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FIND YOUR INNER STRENGTH

Simple practices
to create calm and
build resilience

+

**WHY
CRYING IS GOOD
FOR YOU**

TRUE GRATITUDE

3 health benefits
1 daily habit

**MAKE PEACE
WITH MONEY**

How to think
mindfully about your
financial future

◀ **Nana
Visitor**

*Star Trek: Deep
Space Nine actor*

FIND
THE BEST
MINDFULNESS
TEACHER
FOR YOU

mind
the
moment

We know
it's a busy time
of year, so...

Let's keep things simple.

Don't see the insert? You
can download a copy at
[harvardpilgrim.org/
mindfulness](http://harvardpilgrim.org/mindfulness)



Here's a moment of mindfulness you can share with yourself, or anyone else.

Better yet, it's portable—meditation is the original 'mobile device.' It can be done at home, at the office, standing in line, or sitting in a waiting room...the possibilities are endless. Use this insert anywhere you think mindfulness has a home — then let us know about it!



Sit or stand comfortably.

Pay attention to your breathing.

Begin a slow count to 4 as you **inhale**. Count to 4 as you **exhale**.

Breathe in...5.
Breathe out...5.

Breathe in...6.
Breathe out...6.

Release the counting and let your breathing return to its natural pace.



Share your moment by posting your pics on Instagram and tagging us **@mind_the_moment**



Feel refreshed? Ask us about the other ways we're bringing mindfulness into everyday life (including your organization)
mindthemoment@harvardpilgrim.org

This mindfulness service announcement is brought to you by Mind the Moment, a program developed and offered by Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, Inc.

