



Intentions Are Seeds, by Gil Fronsdal

While our activities have consequences in both the external and internal world, happiness and freedom belong to the inner world of our intentions and dispositions. [...] Mindfulness places us where our choice is possible. The greater our awareness of our intentions, the greater our freedom to choose. People who do not see their choices do not believe they have choices. They tend to respond automatically, blindly influenced by their circumstances and conditioning. Mindfulness, by helping us notice our impulses before we act, gives us the opportunity to decide whether to act and how to act.

Every mind-moment involves an intention. This suggests the phenomenal subtlety with which choices operate in our lives. Few of us keep our bodies still, except perhaps in meditation or in sleep. Each of the constant movements in our arms, hands, and legs is preceded by a volitional impulse, usually unnoticed. Intentions are present even in such seemingly minute and usually unnoticed decisions as where to direct our attention or which thoughts to pursue. Just as drops of water will eventually fill a bathtub, so the accumulation of these small choices shapes who we are.

Our intentions - noticed or unnoticed, gross or subtle - contribute either to our suffering or to our happiness. Intentions are sometimes called seeds. The garden you grow depends on the seeds you plant and water. Long after a deed is done, the trace or momentum of the intention left behind it remains as a seed, conditioning our future happiness or unhappiness. If we water intentions of greed or hate, their inherent suffering will sprout, both while we act on them and in the future in the form of reinforced habits, tensions, and painful memories. If we nourish intentions of love or generosity, the inherent happiness and openness of those states will become a more frequent part of our life.

--Gil Fronsdal