

THE BIG IDEAS

The Practice of Meditation

Cultivating our mindfulness.

Samadhi Muscles

Let's strengthen them.

What's Your Why?

Gotta have a compelling vision.

Practice Every Moment

Not enough just to sit.

Becoming Fully Human

That's the ultimate training.

Thoughts & Waterfalls

Step back and see your thoughts.

Sitting with Dignity

That's how to sit.

Commitment & Discipline

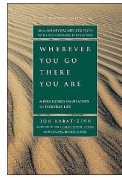
They're super important.

Breath Anchors

Gotta anchor our minds.

Job with a Capital J

What's yours?



Wherever You Go There You Are

Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life

BY JON KABAT-ZINN · HYPERION © 1994 · 278 PAGES

“When we speak of meditation, it is important for you to know that this is not some weird cryptic activity, as our popular culture might have it. It does not involve becoming some kind of zombie, vegetable, self-absorbed narcissist, navel gazer, “space cadet,” cultist, devotee, mystic, or Eastern philosopher. Meditation is simply about being yourself and knowing something about who that is. It is about coming to realize that you are on a path whether you like it or not, namely, the path that is your life. Meditation may help us see that this path we call our life has direction; that it is always unfolding, moment by moment; and that what happens now, in this moment, influences what happens next.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn from *Wherever You Go, There You Are*

For the last several decades, as a Professor of Medicine and the founding Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Jon Kabat-Zinn has been one of the leading pioneers in bringing meditation into mainstream medicine.

This book is a great collection of some of his best Big Ideas on mindfulness-based stress reduction and I'm excited to share a handful of my favorites in this Note.

Hope you enjoy and here's to rockin' our meditation practice!!

THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

“Meditation means learning how to get out of this current, sit by its bank and listen to it, learn from it, and then use its energies to guide us rather than to tyrannize us. This process doesn't magically happen by itself. It takes energy. We call the effort to cultivate our ability to be in the present moment “practice” or “meditation practice.””

If you haven't noticed, there tends to be a current of thoughts and emotions flowing through our minds pretty much every second of our lives. (My hunch is you've probably noticed by now. :)

Think of the current of thoughts and feelings like a river. Sometimes mellow and sometimes overflowing and raging.

One of the key goals of meditation is to help us learn how to step out of that current and observe it from the shore. And, as we practice stepping out of the current and observing... stepping out of the current and observing... stepping out of the current and observing... we strengthen our mind muscle so we have a much greater chance of gaining control of any emotion (whether it's impatience or anger or shame) that threatens to sweep us away.

STRENGTHENING OUR SAMADHI MUSCLES

“Concentration is a cornerstone of mindfulness practice. Your mindfulness will only be as robust as the capacity of your mind to be calm and stable.”

“Meditation is the process by which we go about deepening our attention and awareness, refining them, and putting them to greater practical use in our lives.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Only that day dawns to which we are awake.”

~ Henry David Thoreau

"The stability and calmness which come with onepointed concentration practice form the foundation for the cultivation of mindfulness. Without some degree of samadhi, your mindfulness will not be very strong. You can only look deeply into something if you can sustain your looking without being constantly thrown off by distractions or by the agitation of your own mind. The deeper your concentration, the deeper the potential for mindfulness."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

"It is virtually impossible, and senseless anyway, to commit yourself to a daily meditation practice without some view of why you are doing it, what its value might be in your life, a sense of why this might be your way and not just another tilting at imaginary windmills."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

Concentration. As Kabat-Zinn advises us, our mindfulness will only be as strong as our ability to calm our mind and point it in the direction we choose.

He continues: "You can think of concentration as the capacity of the mind to sustain an unwavering attention on one object of observation. It is cultivated by attending to one thing, such as the breath, and just limiting one's focus to that. In Sanskrit, concentration is called *samadhi*, or "onepointedness." *Samadhi* is developed and deepened by continually bringing the attention back to the breath every time it wanders. When practicing strictly concentrative forms of meditation, we purposefully refrain from any efforts to inquire into areas such as where the mind went when it wandered off, or that the quality of the breath fluctuates. Our energy is directed solely toward experiencing this breath coming in, this breath going out, or some other single object of attention. With extended practice, the mind tends to become better and better at staying on the breath, or noticing even the earliest impulse to become distracted by something else, and either resisting its pull in the first place and staying on the breath, or quickly returning to it."

Love the idea of developing our *samadhi*—the onepointedness muscle that allows us to step out of the current of our habitual and reactive thoughts/feelings and to choose the most empowered responses.

