Mindfulness and Kindness
December 1, 2020
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When I first started practicing mindfulness my focus and intention was really about awareness of my breath and of my thoughts. I would sit or lie down with my eyes closed and notice my breathing. How it felt in my body. I would notice when thoughts would wander away from the breath and gently bring back awareness. It took me longer to understand that I really could apply the concepts of mindfulness to my thoughts and my actions. As I continue my personal mindfulness practice, I am learning mindfulness is so much more than focusing on my breath. It is becoming more and more how I live my life. I can use the tools that I am learning from mindfulness practices to enhance how I am interacting with myself, others, and the world. With mindfulness practice, we can enhance our understanding and application of the qualities of empathy and kindness.

Growing up, kindness and empathy were qualities that were deeply valued and expressed in my family. I always felt like I had a solid understanding of what it meant to practice kindness and empathy towards others. I think the biggest aha moment was when I was on a mindfulness retreat and we started having discussions around applying those qualities towards others including others that may have a different value system, those that think and do things that we have difficulty understanding or have caused others significant pain/suffering, and towards ourselves.

During retreat I explored and noticed how I felt when I thought about someone that I felt had hurt me/wronged me. When I would bring to mind that person, those experiences, I felt some uncomfortable feelings. Was it easy to extend loving kindness? The answer was no, at first. The more I practiced I was intentional about drawing from a place of empathy and love and those uncomfortable feelings started to dissipate. I was starting to be able to release negative thoughts and feelings and that actually felt REALLY good.

I have been learning that extending loving kindness and interacting with others from a place of heartfulness just feels better.