

The Raisin Practice – Mindful Eating

(From Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World)

Set aside five to ten minutes when you can be alone, in a place, and at a time, when you will not be disturbed by the phone, family or friends. Switch off your mobile phone, so it doesn't play on your mind. You will need a few raisins (or other dried fruit or small nuts). You'll also need a piece of paper and a pen to record your reactions afterwards. Your task will be to eat the fruit or nuts in a mindful way.

Read the instructions below to get an idea of what's required, and only reread them if you really need to. The spirit in which you do the meditation is more important than covering every instruction in minute detail.

You should spend about 20 to 30 seconds on each of the following eight stages:

1. Holding

Take one of the raisins (or your choice of dried fruit or nut) and hold it in the palm of your hand, or between your fingers and thumb. Focusing on it, approach it as if you have never seen anything like it before. Can you feel the weight of it in your hand? Is it casting a shadow on your palm?

2. Seeing

Take the time really to see the raisin. Imagine you've have never seen one before. Look at it with great care and full attention. Let your eyes explore every part of it. Examine the highlights where the light shines; the darker hollows, the folds and ridges.

3. Touching

Turn the raisin over between your fingers, exploring its texture. How does it feel between the forefinger and thumb of the other hand?

4. Smelling

Now, holding it beneath your nose, see what you notice with each in-breath. Does it have a scent? Let it fill your awareness. And if there is no scent, or very little, notice this as well.

5. Placing

Slowly take the object to your mouth and notice how your hand and arm know exactly where to put it. And then gently place it in your mouth, noticing what the tongue does to 'receive' it. Without

chewing, simply explore the sensations of having it on your tongue. Gradually begin to explore the object with your tongue, continuing for 30 seconds or more if you choose.

6. Chewing

When you're ready, consciously take a bite into the raisin and notice the effects on the object, and in your mouth. Notice any tastes that it releases. Feel the texture as your teeth bite into it. Continue slowly chewing it, but do not swallow it just yet. Notice what is happening in the mouth.

7. Swallowing

See if you can detect the first intention to swallow as it arises in your mind, experiencing it with full awareness before you actually swallow. Notice what the tongue does to prepare it for swallowing. See if you can follow the sensations of swallowing the raisin. If you can, consciously sense it as it moves down into your stomach. And if you don't swallow it all in one go, consciously notice a second or even a third swallow, until it has all gone. Notice what the tongue does after you have swallowed.

8. After-effects

Finally, spend a few moments registering the aftermath of this eating. Is there an aftertaste; what does the absence of the raisin feel like? Is there an automatic tendency to look for another?

Now take a moment to write down anything that you noticed when you were doing the practice.