Here's how I like to think about it: Imagine Arnold Schwarzenegger's physique. All ripped up and sculpted from the countless hours he's spent in the gym.

Now imagine His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Although it's not quite as easy to see inside his mind, it's at least as sculpted as Schwarzenegger's body. He's spent as many hours training his mind as Schwarzenegger has spent on his body. "Meditation workout" after workout, the Dalai Lama's done repetition after repetition—training his mind to come back to his breath, to come back to love, to come to back patience and compassion.

How's your mind looking? All Schwarzenegger-ed out or a little soft and flabby?! :)

WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

"If you hope to bring meditation into your life in any kind of long-term, committed way, you will need a vision that is truly your own—one that is deep and tenacious and that lies close to the core of who you believe yourself to be, what you value in your life, and where you see yourself going. Only the strength of such a dynamic vision and the motivation from which it springs can possibly keep you on this path year in and year out, with a willingness to practice every day and to bring mindfulness to bear on whatever is happening, to open to whatever is perceived, and to let it point to where the holding is and where the letting go and the growing need to happen."

It's always a good idea to have a "Why?" for what we're doing, eh? Kinda hard to truly make that 100% commitment unless we have a *really* strong vision of how it ties to our most fundamental values...

So, what's *your* "Why?" for developing a meditation practice?

Here's a quick look at mine: I'm committed to creating an authentically awesome life—expressing as much love, creativity, kindness, generosity, enthusiasm, courage, wisdom, inspiration, joy and overall goodness as I can in service to my Wife, my family, my friends, my community and the world.

To do this, it's **incredibly** clear to me that the starting point is getting my mind strong. Optimism/the ability to shape the contents of our consciousness is THE #1 principle all the great teachers come back to again and again and again (as I talk about in all these Notes, the Optimal Living 101 class and my book). It's equally clear to me that meditation is one of *the* most powerful ways to strengthen my mind as I develop the ability to step in between stimulus and

" I don't know of any magical solutions and, frankly, I am not looking for one. A full life is painted with broad brush strokes. Many paths can lead to understanding and wisdom. Each of us has different needs to address and things worth pursuing over the course of a lifetime. Each of us has to chart our own course, and it has to fit what we are ready for."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

" What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

response.

Now, I'd meditate if all I got out of it was the ability to step in between a challenging stimulus and a craptastic habitual response—choosing my most empowered response instead of a lame one. But, what's really cool is that we get a lot of other goodness out of meditation.

As we discuss in our Note on *The Relaxation Revolution*, science now shows that mind body practices such as meditation not only keep us significantly healthier, they literally alter our genetics—changing the way our genes express themselves and keeping us much more healthy, creative and fully alive. That rocks.

But that's not it.

I also know that cultivating my samadhi muscles helps me plug into the Divine within me—helping me shine with a radiant enthusiasm that supports the expression of all my other virtues.

And, finally, I kinda see meditation as a shower for my mind. I don't know about you, but I shower at least once a day. If I missed a day or two and you came within a few feet of me, you'd know. If I missed a week or two, you'd *definitely* know and I don't want to imagine what I'd smell like if I missed a month or two. SAME thing with my mind. If I missed a day or two, you'd know. If I missed a week or two, you'd *definitely* know and I don't want to imagine who I would be if I missed a month or two.

And, finally, finally, starting every morning with my meditation practice, it's pretty much impossible for me to have a *really* bad day (and definitely not two in a row). There's something truly magical to sitting down and cleaning my consciousness up so consistently...

So, that's a quick look at why I've meditated every day for at least 30 minutes for the last 2+ years and why I don't plan to miss a day for the rest of my life. What's YOUR Why?!?

You might dig Kabat-Zinn's awesome exercise to help us discover it: "TRY: Asking yourself why you meditate or why you want to meditate. Don't believe your first answers. Just write down a list of whatever comes to mind. Continue asking yourself. Also, inquire about your values, about what you honor most in your life. Make a list of what is really important to you. Ask yourself: What is my vision, my map for where I am and where I am going? Does this vision reflect my true values and intentions? Am I remembering to embody those values? Do I practice my intentions? How am I *now* in my job, in my family, in my relationships, with myself? How do I want to be? How might I live my vision, my values? How do I relate to suffering, both my own and others?"

PRACTICE EVERY MOMENT

"If mindfulness is deeply important to you, then every moment is an opportunity to practice."

Love that. Reminds me of Eknath Easwaran's awesome comment in his brilliant *Conquest of Mind* (see Notes): "Sri Aurobindo, one of twentieth-century India's most luminous figures, has a good motto for reminding us of this: "All life is yoga." Every moment, he means, is an opportunity for training the mind."