mindful december

CONTENTS



54

ON THE COVER

44 FIND YOUR INNER STRENGTH

Simple practices to
create calm and
build resilience

18 True Gratitude 3 health benefits, 1 daily habit

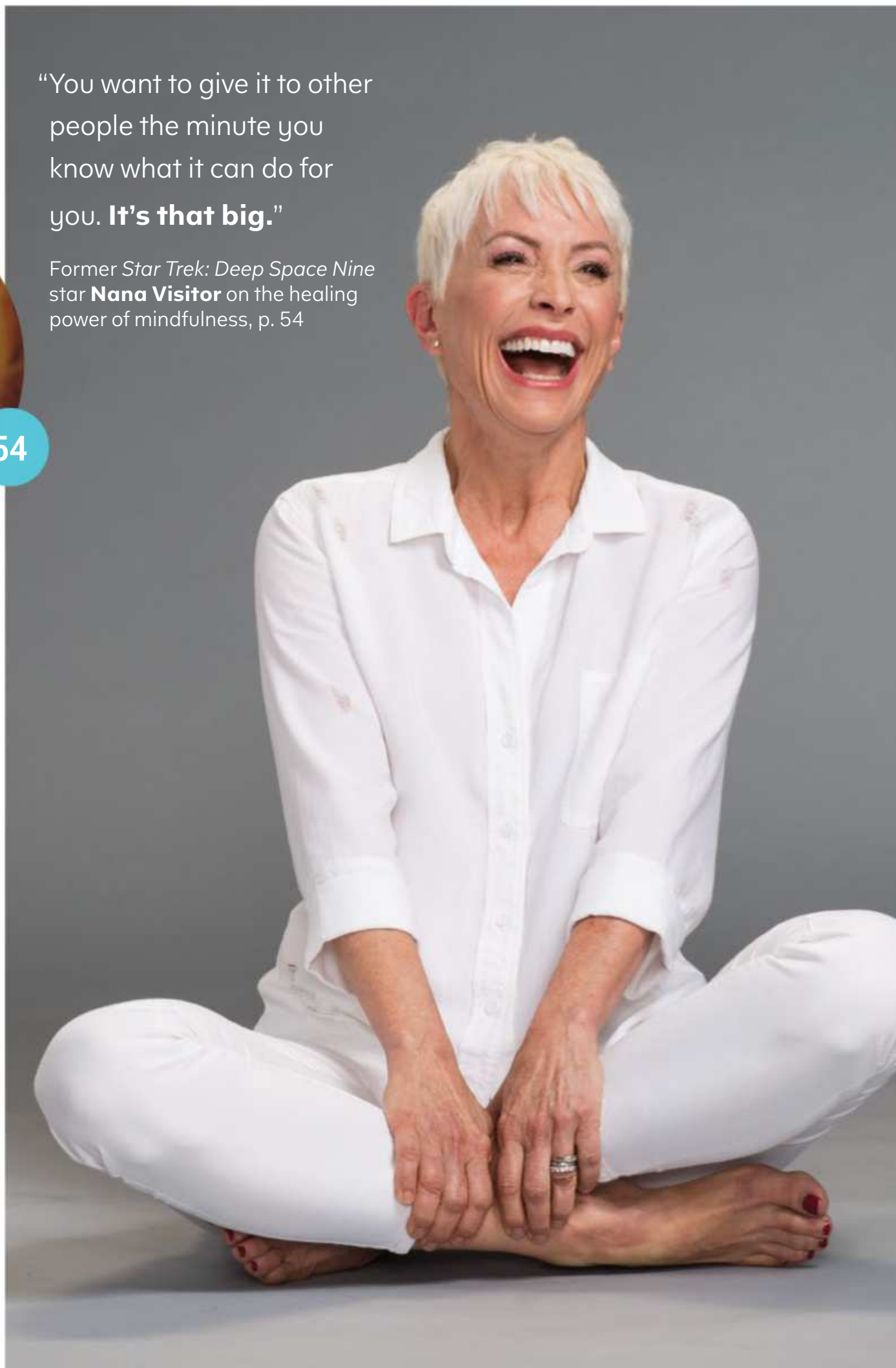
30 Why Crying Is Good for You

38 Make Peace with Money How to think mindfully about your financial future

60 Find the Best Mindfulness Teacher for You

"You want to give it to other
people the minute you
know what it can do for
you. **It's that big.**"

Former *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*
star **Nana Visitor** on the healing
power of mindfulness, p. 54



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BLAKE FARRINGTON AND AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. ILLUSTRATIONS BY IRENE RINALDI, MISSY CHIMOVITZ, ASIA PIETRZYK AND EDMON DE HARO.



“What makes a good teacher of mindfulness? And do the qualities and experience most of us assume are important really make a difference to the people they are teaching?”

Peter Jaret on pressing questions around certification for mindfulness instructors, p. 60



FEATURES

38

The Path to Prosperity

Ready to bring your current finances into harmony with your bigger life goals? Money mapping offers a mindful way forward.

44

Finding Strength in Solitude

Spending time by yourself can seem like either a rare gift or a desperate last resort. **David Rome** explores our underrated need for alone time to connect you with your deepest self.

54

To Boldly Move On

Former *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* star **Nana Visitor** talks about her journey through show business and how she's used mindfulness to heal deep wounds.

60

The Real Deal

As more and more of us seek mindfulness guidance and instruction, where should we turn to find teachers and programs we can trust and recommend?

Cover Photograph: Nana Visitor, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* actor, trauma survivor, and mindfulness practitioner. Photograph by Blake Farrington. Hair and makeup by Alma Diffie. Wardrobe by Kelly Shouey.

Mindful Living

18

How To

The Power of Thanks

Here's why science suggests we express true gratitude for extra health and happiness.

20

Mindful Eating

Jewels of Winter

Brighten up a chilly day with juicy, energizing pomegranate.

22

Mindful MD

Recovery in the Real World

Resuming life after cancer is easier said than done. Survivor Pat Rockman tells her story.

26

Inner Wisdom

Let Go of Your Labels

They're the short-hand we try to fit our spacious, colorful, uncategorizable selves into—and we could all take them a little less seriously.

