.

You May Not Know That You Know This Already

When I describe effortless mindfulness, some people tell me they’ve had this feeling walking in nature, playing music, gardening, making love, driving a car, or during a special moment in their past that they long to return to. Many of us have been intuitively practicing some form of effortless mindfulness throughout our lives—while being creative, with loved ones, or while playing sports. And some of us have experienced it when we suddenly became calm and clear during a crisis.

For example, we may have shifted into effortless mindfulness while hiking with friends. While hiking, we may notice that as soon as we reach the summit of the hill, our goal seeking stops for that moment. Our identity as a seeker relaxes as we look at the sky and feel our awareness and mind open

into it. We might look at our friends and feel a sense of connection and open-heartedness. We feel fully present, with no problems to solve and nothing to push away. We look at the trees and feel connected and part of nature. Our separate sense of self relaxes to reveal a wordless experience that rests in a place of “all is well.” At times like these, we feel freedom, clarity of mind, joy, connection to nature and other people, and a sense of well-being. However, we often associate these enjoyable qualities with an activity or place without realizing that the source is already available within us.

Because we don't always know that the source of our joy and freedom is already available to us, we might later say, “I miss that incredible feeling I had while hiking last week. I'll have to wait until my next vacation to return there.” Yet, if we try to recreate an experience by doing the same activity again, our expectation may keep us from relaxing the seeking mind enough to allow effortless mindfulness to be revealed.

Without knowing it, most of us do our favorite leisure activities to experience effortless mindfulness and its natural qualities of freedom and joy. We do what we love to experience effortless mindfulness. However, effortless mindfulness and its qualities are not dependent on what we do or where we are. So even at work or in the New York City subway, we can discover the inner freedom, love, and clarity that are who we truly are.

GLIMPSE **Memory Door**

First, read this mindful glimpse below. Next, choose a memory of a time you felt a sense of freedom, connection, and well-being. Then do this mindful glimpse using your memory as a door to discover the effortless mindfulness that is already here now.

1. Close your eyes. Picture a time when you felt well-being while doing something active like hiking in nature. In your mind, see and feel every detail

of that day. Hear the sounds, smell the smells, and feel the air on your skin; notice the enjoyment of being with your companions or by yourself; recall the feeling of walking those last few yards toward your destination.

2. Visualize and feel yourself as you have reached your goal and are looking out over the wide-open vista. Feel that openness, connection to nature, sense of peace and well-being. Having reached your goal, feel what it's like when there's no more striving and nothing to do. See that wide-open sky with no agenda to think about, and then simply stop. Feel this deep sense of relief and peace.
3. Now, begin to let go of the visualization, the past, and all associated memories slowly and completely. Remain connected to the joy of being that is here within you.
4. As you open your eyes, feel how the well-being that was experienced then is also here now. It does not require you to go to any particular place in the past or the future once it's discovered within and all around. ■

Effortless Mindfulness Is Like a Flow State

Effortless mindfulness is not only experienced during meditation or relaxation. When we open into it, we find a new balance between being and doing. In this age of multitasking, *effortlessness* may be hard to understand, let alone value. There is a Chinese phrase, *wei wu wei*, often translated as “effortless effort” or “effortless doing,” which is activity that is natural and in harmony with everything. In Tibetan Buddhism, effortless mindfulness is sometimes called *non-meditation* because we discover the spontaneous flow of wisdom and action. Effortless mindfulness is

compatible with an active, engaged life since it can be practiced with eyes open, anywhere. You can look out of your window at work and, in a few minutes, shift from a sense of feeling worried or fearful into effortless well-being and compassionate connection. You can return to your activity, now operating from effortless mindfulness.

You may know a form of effortless mindfulness as “being in the zone” or in a flow state. Flow is one of the most important areas of research in contemporary psychology. Many of us consider flow an optimal way of functioning while doing complex tasks. In 1990, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, PhD, published his seminal book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, based on years of research. Csikszentmihalyi and his team studied the ways people engage in sports, art, music, scientific research, and other tasks in order to enter a state of flow.

Csikszentmihalyi points to these seven qualities of flow:

- Knowing that an activity is doable, that our skills are adequate to the task
- Being completely involved in and focused on what we’re doing
- A sense of ecstasy
- Great inner clarity: knowing what needs to be done and how well we’re doing
- A sense of serenity: no worries about oneself; a feeling of going beyond the boundaries of ego
- Timelessness: being thoroughly focused on the present so that hours seem to pass in minutes
- Intrinsic motivation: whatever produces flow becomes its own reward¹

Most people master the task they are good at to enter the flow state. But in effortless mindfulness, we first shift into an integrated flow state, and then we can do any task from heart knowing.