And Genpo Roshi's equally awesome comment in his equally brilliant *Big Mind Big Heart* (see Notes): "We're at the point in our evolution that we all have to become conscious. This is a time of revolution. There's no holding back. So I'm about tearing down the monastery walls and seeing the whole world as the monastery, as the practice, as the spiritual temple. What we're all working on is this very being, this very life. This is the temple, it has no walls."

This is a *huge* part of my meditation practice. It's not about sitting for 15 or 30 or 60 minutes and then being rude at the breakfast table. We've gotta look at every moment as another opportunity to train our minds and to become more connected to our Highest Selves.

So, let's practice every moment!

BECOMING FULL HUMAN BEINGS

"Formal practice refers to specific periods of time in which we purposefully stop other activity and engage in particular methods of cultivating mindfulness and concentration."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

"I am told that in Pali, the original language of the Buddha, there is no one word corresponding to our word "meditation," even though meditation might be said to have evolved to an extraordinary degree in ancient Indian culture. One word that is frequently used is *bhavana*. Bhavana translates as "development through mental training." To me, this strikes the mark; meditation really is about human development."

How cool is that?!?

They didn't even have a word corresponding to "meditation" in Buddha's Pali. Love it.

This practice that we now call meditation was (and is) better understood as "development through mental training." Fact is, it's impossible to develop into full human beings unless we deliberately train our minds.

So, let's!!! :)

THOUGHTS AND WATERFALLS

"Meditation does not involve trying to change your thinking by thinking some more. It involves watching thought itself."

That's from a chapter called "*Meditation: Not to Be Confused with Positive Thinking.*" :)

Meditation isn't about learning how to change our thoughts from negative to positive per se. It's about learning to observe the thoughts themselves. That process alone has an alchemizing effect—simply seeing that we are NOT our thoughts is remarkably powerful. And cultivating this practice is another way to develop the samadhi muscles that allow us to step out of the stream of negative thoughts that can often sweep us away.

Kabat-Zinn has a beautiful image to bring this point home. He says: "Another way to look at meditation is to view the process of thinking itself as a waterfall, a continual cascading of thought. In cultivating mindfulness, we are going *beyond* or *behind* our thinking, much the way you might find a vantagepoint in a cave or depression in the rock behind a waterfall. We still see and hear the water, but we are out of the torrent."

Beautiful...

SITTING WITH DIGNITY

"So, when we take our seat in meditation and remind ourselves to sit with dignity, we are coming back to our original worthiness. That in itself is quite a statement."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

"When we describe the sitting posture, the word that feels the most appropriate is "dignity."

Sitting down to meditate, our posture talks to us. It makes its own statement. You might say the posture itself is the meditation. If we slump, it reflects low energy, passivity, a lack of clarity. If we sit ramrod-straight, we are tense, making too much of an effort, trying too hard. When I use the word "dignity" in teaching situations, as in "Sit in a way that embodies dignity," everybody immediately adjusts their posture to sit up straighter. But they don't stiffen. Faces relax, shoulders drop, head, neck, and back come into easy alignment. The spine rises out of the pelvis with energy. Sometimes people tend to sit forward, away from the backs of their chairs, more autonomously. Everybody seems to instantly know that inner feeling of dignity and how to embody it."

Wondering how you should sit? There ya go: Sit with dignity.

Whether it's sitting in a chair or in a more formal meditation posture, keep the word "Dignity" in mind.

COMMITMENT & DISCIPLINE

"Too often, our lives cease working because we cease working at life, because we are unwilling to take responsibility for things as they are, and to work with our difficulties."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

"One of the principle virtues of a daily discipline is an acquired transparency toward the appeals of transitory mood states. A commitment to getting up early to meditate becomes independent of wanting or not wanting to do so on any particular morning. The practice calls us to a higher standard—that of remembering the importance of wakefulness and the ease with which we can slip into a pattern of automatic living which lacks awareness and sensitivity. Just waking up early to practice non-doing is itself a tempering process. It generates enough heat to rearrange atoms, gives us a new and stronger crystal lattice of mind and body, a lattice that keeps us honest and reminds us that there is far more to life than getting things done.

Discipline provides a constancy which is independent of what kind of day you had yesterday and what kind of day you anticipate today."

If you've read enough of these Notes you know I'm a huge fan of consistency on our fundamentals and turning our discipline into blissipline.

