**Minding your Matter - Mindfulness - Not only for Monks**

Mindfulness is at the heart of the Shaolin Monk’s lifestyle. It is a non-stop training in mindfulness. From the moment they awake until they return to sleep, they are engaged in some sort of mindfulness practice, be it in sitting, walking or daily activities. They practice extreme physical, emotional and mental exercises. This supports and is applied to their marital arts practice. As a result, they are capable of performing what would appear to be superhuman acts. But really, what looks like magic or impossible, comes directly out of their ongoing committed practice and mindfulness.

We don’t all have to be Shaolin Monks to take advantage of the many and profound benefits of a mindfulness practice. Mindfulness practice actually isn’t all about the mind. It’s much more about discovering the mind/body connection. For instance, right now, are you standing, sitting or lying? Whichever position you are in, notice your contact with the surface you are on. If standing, your feet provide your contact point with the floor or ground. If sitting, your pelvis is in contact with some sort of surface.

Whatever your position, take a moment to feel the contact points, the parts where you feel the most pressure against the surface. Keep your attention on your sensation of the contact areas and slowly start to move a very small amount in a way that shifts your contact points, feeling for the changing sensations as you move. Notice small details about your sensation as your interface with the surface shifts.

Pause a moment and notice where your attention goes. What’s different about how you are feeling, how you are sensing yourself? Take a moment to notice your breath and the movement that happens if you don’t impose any ideas about how you ‘should’ breathe. Chances are you just experienced a shift in your awareness of yourself and maybe even your environment.

That was a very small taste of what guided attention towards your sensation can do. Imagine if you spent forty-five minutes being guided through a movement sequence that speaks to your motor cortex about changing unconscious habits of posture and movement? Bringing mindfulness into your life is a way to increase your vitality, ease in moving, breathing and posture.

There are various approaches for increasing your ability to be mindful in your daily activities. People who do Tai Chi are practicing in this way. Chi Kung is another form that applies awareness while still or moving slowly. Authentic Movement is a beautiful practice that brings people into a new state of awareness. Emilie Conrad Da’oud developed the work called Continuum which is a similar path. Many new works in somatics and embodiment practices are developing as the need gets increasingly greater in our fast-pace technological lives.

**Feldenkrais’** *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons are definitely apart of this growing need for people to become somatically aware. It is a very intelligent movement system with a few thousand lessons created by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais. They are specifically designed to speak to your nervous system and to expand your movement options. The process that leads to these new movement possibilities is one of directing attention to sensation, creating awareness. Basically, it’s a mindfulness practice that works directly with the somatosensory cortex. It’s a kind of change-your-brain, change-your-body, change-your-life methodology. And it is very accessible to anyone and everyone.

To access research in support of mindfulness, check out Catherine Kerr’s mindfulness research at Brown University. There is a very nice interview with Kerr on the science of meditation by Alex Knapp, on staff at Forbes. Check it out for the current science that elaborates on the health benefits of mindfulness practices. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/alexknapp/2011/09/09/catherine-kerr-on-the-science-of-meditation/3/>

Rick Hanson’s short video on meditation and neuroplasticity.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA3EGx46r4Q>

If you are interested in the science of mindfulness you can investigate Richard Davidson’s work with the Dali Lama and Deepak Chopra and Jon-Kabat Zin’s work with stress.