

The Craving Mind

*(A book review of **The Craving Mind** by Judson Brewer)*

Book Acknowledgement: For all those who suffer.

Forward Excerpt: Jon Kabat-Zinn quote from *The Craving Mind*

“It is so easy to fall into ruts, bad habits, even depression, thirsting for what we need to complete ourselves, what we might need to feel at home in our own skin, truly at peace in our life, even for just a brief moment or an hour or a day. All the while, ironically, we are missing the fact that we are actually conspiring to make ourselves slaves to an illusion. To the compulsive longing to complete ourselves when, in fact, we are already complete.”

Quote from Pema Chodron on Addiction

“When we scratch the wound and give into our addictions, we do not allow the wound to heal. But when we instead experience the raw quality of the itch or pain of the wound and do not scratch it, we actually allow the wound to heal. So not giving in to our addictions is about healing at a very basic level.”

Food cravings:

We are wired to find food, remember the location where we found it and to satisfy our hunger. It is an old stimulus, response and reward system hardwired into our brains for survival which is good. But why do we reach for food for reasons other than survival? We may be driven to this behavior, not by hunger, but because we are trying to soothe our mad, sad or angry emotions. The satisfaction of eating food momentarily distracts us from the “itch” of whatever physical or emotional wound you may be experiencing.

Technology craving:

Technology is designed to create a stimulus, response and reward system in our brains, in turn, causing craving and addiction to have more of the technology. Just like other addictions the reward lessens over time causing us to use more and more in order to achieve the reward hit in our brains. The stimulus and reward systems are multi-layered and further complicated by our social connections and expectations. Technology is proving to fracture our attention because of these habitual patterns. It keeps us from being alive and awake and present in our natural setting.

Along with other modalities of treatment and therapy, your mindfulness practice can help with the over-powering need to “scratch the itch” of your craving or addiction. The tactics and treatments are your map and mindfulness can be your compass to point you in the right direction on your road to helping you through your cravings and addictions. This can be accomplished by building up your ability, over time, to sit with the discomfort of the craving. Practicing sitting with discomfort will allow the craving to dissipate by not reinforcing the reward system in your brain each time you have a craving.



Addiction to Self:

Think about the voice in your head that we call the “self” that has been talking to you since you were born. As you grow up, you receive outside feedback which reinforces your behavior or identity. You may decide to keep this piece or that piece of a new identity you are trying on, based on the reward or lack of reward. You probably saw behavior modeled and decided to try it on as part of your identity. From that experiment, you may have decided to integrate the new part or discard it depending on the success or failure based on many factors.

Perhaps you can think of a time that you were confronted with a part of your identity through an encounter with a family member or at work that caused you to not want to integrate that part into your identity. How can we approach this mindfully? Sit in mindfulness to take in this new part of yourself, this new experience that is shaping you, opening yourself to acceptance of what is. Reflecting on the fact that we are all changing, growing and becoming – sometimes beautiful and wonderful and sometimes it doesn't feel so wonderful.

Craving and Love:

Examples of Love: Agape –Love of God, creator, bigger than life, universal; Brotherly/Sisterly-Gentle, lateral way of embracing other people because we care about them in a platonic way; Aros – erotic, romantic love; Generative love – i.e. Parent to child, child to parent

Craving love is an addiction driven by emptiness that needs to be filled by another person. Love isn't about me generating feeling of care, concern and deep love and admiration and respect for another, instead, it's about me needing that from someone so much so that I may pick partners that may not be good for me, I may stay in relationships that are not good for me, and could even border on or include abusive situations. This craving for love that is not fulfilled primarily because of this need, because the “I” is needing more than it is giving. When the craving takes over and you just feel like you can't live without this person, it may help to approach the nature of the relationship with mindfulness by asking what is empty in me that needs to be built up and is anyone else in charge of my happiness? Only me. We are responsible for ourselves and our happiness. We can reflect on what is missing and find ways to fill ourselves up and create our own happiness so that we may have something to give to another in our relationships.

Craving and Anger

Anger isn't right or wrong. It is a valid feeling. Be aware of being angry, where it is coming from and why. Is it outward or inward anger? Do I want to express it or is it best to sit with it and let it be? Bringing mindfulness into anger allows us to be at choice and aware of our anger. Emotions and feelings don't run us.

"It's like a mother, when the baby is crying, she picks up the baby and she holds the baby tenderly in her arms. Your pain, your anxiety is your baby. You have to take care of it. You have to go back to yourself, recognize the suffering in you, embrace the suffering, and you get a relief." Thich Nhat Hanh – *Anger*



Happiness Craving:

Everyone wants to be happy. Craving comes in when we want to hold on tight to the circumstances, people, places and events that created the happiness. We can get greedy for happiness and want more and more of the circumstances that provided the moment of happiness. To approach the craving for happiness mindfully, it is helpful to remember, happiness is a visitor, it comes and goes, just like everything. The tighter we hold on, looking backward at the memory of the happiness, wishing for it to return, the less likely we leave space for a new moment, a new happiness to enter our experience.

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