**Mindfulness**

**The Exhaustion Funnel**

You probably know the syndrome: your life is going OK until something happens - you get overloaded at work, a family member falls ill, you fall out with someone - and you feel stressed. So, you think, “I can’t do everything I usually do this week, something will have to go”. But what? Usually the first thing we drop is something that isn’t essential, something that won’t entail letting others down very badly: going to the gym, listening to music, seeing a friend, watching a film, reading a book. Something, in other words, that we enjoy, that nourishes us, and that makes us feel glad to be alive.

By the end of the week we feel a little more stressed because we didn’t do one of the things that help to keep us nourished, although we *did* continue to do all those things that deplete us and make us feel stressed. So we feel that something else is going to have to go this week. What? Something else that we enjoy, and that won’t let others down very much. As a result, by the end of that week we feel even more depleted - something else has got to go ... you can see where this is going can’t you?

The above diagram comes from Professor Marie Asborg, of the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm. The top ring of the funnel shows a full life, with work, family, friends, hobbies, interests, etc. The bottom ring is a life that has been stripped down to merely doing those things we have to do to keep alive - work, cleaning, food shopping etc. Professor Asborg suggests that those of us who continue down the exhaustion funnel are likely to be the most conscientious workers, whose level of self-confidence is closely dependent on their performance at work, and who are often seen as the best workers, not the lazy ones. Although she refers to ‘performance at work’ and ‘workers’, it’s easy to see that this syndrome can also apply to other situations, such as family and friends.