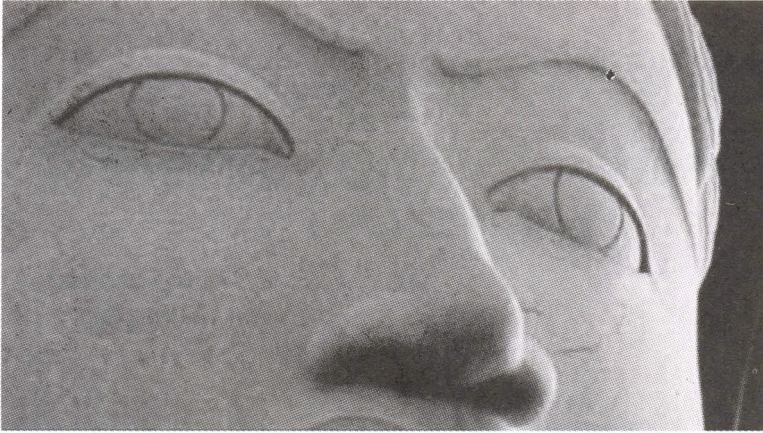


# Live Mindfully...

Sudha Umashanker



**'A ship in harbour is safe; but that's not what ships are meant for.'**

The New Year has dawned upon us. The revelry, the mad excitement of the countdown, the thrill of ringing in 1.1.11 at a favorite place, the partying till the wee hours, digital greetings at the stroke of midnight wishing friends and foes alike and clogging servers/towers and what have you, the rush of adrenalin, it is all behind us. The euphoria has died down. It's back to business as usual - another day; another year; another frenetic roller coaster ride.

Does it have to be that way? No it doesn't - not if one remains mindful.

The point is we have forgotten how to be mindful. Sucked in as we are into this rat race called life we seem too busy all the time with the wrong things - rather the wrong attitude towards things.

Mindfulness, a concept that Buddhist monks speak of, is just what the doctor ordered to get some sanity back in our existence.

Mindfulness is neither rocket science nor some kind of philosophical abstraction. It means just

what the word purports to mean. Being keenly aware, being truly alive, being acutely conscious - of everything you do and say.

From the time sleep wears off and you wake up to another day - be mindful. Take in the sights and sounds of daybreak, the birds chirping, the odd traffic noise, the veil of darkness lifting. As you sip your morning tea or coffee, remain mindful. Take in the aroma, dwell on the flavor, feel the warmth of the hot beverage on your tongue and swirl it around your mouth and drink each mouthful consciously (ditto for other liquids!). When you do your stretches or yoga feeeeel every stretch, hold it, be aware of the points where your body feels tight and slowly feel the muscles loosening up and limbering up for the day ahead. When you talk to some one, listen actively and listen intently - don't rush in to complete their sentences or fill in the silences. Believe me you will learn a lot more about the person that

away. Even with a routine thing as taking a shower be aware of the lather of the soap against your body and the feel of the water running against your skin - cleansing the body and washing away all the grime and your troubles too.

Sitting down to a meal with the family? Give it your 100% - the food, the conversation, and the people around. Reduce the clutter on the dining table and create the mood if you must. When you meditate, feel the stillness within - notice carefully the thoughts that flit in and out of your mind, in quick succession at first (from the mundane to the deeper - did you lock the front door, don't forget the bank papers tomorrow morning and the parcel you have to courier your son and the extra point you have to add to your presentation whatever, whatever) - till the initial restlessness settles and thoughts find their own level and you are able to go deeper into meditation. As you go about your varied tasks focus on the job on hand, unmindful - for a change of the results. During a recent chat with a Swamini

friend, she observed that hope is a waste of time. Instead, remain mindful, she said.

In response to a question: How does one practice spiritual life in today's modern lifestyle?, His Holiness the Dalai Lama says: "Because of the different lifestyles existing in today's society there are differences in forms of practice. But on a deeper level the meaning of practice of the Dharma is to watch one's own mind. It is mindfulness of mental activities. When positive emotions come, it is to realize this is positive, so it is good and welcome. S o m e t i m e s one deliberately tries to create positive emotions. Then through mindfulness one can realize that negative emotions are about to come and try to minimize them. That is the real practice of Dharma not just going on long retreats. Watch your own mind, your own sense of motivation. Once you gain some experience with mindfulness you can practice these things no matter what your level of society even if you are busy. In fact in the field of

business or teaching or mechanical work, any field really, mindfulness is very useful.”

How do you remain mindful when life throws challenges at you? I want to share with you a message I saw on the pillar of a temple. “Calm waters of the sea don't produce the best sailors”. If life tosses a challenge at you it is to help you evolve, to strengthen and to mature. An equivalent of this is the quote that says – “A ship in harbour is safe; but that's not what ships are meant for.”

Remaining mindful even during trying times helps you do the best in the given situation and that translates into favorable results. The pace is not rushed, there is less tension and you think more clearly. Mindfulness can yield far more positive outcomes than your mind can now imagine.



As Tian Dayton says in *The Soul's Companion* “It is enough today to be alive, to wake up with a body full of energy, with senses that are in touch with the experience of living. I will do whatever connects me with spirit. I choose not to pass hours of my day numb and dead inside treating life as it were

worth nothing. Today I will be an appreciator of the ordinary. I will laugh at the apparent contradictions in events and the silliness of my own petty thoughts and actions. Today wherever I am in my personal life is all right. I will not wish to be elsewhere. I will not hold myself and others to awful standards and postpone contented living pending my reaching some future goal. Today is all that I know I have.”