There's something truly magical about becoming the type of person who does what needs to be done—independent of whether or not we "feel" like it.

So many teachers hit on this theme. For now, let's celebrate David Reynolds' wisdom from his great book *Constructive Living* (see Notes) where he says: "The mature human being goes about doing what needs to be done regardless of whether that person feels great or terrible. Knowing that you are the kind of person with that kind of self-control brings all the satisfaction and confidence you will ever need. Even on days when the satisfaction and confidence just aren't there, you can get the job done anyway."

BREATH ANCHORS

"It helps to have a focus for your attention, an anchor line to tether you to the present moment and to guide you back when the mind wanders. The breath serves this purpose exceedingly well. It can be a true ally. Bringing awareness to our breathing, we remind ourselves that we are here now, so we might as well be fully awake for whatever is already happening."

A key idea of effective mindfulness meditation is to have an "anchor" for your attention.

Imagine a boat getting tossed by the ocean's waves. To keep the boat in one place, the Captain throws down an anchor. Same thing with our minds. If we want to keep our minds in one place, we've gotta establish an anchor. And the breath is one of the best ones out there.

Kabat-Zinn continues: "To use your breathing to nurture mindfulness, just tune in to the feeling of it... the feeling of the breath coming into your body and the feeling of the breath leaving your body. That's all. Just feeling the breath. Breathing and knowing that you're breathing. This doesn't mean deep breathing or forcing your breathing, or trying to feel something special, or wondering whether you're doing it right. It doesn't mean thinking about your breathing, either. It's just a bare bones awareness of the breath moving in and the breath moving out."

(For more on specific techniques for meditation, Google Jon Kabat-Zinn and/or check out www.Blissitations.com where we're developing resources to help you develop an awesome meditation practice grounded in all these Big Ideas!)

YOUR JOB WITH A CAPITAL J

In a chapter called "What Is My Job on the Planet with a Capital J?" Kabat-Zinn tells the inspiring story of Buckminster Fuller—who, apparently, before he was recognized as a genius, had failed numerous times by age thirty-two and was contemplating suicide. Apparently everything he tried didn't work out and he thought perhaps life would be better for his wife and

"Mindful inquiry can heal low self-esteem, for the simple reason that a low self-estimation is really a wrong calculation, a misperception of reality."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

“What is my job on the planet?” is one question we might do well to ask ourselves over and over again. Otherwise, we may wind up doing somebody else’s job and not even know it.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Perhaps the most “spiritual” thing any of us can do is simply to look through our own eyes, see with eyes of wholeness, and act with integrity and kindness.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

infant daughter if he ended his life.

Thankfully for all of us, he decided to live from that moment on *as if* he had died that night and decided that he would become an employee of the planet—devoting himself to “asking, “What is it on this planet [which he referred to as Spaceship Earth] that needs doing that I know something about, that probably won’t happen unless I take responsibility for it? He decided he would just ask that question continuously and do what came to him, following his nose. In this way, working for humanity as an employee of the universe at large, you get to modify and contribute to your locale by who you are, how you are, and what you do. But it’s no longer personal. It’s just part of the totality of the universe expressing itself.

Rarely do we question and then contemplate with determination what our hearts are calling us to do and to be. I like to frame such efforts in question form: “What is my job on the planet with a capital J?” or, “What do I care about so much that I would pay to do it?” If I ask such a question and I don’t come up with an answer other than, “I don’t know,” then I just keep on asking the question.”

What an *awesome* exercise!! Ultimately, our meditation is not the end goal in itself but a vehicle to help us most fully live. So, what’s YOUR J-O-B with a capital J-O-B?!? :)

Here’s to embracing our practices that help us most fully plug in so we can shine with an uber-bright radiant enthusiasm that lights up our world,

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

P.S. “Once the universe is your employer, very interesting things start to happen, even if someone else is cutting your paycheck. But you do have to be patient. It takes time to grow this way of being into your life. The place to start of course is right here. The best time? How about now?”

**If you liked this Note,
you’ll probably like...**

Conquest of Mind
The Relaxation Revolution
The Dhammapada
The Bhagavad Gita
Mastery

About the Author of “Wherever You Go There You Are”

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Jon Kabat-Zinn, PH.D., is founding Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He is also the founding director of its renowned Stress Reduction Clinic and Professor of Medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He teaches mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in various venues around the world. He received his Ph.D. in molecular biology from MIT in 1971 in the laboratory of Nobel Laureate, Salvador Luria. (from University of Massachusetts Med school’s web site)

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Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a “Philosopher”) and a passionate student of life who’s committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He harts his job.