Departments

4

Point of View

Take Some Time Off

Why meditation's not *always* the best way to manage your mind.

30

Brain Science

Why Are You Crying?

Research suggests tears do far more for us than clean dust and dirt from our eyes.

6

The Mindful Survey

10

Top of Mind

15

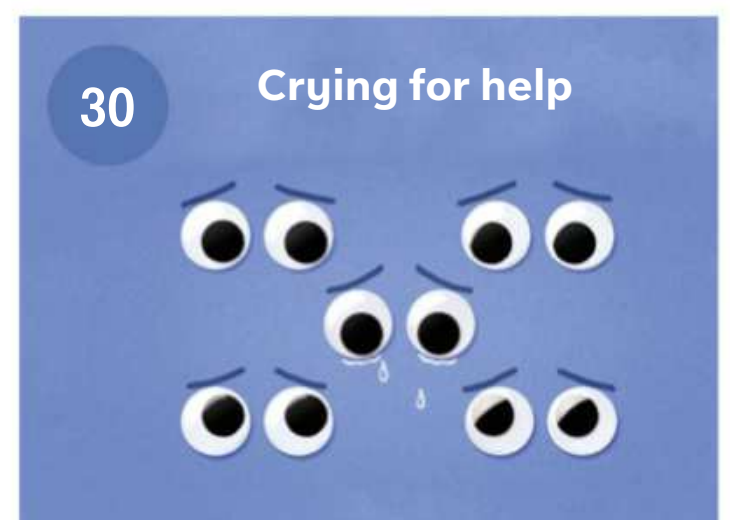
Mindful-Mindless

73

Bookmark This

80

MindSpace



Take Some Time Off



Barry Boyce

Editor-in-Chief

barry@mindful.org

Our must-read story this issue:

In our Mindful Interview, find out how actor **Nana Visitor** (Major Kira on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*) bounced back from a deeply traumatic experience. On page 54.

In Maurice Sendak's classic

Where the Wild Things Are, young Max's bedroom transforms into a jungle filled with wild things who roar and bare their teeth and menace with their claws. He tames them into stillness and they become his friends. Having journeyed to where the wild things are, Max returns to his room to enjoy a nice hot meal. A delightful round trip.

Generations of children and the adults reading it to them (it's 55 years old now!) have reveled in this miniature version of the hero's journey—at least partially because it is a great metaphor for the mind.

The mind is indeed where the wild things are. It contains our fears for the future and the future of those we love, our regrets and shame stored up from the past, our confusion about who we are and who we ought to be, our anger with the ogres of the world, our annoyance with people who just aren't fitting into our version of how they ought to be, *and* our annoyance at being so petty in trying to fit people into boxes. (Who do we think we are?) All that and much more lurks in the mind.

In mindfulness meditation we find ourselves alone, with all the wild things jumping out from behind the bushes in our psyche. With steadiness and encouragement, we can see the monsters as just thoughts—workable and tamable—as in Max's little story. We may even feel emboldened to go deeper with this exploration and do some intensive meditation: for a few days, or a week, or more. We'll let more of the wild things out to play and see what happens.

It can get tricky at that point. As professor Willoughby Britton of

Brown University has pointed out, if we're not prepared and don't have the right kind of context, mindfulness meditation, particularly in intensive doses, may be psychologically unhealthy. It may unleash the wild things to a degree that may overwhelm us. Few people report such problems with daily doses of meditation and simple techniques to bring us back to the present, but there are cautionary tales of meditators who thought they would tame their wild mind once and for all in a heroic mindfulness intensive. When it went bad, they never returned to meditating.

Trying too hard is just that: trying. It pays to take it easy, particularly if we're not taking it easy most of the time. Meditation is not a pill, with automatic results. How well it works depends on a lot of factors, one of which is our wellness to begin with.

