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Mindfulness as a Means to a Better Politics

Introduction

Most people can recall a discussion or social situation in which their political views conflicted with those of other participants. A recent poll conducted of Ohioans by the Institute for Civics and Public Policy found that two-thirds of respondents reported they had strained personal relationships because of the political environment and nearly 8 in 10 agreed that the current political environment was as toxic as it had ever been in their lifetimes.

Participating in society means coexisting with others and self-governance requires that individuals are able to come together to solve collective problems. With people feeling polarized within the current political climate, mindfulness can help remedy our civic engagement.

Question 1: What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice that involves intentionally focusing on thoughts, feelings, and sensations without allowing our impressions, judgments, or external factors to influence the experience. It comes primarily from Buddhism's Eightfold Path, which teaches the Right understanding, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration. As it is known now, mindfulness has entered both secular and spiritual culture, combining these many facets to achieve meaning in diverse practices and understandings. For the purposes of common practice, it focuses on mindfulness of the present to reduce judgment.

Keeping mindful of thoughts, feelings, and sensations can help prevent overstimulation. Our society has become inundated with distraction, frustration, and general unpleasantness due to the presence of various media sources. Achieving awareness before allowing judgments to precede the moment helps avoid this unpleasantness. When people take notice before making judgments, they bring clarity to the present moment and prevent themselves from dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. In order to achieve mindfulness, we must be aware of the present and accept the moment we live in. Once mindfulness is reached, a better understanding of consciousness and perspective can begin. Appreciating the present we share with others allows us to collectively celebrate it rather than clouding it in self-judgments or in the judgment of others.

Question 2: How does mindfulness relate to politics?

With the current polarized political climate of the United States, implementing mindfulness practices can alleviate some of the toxic discourse in politics. Personal political attitudes can be

impacted by both external and internal factors. Some external factors that impact our political ideology are social media, the news, or our education. Internal factors that impact our political attitudes include emotions. Learning to regulate our emotions with mindfulness can change our political discourse. Practicing mindfulness can allow citizens to improve their outlook to become more constructive in their discussions with others about the future of the country.

Once mindfulness has allowed someone to have a more positive outlook, they will be more willing to have civil political discourse. Mindfulness gives us the tools to understand our beliefs and also see others as human beings, acknowledging that they can have different opinions than our own. In today's political climate, many are not open to understanding the other side's opinion or changing their mind. By implementing mindfulness into politics, people will become more open to the idea of changing their opinion or at least understanding where others are coming from.

Mindfulness in politics can be implemented on the personal and governmental level. Mindfulness can be used while having a stressful conversation about current events with people who have differing opinions. On a wider scale, mindfulness can be implemented into governing bodies to promote compassion between representatives. Mindfulness can allow representatives to come together and create legislation in a more civil, collaborative, and constructive way.

Question 3: How can we implement mindfulness into our daily lives?

The best way to increase the practice of mindfulness is by making it accessible and convenient. Oftentimes, mindfulness is misconceived as spending hours at a time meditating; however, this is not the case. While meditation is one technique that can be used, a more favorable approach for those trying this practice for the first time is to take short pauses throughout the day. This is an extremely effective method because it forces individuals to slow down during times of chaos and high stress. Not only does this pause the emotions currently being felt, but it helps the individual to process and reflect on them. This can help prevent further negative emotions like this in the future. Taking five minutes each day to pause and practice mindfulness adds up and can lead to significant benefits in one's life.

For today's youth especially, practicing mindfulness is easier said than done. Generation Z has developed a tendency to distract themselves and become intentionally "not present;" they can be seen double-screening or booking their schedules down to the minute in order to avoid other aspects of their lives. While every individual can benefit from practicing mindfulness, Gen-Z might have the most to gain. By implementing the five minute approach to mindfulness, Generation Z will be able to come more in-tune with their emotions and may no longer feel the need to distract themselves from reality.

Conclusion

Our political culture finds itself in a place where common decency and respect for members of opposing parties is limited, and addressing the stress-inducing toxicity in politics will be an

ongoing battle. This does not take away from the fact that significant bipartisan efforts still occur and should remain not just a goal, but an expectation from the individuals that represent the American people. Mindfulness offers a frame of thinking and behaving that can dispel this toxicity, and encourages a path toward better cooperation. It is a practice that takes patience and thoughtfulness. Mindfulness takes time, but it is an exercise providing a gateway to a better means of civil exchange.