

Examining the Five Facets of Mindfulness Through Orthodox Jewish Practice

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Mindfulness and Orthodox Jewish Practice

Identified sources reveal strong connections

- Berachot 30b: The early pious individuals waited for 1 hour before prayer, so they could focus themselves to their father in heaven.
- Rosh HaShanah 28a: Commandments also require intent and focus (“kavanah”).
- Berachot 2:1 – can only fulfil requirement of “shema” (prayer) if you had intent and focus.

Need for second order mindfulness research (Shapiro et al. 2006)

Hypothesis

- Extant sources demonstrate ‘attention’ component of mindfulness within Jewish sources
- Do Jewish sources *also* detail methods or techniques for developing mindfulness?
- Five Facets of Mindfulness framework help to reveal such methods in analysis of sources.

Mindfulness Facets

- Five-facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer (2006)
- Key mindfulness traits identified via factor analysis
- Associated with reduced anxiety and depression (Desrosiers et al. 2013)

Facet Descriptions

Mindfulness Facet	Definition
Observing	The ability to notice thoughts, feelings, and sensations without getting caught up in them.
Describing	The ability to accurately label and name thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise.
Acting with awareness	The ability to be present and engaged in activities without being distracted or preoccupied.
Non-reactivity	The ability to respond to experiences in a calm and composed manner, without being swept away by emotions.
Non-judgment	The ability to accept inner experiences without judgment or evaluation, whether they are positive or negative.

Beyond the mere practice, the five facets reveal ‘how tos’ of mindfulness within traditional Jewish sources.

“Similarly, he must answer nothing, nor engage in any argument and counterargument with the foreign thought...rather should he adopt an attitude as if he neither knows nor hears the thoughts that have befallen him.”
- Tanya 1:28

Results

- Five Facets revealed in classic Chassidic literature
- Tanya 1:28: “Similarly, he must answer nothing, nor engage in any argument and counterargument with the foreign thought...rather should he adopt an attitude as if he neither knows nor hears the thoughts that have befallen him.”
- Lekutey Maharan 2:52:1 – “The same is true of prayer; in regard to thoughts that come to distract, it is exactly the same. The thought comes a number of times, time after time, in order to confuse. One has to be strong, so as not to pay attention to it under any circumstances. And in this way, it leaves.”
- More than a citation of mindfulness practiced
 - Provides actual tools for managing unwanted thoughts
 - Focus through the avenue of prayer, but can be applied to other settings

Facet Analysis

- Non-reactivity: Not responding to the given thought
- Observing: Noting that that you are having an unwanted thought
- Acting with awareness: Engaging in prayer
- Non-judging: Looking at said thoughts in neither a positive or negative manner
- Describing: Labeling thoughts as intrusive in nature

Discussion

- Strong history for mindfulness practice within Jewish sources
- Beyond meditation practices and emphasis on attentional awareness, an analysis utilizing five facets of mindfulness reveal sources on ‘how’ to practice mindfulness
- Of note, sources identified were primarily Chassidic in nature

Future Directions

- Future research
 - Assess if such practice pre-date Chassidic literature
 - Why such practices are primarily found in Chassidic thought (vs. other Jewish sources)
- Limitations: Non-exhaustive search of extant Jewish literature
 - Future research can utilize additional search tools focusing primarily on Jewish sources

References

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