

One area of my own life where I find that I'm often not focused enough is when I'm eating. It's too often another opportunity to multi-task! I love breakfast, but it's usually eaten in a hurry because I need to get to work. Lunch is often coupled with another task - work or reading - with the reading too often on my cell phone checking Facebook or the news. Dinner has the best chance of my focus- with some conversation with family or friends. But it is too often in front of the evening news.

I first experienced mindful eating at a conference, and while I don't do it all the time now it has made me more aware, and I can catch myself eating too fast, not enjoying my food or surroundings - unmindful of what I'm doing! So, what is mindful eating? It is the practice of bringing your attention to what you are eating - the food and its textures, smells, tastes, appearance - coupled with attention to your own sensations, thoughts, feelings and gratefulness for what you have.

How do you practice this? It's easy, really, which is important to remember. Spiritual practices don't have to be arduous - they're more about attention and focus - and letting that work on our souls and psyches.

Prepare: Your meal can be simple or elaborate. You can do this alone or with family or friends if they're willing to participate. It might be something you'd like to try alone for the first time or two. Put your food on your plate. Try to have a variety of textures and tastes. Perhaps you'd like to use a pretty plate, cloth napkin, the "good silver". These can give you a visual sensation of caring for yourself and your food.

Sit quietly at your table: Place your hands, palms open, on your lap and close your eyes. Give thanks for your food. You might like to name each food, giving thanks for those who have grown the food or even for the animals. Some people like to place their hands over their plates in a symbol of blessing.

Notice and eat: Open your eyes and look at your plate. Notice the colors and types of food. Notice any smells. Pick up your fork, and take a bite of one of the foods. Put your fork back down on the table, hands in your lap, and chew carefully noticing taste and texture. When you have finished chewing, take another bite, put your fork back down on the table, and chew noticing taste and texture. Continue this mindful eating until you have finished.

Finishing: When finished, place your hands back in your lap, palms open and give thanks again for your meal and all the good things that God has given you.

Interestingly, I find that this works well in a restaurant when I am eating alone. The moments when I've placed my fork back on the table and am chewing is when I sit quietly and notice all the people around me. It's fun to see people laughing together, having serious conversations, or perhaps eating alone. Give thanks for the variety of people in this beautiful world, and for those who work in the restaurant so that others may enjoy their hospitality.

Bon appetit!

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