

Reading List: Jon Kabat-Zinn

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist and professor of medicine, is the founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine and the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. A Zen practitioner, Kabat-Zinn is the creator of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), a secular, intensive mindfulness training program designed to help people that are experiencing pain, illness, cancer, depression, anxiety, and stress. Kabat-Zinn writes in short one to two page chapters, making his books a perfect guide for those looking to start or sustain a mindfulness practice.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2018). *Falling awake: How to practice mindfulness in everyday life*. Hachette Books. (Original work published 2005)

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2018). *Meditation is not what you think it: Mindfulness and why it is so important*. Hachette Books. (Original work published 2005)

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2012). *Mindfulness for beginners: Reclaiming the present moment—and your life*. Sounds True.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life* (10th Anniversary ed.). Hachette Books. (Original work published 1994)

Kabat-Zinn, J., & Hanh, T. C. (2013). *Full catastrophe living* (Revised ed.). Bantam Books. (Original work published 1990)

Sample from:

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2009). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life* (10th Anniversary ed.). Hyperion E book. https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0037B6QSY/ref=kinw_myk_ro_title

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice which has profound relevance for our present-day lives. This relevance has nothing to do with Buddhism per se or with becoming a Buddhist, but it has everything to do with waking up and living in harmony with oneself and with the world. It has to do with examining who we are, with questioning our view of the world and our place in it, and with cultivating some appreciation for the fullness of each moment we are alive. Most of all, it has to do with being in touch.

From the Buddhist perspective, our ordinary waking state of consciousness is seen as being severely limited and limiting, resembling in many respects an extended dream rather than wakefulness. Meditation helps us wake up from this sleep of automaticity and unconsciousness, thereby making it possible for us to live our lives with access to the full spectrum of our conscious and unconscious possibilities. Sages, yogis, and Zen masters have been exploring this territory systematically for thousands of years; in the process they have learned something which may now be profoundly beneficial in the West to counterbalance our cultural orientation toward controlling and subduing nature rather than honoring that we are an intimate part of it. Their collective experience suggests that by investigating inwardly our

own nature as beings and, particularly, the nature of our own minds through careful and systematic self-observation, we may be able to live lives of greater satisfaction, harmony, and wisdom. It also offers a view of the world which is complementary to the predominantly reductionist and materialistic one currently dominating Western thought and institutions. But this view is neither particularly “Eastern” nor mystical. Thoreau saw the same problem with our ordinary mind state in New England in 1846 and wrote with great passion about its unfortunate consequences.

Mindfulness has been called the heart of Buddhist meditation. Fundamentally, mindfulness is a simple concept. Its power lies in its practice and its applications. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.

A diminished awareness of the present moment inevitably creates other problems for us as well through our unconscious and automatic actions and behaviors, often driven by deepseated fears and insecurities. These problems tend to build over time if they are not attended to and can eventually leave us feeling stuck and out of touch. Over time, we may lose confidence in our ability to redirect our energies in ways that would lead to greater satisfaction and happiness, perhaps even to greater health.

Mindfulness provides a simple but powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck, back into touch with our own

wisdom and vitality. It is a way to take charge of the direction and quality of our own lives, including our relationships within the family, our relationship to work and to the larger world and planet, and most fundamentally, our relationship with ourselves as a person.

The key to this path, which lies at the root of Buddhism, Taoism, and yoga, and which we also find in the works of people like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, and in Native American wisdom, is an appreciation for the present moment and the cultivation of an intimate relationship with it through a continual attending to it with care and discernment. It is the direct opposite of taking life for granted.

The habit of ignoring our present moments in favor of others yet to come leads directly to a pervasive lack of awareness of the web of life in which we are embedded. This includes a lack of awareness and understanding of our own mind and how it influences our perceptions and our actions. It severely limits our perspective on what it means to be a person and how we are connected to each other and to the world around us. Religion has traditionally been the domain of such fundamental inquiries within a spiritual framework, but mindfulness has little to do with religion, except in the most fundamental meaning of the word, as an attempt to appreciate the deep mystery of being alive and to acknowledge being vitally connected to all that exists.

When we commit ourselves to paying attention in an open way, without falling prey to our own likes and dislikes, opinions and prejudices, projections and expectations, new possibilities open up and we have a chance to free ourselves from the straitjacket of unconsciousness.

I like to think of mindfulness simply as the art of

conscious living. You don't have to be a Buddhist or a yogi to practice it. In fact, if you know anything about Buddhism, you will know that the most important point is to be yourself and not try to become anything that you are not already. Buddhism is fundamentally about being in touch with your own deepest nature and letting it flow out of you unimpeded. It has to do with waking up and seeing things as they are. In fact, the word "Buddha" simply means one who has awakened to his or her own true nature.

So, mindfulness will not conflict with any beliefs or traditions—religious or for that matter scientific—nor is it trying to sell you anything, especially not a new belief system or ideology. It is simply a practical way to be more in touch with the fullness of your being through a systematic process of self-observation, self-inquiry, and mindful action. There is nothing cold, analytical, or unfeeling about it. The overall tenor of mindfulness practice is gentle, appreciative, and nurturing. Another way to think of it would be "heartfulness."

A student once said: "When I was a Buddhist, it drove my parents and friends crazy, but when I am a buddha, nobody is upset at all."