

SUMMARY

WHEREVER YOU GO,
THERE YOU ARE

JON KABAT-ZINN



Summary of “Wherever You Go, There You Are” by Jon Kabat-Zinn

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Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life

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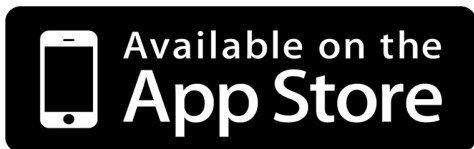


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Introduction

When you hear about meditation, you might think that meditation is something that only practiced Buddhist monks can do. However, meditation is not just for Buddhist monks anymore. It can be useful and possible for everyone to practice meditation in their daily lives. That's because meditation is all about paying attention, which is something anyone can do! This practice can be simple or complicated depending on whether or not you think you have your life figured out. In other words, those who think they have everything figured out fail to pay attention to what is going on around them because they have complete faith in their knowledge and actions. In Buddhism, however, this thinking is akin to being ignorant of the world. Instead, we must focus on being mindful of everything that is around us and living in the moment. "An appreciation for the present moment," or "mindfulness," is the center of all meditative practices, and while it may sound simple, it's not that easy. Luckily, once you master the basics of meditation, you'll be able to meditate at any time and in any situation. All you have to do is take yourself away from your thoughts and focus on your breathing. Additionally, sitting in a relaxed and dignified pose will help with meditation and improve your focus. So why should you begin practicing mindfulness meditation anyway? Being mindful can help you experience new levels of joy, peacefulness, and happiness. It will also help you better understand your emotions, like grief, sadness, and fear. In the end, mindfulness will allow you to become aware of who you are, giving you the power to unleash your creativity and intelligence.

Lastly, everyone can meditate. While it certainly takes a long-term commitment to master meditation, engaging in regular practice will allow you to open yourself up to personal growth. In fact, "Thinking you are unable to meditate is a little like thinking you are unable to breathe or to concentrate or relax." So if you're ready to unlock your powers from within, let's get started.

Practicing Patience, Non-judgment, and Generosity

Many people believe that meditation is only for those who spend a lifetime practicing various techniques. And while mindfulness meditation certainly takes time and commitment, the truth is that anyone can mindfully meditate. In fact, the only physical attribute you need is to have a mind. To begin your practice, you'll need to focus on honing specific qualities. First, start by practicing *patience* in your daily life, especially when it makes the least sense for you to do so. For example, when you get irritated or annoyed because you are sitting in bumper to bumper traffic, take a moment to recognize how pointless that feeling is. In other words, try and practice patience even when it seems hard or useless. Take a look at the Dalai Lama who never got angry with the Chinese people, even when the government committed atrocious acts of genocide against the Tibetan people. Instead, he understood that even if the Chinese took everything from them, he would never allow the Chinese to take his mind too.

Practicing patience means that you accept the way things are and understand that everything will happen in due time. So when you find that you are becoming angry or impatient, you should practice turning that anger into patience and compassion. Next, you'll need to practice on being *non-judgmental*. You see, as you meditate, you'll notice how often your mind makes judgments. That's because the brain wants to categorize your experiences as either *good* or *bad*. However, if you use patience and look at the big picture, you'll realize that you don't know everything. So instead of judging the situation and labeling it as good or bad, be patient and have faith that things will develop how they are supposed to. With this non-judgment and non-attachment attitude, you can begin to focus on the present and how to better your circumstances rather than focusing on past actions.

The next quality that you'll need to practice is *generosity*. Generosity is an important part of anyone's personality who wants to make the world a

better place. It is centered around casting away the “me first” attitude and becoming loving and trusting of others. Additionally, it focuses on giving your gifts freely to the world. This isn’t necessarily the giving of material goods or money; instead, it can also mean being generous with your enthusiasm, trust, presence, and compassion. On the other hand, when you hoard and fail to trust others, you create an isolationist attitude which results in constant worry that prevents you from participating in the present. Lastly, even if others abuse your love and trust, you must continue to give it freely in the world to others. If not, you are just continuing a mindless cycle of negative repetition.

Practicing Humility, Voluntary Simplicity, and Concentration

In addition to practicing generosity, patience, and non-judgment, there are a few other practices that will help you on your path to mindfulness. For instance, *humility* is especially important in a mindful person's personality. You see, humans are actually pretty weak, even the most successful people have failed and been brought to their knees on more than one occasion. Therefore, you must be able to admit the fallibility and imperfection of being human. In doing so, you can begin to strengthen yourself.

On the other hand, those who cannot admit to being imperfect end up making themselves look weak and even delusional. That's because it is difficult to trust anyone who is not humble and acts as if they have all the answers. I mean, who among us was born immediately knowing more than anyone else? Along with humility, *voluntary simplicity* and *concentration* can become important qualities to help you along your journey to mindful meditation.

Voluntary simplicity means engaging in one thing at a time. For instance, if you are spending time with your family and you receive a text or email, you could purposely ignore your phone and give your full attention to your family. When you begin to add too many things into your life at once, you complicate your life even further. So keep your life simple by practicing voluntary simplicity. Of course, this doesn't mean that you should do nothing. Instead, you are consciously stopping certain activities to cultivate a sense of stillness and appreciation.

