

## Smell the Fall



Can we trust our minds as they are?

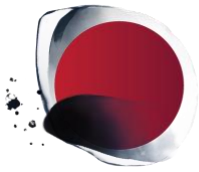
I was walking with my wife this morning at 5:15 am. She said, “smell the Fall.” I looked out, took a sniff, and realized - though I was awake and seeing and attempting to smell, nothing was registering in my mind. It, the pre-dawn morning was out there, and I was aware of it, but I realized my connection with it had no immediate meaning. It was then I thought of a recent email from a friend in which she told me that she is “always looking to the future and finding it difficult to enjoy and take in the present.”



First, I think we must trust our minds as they are. Whether your mind hovers around the emptiness of all experience, as mine is currently doing, or you find it racing toward the future, as my friend described. Simply trusting it – “the mind as-is,” begins to shift the awareness into the position of the witness. For example, as I sit writing and I begin to imagine what is next in my day, the itinerary is there, but the typical associative piece is missing. I have a ten o’clock appointment in which I am facilitating a potential acquisition and expansion of a small medical software company. I have a twelve o’clock meeting with the CEO of a large manufacturing company. When I look at both agenda items, I find no attendant feelings or impulses to go along with the images of the appointments. I know I will rise to the occasion when called upon to do so, but at this moment there is only emptiness between here and there.

What I am missing is the “such-ness” of experience. That is a Buddhist expression, as I understand it, of the involvement of the five senses in the moment as it relates to the object of experience. The such-ness of experience may be described as the balanced application of awareness that allows for the full beauty of the moment to unfold into consciousness “as-is.” Imagine tasting a perfectly ripe piece of fruit; you can see it in your hand, taking a bite you can taste its sweetness, there may also be a sound associate with it, and now smell its bouquet. By bringing our awareness to the senses as they engage the experience in-the-moment we increase the potential to rest or linger in that moment. If the experience is pleasant, it is easier to remain present. It may become more challenging to remain in the moment if what we are facing is unpleasant or painful.

Here is the rub as I see it. Even when the present moment is pleasant or better yet good or even great, there is a “shadow experience” that arises right next to it. So, when I rubbed my son’s head this morning to awaken him for school, I remembered all the times

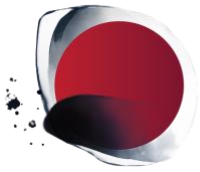


he would let me cuddle him as a younger boy that are now gone. I then realize I won't be able to hold him in my arms and smell his head, feel his cheeks against mine like I used to, and I feel grief. So, a pleasant and "positive" moment is potentially overrun by the memory of what is past and not to return. Just this amount of flooding of mental "stuff," into the moment, is enough for me to move on and away from my experience. I don't want to feel the pain, so I move on and away from the pleasure - the proverbial baby out with the bath water.

Now as I write this, I realize something; the emptiness I feel may be a defense against having to deal with this dichotomy. For the most part, my daily life is good. Yet a potent shadow carrying grief for days past, as well as fear of what may come, causes me to move beyond feeling. These memories or projections carry a potential to eclipse the beauty or the pleasure of the moment. And my defense against them may very well leave this experience of emptiness.

So, this is where mindfulness comes in. One of my teachers would remind me at every opportunity, "If you take care of it, it will take care of you." He was referring to "dharma" or "the way." This refers to mindfulness, a way of being present. As I observe and open to the complexity of any given moment as received into awareness via the senses, I cultivate this quality of mind, mindfulness.

One practice I find useful is this: I will often consciously intend to hold my awareness to an experience. For example, this morning I wanted to taste and experience my cup of coffee. So, I am sitting with my one cup of coffee and tasting it. A moment later I am off into thought or into the news on the TV. When I realize that I am no longer "with" my cup of coffee I do two things: I return to the taste, the smell, the burning sensation in my belly and



I also attempt to “back-track” and see what thought or feeling compelled my awareness away.

This gentle return to the object of awareness, while noting the things that may have pulled my attention away, strengthens mindfulness. Like a muscle, over time it develops through use.

Image courtesy of: [Olivier Piquer](#) [@olivpi](#)

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