GLIMPSE **From Your Heart**

1. Pause . . . notice your next out-breath . . . then, with the next in-breath, let your awareness move from your head down to your heart.
2. What is it like to know from your heart? ■

Introducing Awake Awareness

To practice any form of mindfulness, we shift our awareness and level of mind to see things differently. Deliberate mindfulness uses attention and our observing mind, whereas effortless mindfulness comes from a particular level of mind and awareness that is not as familiar. Among other names, this unique level of mind and awareness has been called source of mind, nature of mind, unity consciousness, natural awareness, true nature, optimal mind, and heart-mind. I will call this level of awareness and mind *awake awareness*.

Awake awareness is the foundation of knowing, like the quantum field from which individual particles of thoughts or waves of feelings appear. Awake awareness is formless and contentless, yet knowing. At first, awake awareness feels like the absence of thought and an opening into more space. Then, we notice an alertness, a clarity, and a feeling as if we are aware from the open space. It’s not the same experience as knowing from thought, and it does not feel like “I” am aware. It is more as if we’ve shifted into an awareness that is already awake by itself, without our help. This is why it is called *awake awareness*.

Here’s a deeper look at what awake awareness is and isn’t:

- Awake awareness is our primary level of knowing, which is prior to thinking, includes thinking, and is also beyond thinking.
- Awake awareness is not an altered, transcendent, or even a meditative state. It is not attention, and it's not *mindful* awareness; neither is it mindlessness or zoning out.
- There are many types of consciousness (patterns of experience) such as emotional consciousness, hearing consciousness, and thinking consciousness. Awake awareness is what makes consciousness conscious. Thoughts, feelings, and sensations are dancing patterns made of awake awareness.
- Awake awareness is clear and open, resting as peace of mind, while trusting that information or insight will come when needed.
- Awake awareness is the same in all of us, yet our individuality arises from it. Rather than looking to our thoughts, memories, personality, or roles to identify ourselves, through effortless mindfulness we come to know awake awareness as the primary dimension of who we are. Once we experience awake awareness as the foundation of our identity, we experience our conditioned thoughts, emotions, and sensations as waves within the ocean of our life.
- Awake awareness cannot be harmed by any strong emotional state. In other words, awake awareness is the source from which all emotional states arise and are experienced. We don't have to leave or change our feelings to find essential well-being.
- Awake awareness is nonconceptual, invisible, formless, boundless, and timeless,

yet it is our optimal level of knowing and the foundation of our identity. It is experienced in those times when we peek beyond the veil of our conventional experience and notice the silence that is the fabric of our everyday reality.

- Awake awareness unfolds into open-hearted awareness, and then the natural qualities of well-being, compassion, and intuitive intelligence are revealed.

Awake awareness is the most important discovery we can make on our path of effortless mindfulness. However, in this approach, awake awareness is not the end goal, and we do not seek to remain in a detached witness state or a state of pure awareness. Instead, awake awareness will unfold into awake awareness-energy embodied and into open-hearted awareness. Similarly, as we will explore later in this book, effortless mindfulness could be called “effortless mindfulness embodied” or “effortless heart mindfulness” as we learn to live an awakened life.

GLIMPSE **Background Awareness**

1. Take one slow, deep breath.
2. Let out a sigh.
3. Now, let your awareness open to discover the background awareness that is already effortlessly awake and aware without your help.
4. Notice that you can effortlessly focus *from* this background awareness. ■

The practice of effortless mindfulness begins as a simple shift or letting go to discover a naturally awake awareness that is already present all around and within us. One of my students described the

experience like this: “I’m not aware of an open mind and an open heart. I’m aware *from* an open mind and heart that is connected to everything.” When we tap into this feeling of viewing from our wordless awake awareness, it opens us to a relief from suffering, natural joy, and compassionate connection with people and the world around us.

We have been taught that our intelligence, identity, and safety are based on developing and being centered in thought-based knowing, or what I will call our *small mind*. When we shift from our small mind to awake awareness as the source of mind, we discover that we are already effortlessly mindful. Effortless mindfulness is the way of knowing, creating, and relating from awake awareness. Although effortless mindfulness begins by letting go of everything, we ultimately become embodied, energetic, loving, and fully human.

GLIMPSE **Eyes of Awareness**

1. With a soft gaze, simply see what is here in front of you.
2. Notice the awareness that is looking through your eyes.
3. Now close your eyes and notice the same awareness that was looking out is still here.
4. Simply rest as this wordless awareness, which is now aware of itself.
5. Without creating a thinker, be the awareness that welcomes and includes everything. ■



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