Lastly, it takes concentration to focus and become successfully mindful. The good thing is that the more mindful you become, the more deeply you'll be able to concentrate on things. Therefore, concentration is another key element to focus on in your practice of meditation and mindfulness. Without concentration, mindfulness will be unable to flow with ease. When you are fully concentrated, you are able to direct your energy towards living

in the moment. All other thoughts and worries will disappear, and you'll be able to experience both stillness and peace. To be successful at concentrating, you'll also need to be patient. When you have patience, you'll be able to concentrate better and think deeper thoughts that can lead to more meaningful insights about life and the world around you.

Calming Your Chaotic Thoughts With Mindful Meditation

Do you sometimes feel as if your thoughts become an all-consuming chaotic storm in your brain? When you become triggered or agitated, you may feel as if your brain is completely out of control. During these times, you can turn to meditation to calm this storm of thoughts and sail on smoother seas. While this is a good motivation to practice meditation, you must first accept the storm in your mind before you can conquer it. To do this, you must learn to navigate the storm successfully by observing your thoughts without becoming upset or angry. Therefore, you must look at meditation as a shift in your life from *doing* to *being*. In other words, be in your life at every moment, don't just keep doing things without any thought of possible consequences.

To live in the moment and be mindful, first take a look at your surroundings. Find the things that make this day different from every other you have experienced. Perhaps feel the breeze on your face or the sun on your skin. Take in new views and new people around you and observe all changes, from the slightest changes to the largest most obvious ones. Next, you'll need to focus on your breathing. Anytime you feel unable to calm yourself, focus on your breathing but don't try to change it or guide it. Simply observe it. When you focus on your breathing, you can bring yourself back to the present moment. In just one breath, you can regain focus.

Next, remind yourself that *this is all there is*. This simply means that the present moment is all that matters; the future may not happen, and the past has already happened. Your time for change and growth exists only in the present, so to focus on anything else doesn't matter. If your mind starts to wander, ask yourself where your mind is right now, then personalize it so you can clearly see that you are more than just the thoughts before you.

Now that you know how to calm the storm inside your mind, it's time to practice meditation. This doesn't mean that you will simply rehearse repetitively; instead, you'll need to master the skill of returning to the present moment over and over again. Eventually, your ability to be present will come naturally. The best part is that you can meditate anytime, anywhere. You don't have to be like Henry David Thoreau and travel to Walden Pond to become mindful. Instead, you can meditate anywhere where you can breathe. If you meditate regularly and make meditation a daily routine, you'll eventually learn to live in the moment and be able to make decisions without hesitation and fear.

There Is No Right or Wrong Way to Meditate

Mindfulness meditation can be done in a number of ways. And while there is no right or wrong way to meditate, there are some methods that can help you deepen your mindfulness and concentration. For instance, your posture can positively affect your practice. Begin by sitting, which is the most common way to meditate and where posture becomes incredibly important. To begin, you should sit with your spine straight, stay in a relaxed state, and ground yourself. Try not to be too stiff, with your shoulders and relax your face. Finally, your head, neck, and back should stay aligned.

While posture is important during meditation, it's also important to maintain good posture every day and be mindful of how you present yourself. After all, people judge you based on your image; in fact, people make assumptions based on body language, whether it is conscious or not. When you have the proper posture, you can cultivate a mindful attitude. Now that you know how to keep good posture, it's time to focus on the position of your hands and feet. You should position them appropriately to direct the flow of energy. Try different poses for your hands while you are sitting and see which ones positively affect your ability to meditate. For instance, sitting with your palms on your knees might mean that you are accepting life as it is while having your palms facing up might mean opening yourself up to change.

Next, the amount of time you spend meditating is completely up to you as long as you reach mindfulness throughout. To begin, start meditating for short intervals of time, like five minutes, and try to work your way up to forty-five minutes, which is the ideal amount of time for standard practice. If you find that you're too busy, then simply meditate for as long as you can, even if it's just a minute between phone calls or important meetings. After steadily practicing, try to realize how meditating for different intervals affects your ability to concentrate. Remember: you aren't trying to think different thoughts to push out your chaotic ones, you are trying to look inside your thoughts from an outsider's perspective.

Of course, you'll have the urge to end your meditation at some point. When this urge arises, you should try and recognize where it's coming from. Perhaps you're feeling fatigued, impatient, or uncomfortable. Perhaps it's just time to stop meditating. Once you recognize where the urge to stop comes from, stay in the moment a bit longer, breathe, and slowly come out of meditation. In the end, whatever feels right to you is best; there is no right way or wrong way to meditate. In fact, even though the most traditional way to meditate is by sitting and being still, this does not mean it is the only way to do it. You can also try walking or standing meditation.

When practicing walking meditation, pay attention to every movement you make. Focus on your footsteps and how you raise your foot and place it down. If you are walking, stay aware of your surroundings and even use your surroundings to help your concentration. For instance, when practicing standing meditation, try doing it around trees. Close your eyes, stand still, and imagine you are like a tree. Imagine that your feet are roots in the ground. Then, sway your body the way trees might sway in the breeze.

Lastly, if you are too tired to stand up, lying down can help you in your mindfulness practice. When lying on the floor, begin by consciously releasing your muscles. By releasing your muscles, you'll be able to open your mind and calm your thoughts. Next, imagine you are sinking into the floor and focus on your body. You can either focus on your body as a whole or complete a body scan by focusing on each part separately. During the scan, focus on different parts of your body, move them in any direction you like, and use your breathing to breathe energy into your body. For instance, as you inhale, imagine you are breathing into your toes. Then, as you exhale, release the muscles in your toes and allow them to rest in complete stillness.

Concepts of Being Mindful

Being mindful is more than just sitting down in the right position and being relaxed. Successful meditation relies more on the mind than the body, so it is important to think about mindfulness concepts and what they mean to you.

The first mindfulness concept is *nondoing*. This isn't simply doing nothing; instead, it's actively doing nothing. It means paying attention to the present moment and relinquishing control of your life. Instead of trying to manipulate a particular outcome, nondoing is a form of relaxing and being at peace with the outcome no matter what. Nondoing allows you to recognize that you go through tough times in life to bring out a positive change in the long run. Many creative types seek out this state of "flow" because it unlocks your true inner creativity, allowing ideas to flow freely into your mind.

The next concept is *karma*. Karma is a concept that means that all you experience in your life is a result of your thoughts and actions. If you aren't careful, you can get caught in negative karmic cycles because of past actions or thoughts. To free yourself of these cycles, you can use meditation to help you truly live in the moment and prevent the past from taking hold of your life. You've likely seen people stuck in these cycles before; they can't get over a past action because they believe it has had a negative impact on their life. The only way to take back control of your happiness is to observe your negative behavior and let them go.

Next, we have *nonharming* or "*ahimsa*." This simply means that we are all called to be mindful of our actions and to do no harm to the world or its creatures. Perhaps you have heard the saying, "if you can't help others, then at least don't harm them." In other words, if you can't help someone the way they want you to, then it's best to refuse their help in a non-insulting way. Simply tell that person that you are too busy in your own life and avoid insulting him in any way, like by calling his idea stupid. Of course,

nonharming also includes self-criticism as well. You shouldn't insult yourself or put yourself down. Instead, treat yourself as if you are a small child and be compassionate and understanding in your own faults as well as the faults of others.

The last mindfulness concept is *wholeness*. Wholeness is what you experience when you are living a mindful connected life. It is when you feel as if you are a part of something bigger and that your actions have an impact on more than just yourself. The opposite of wholeness is "selfing," also known as being self-centered. People who are self-centered are only concerned with how things affect themselves and ignore the possible negative impact they may have on other people. Any time you think "I" or "mine," then you are selfing. Luckily, meditation can help you overcome this selfish behavior and allow you to shift your perspective outside your own body.

Challenges of Being Mindful

There are many things in this world that make it difficult to be mindful. A lot of concepts in our world revolve around worrying about the past and future. In fact, there are industries built off of the communal worry of humans. Take insurance, for example, in which the government gives its citizens something to worry about by not covering their health. Then, the insurance companies profit off of that worry since citizens don't want to be stuck in a position where they can't take care of themselves or their loved ones.

In addition to worrying, another challenge you may encounter is distractions. For example, if you are a parent, you'll likely be unable to meditate for long stretches of time without your family interrupting you. If this happens, that's okay! Rather than being frustrated about getting interrupted, go with the flow and satisfy your family's needs. Once they are satisfied, move on with your practice. As Kabat-Zinn states, "There can be no one way to be, no one way to practice, no one way to learn, no one way to love, no one way to grow or heal, no one way to live, no one way to feel, no one way to know or be known."

The distractions that the world presents are something that you'll never be free of unless you do as the ancient stereotypical monks and isolate yourself in the wilderness, which is rather impractical for most of us in modern society. Instead, take the many distractions life throws your way as an opportunity to practice being mindful. For example, when people approach you with their emotions flaring, use this opportunity to practice your meditation. Listen to them, help them with their problem if you can, and then move back to your meditative stance.

If you let yourself become angry or annoyed that you are being interrupted, then the practice of meditation can end up producing the opposite results that you are trying to achieve. Think of every problem as a test and every interruption as an opportunity to be mindful and spread peace in the world

instead of discord. If you look at things this way, not only are you making the world a better place, but you will also feel peace and appreciation.

Final Summary

If we all lived in a world where everyone was mindful and didn't react immediately to their emotions, imagine how much better the world would be. This can become a reality if you practice actively doing nothing and simply take in the scenery. Additionally, if you are in a situation where it becomes hard to concentrate, look at your situation from a new perspective to identify your triggers and figure out how to break your negative cycles. Next, notice how your actions and presence have a distinct influence over your surroundings and be mindful of the influence you are having. This isn't an impossible task. Simply take a moment, breathe in, and be mindful. It's as easy as that. Don't worry if that didn't work you always have your next breath, and the next beat of your heart, every second is a new opportunity.



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