Let's face it. Our daily life may not be providing us with the most psychologically healthy environment. The fevered pitch that so many of us are asked to operate at—by employers, loved ones, our own inner critic and taskmaster—can truly exhaust us and deplete our physical and emotional resources. When I asked several mood disorder specialists who also teach mindfulness if they thought a meditation intensive was a good idea if you're deeply stressed and burned out, their answer was emphatically *no*: When you're that depleted, you need rest, pleasure, companionship, ease. Take time off, and leave the retreat for a time when you're rested and ready to go exploring in your inner jungle. ●

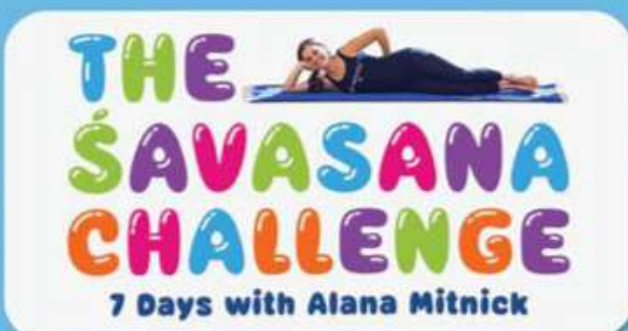
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Chew On This

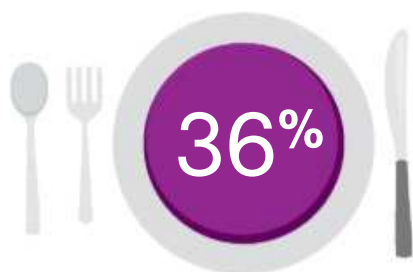
Answers from our reader survey on food

Do you enjoy cooking?

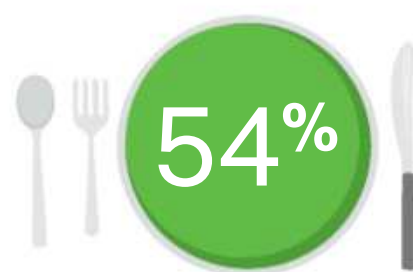
THE MAJORITY—54% OF

respondents—say they enjoy cooking when time and energy allow them to. A more enthusiastic **20%** always savor their kitchen adventures, while **13%** said they like to cook for someone else, but not only for themselves. For **10%** it's a chore to avoid whenever possible, and the last **3%** said they don't know how to cook.

Do you enjoy sharing a meal with other people?



YES—THE MORE THE MERRIER!



YES—WITH A SPECIFIC GROUP



NO—I'D RATHER EAT ON MY OWN

Where's your favorite place in your home to eat?

3% PREFER TO EAT IN THE BEDROOM



12% PREFER TO EAT SOMEWHERE ELSE



22% PREFER TO EAT ON THE COUCH



63% PREFER TO EAT AT THE TABLE



What food do you think is underrated by most people?

- "Vinegar: so many types, so many uses!"
- "Simple foods like soup and bread."
- "Eggs."
- "Natto: Japanese fermented soybeans."
- "Lentils and beans."
- "Fresh produce. I love grazing from my garden."

What's your favorite meal of the day?

BREAKFAST AND SUPPER WERE the clear mealtime winners, with **39%** and **38%** of the vote. Lunch came in third at a respectable **17%**. Another **5%** expressed their devotion to snacks. A few brave respondents—a bit less than **1%**—copped to their favorite meal being wine.

Do you practice mindful eating?



What's the most interesting or unusual food you've ever eaten? Where did you try it?

- "Custard apple in Vietnam."
- "Chicken feet in clear gelatin, in Moldova."
- "Fried oyster sandwich loaf in New Orleans."
- "Rambutan from an uppity supermarket."
- "A coriander and lemon non-alcoholic drink that made me rethink everything."
- "Lizard in Costa Rica."
- "Street food in China. It was very tasty, but very hot."
- "I love guava juice! They serve it everywhere in Hawaii."
- "A weaver ant found in northern Australia. You bite off the green abdomen and it tastes like lime—it is very refreshing!"



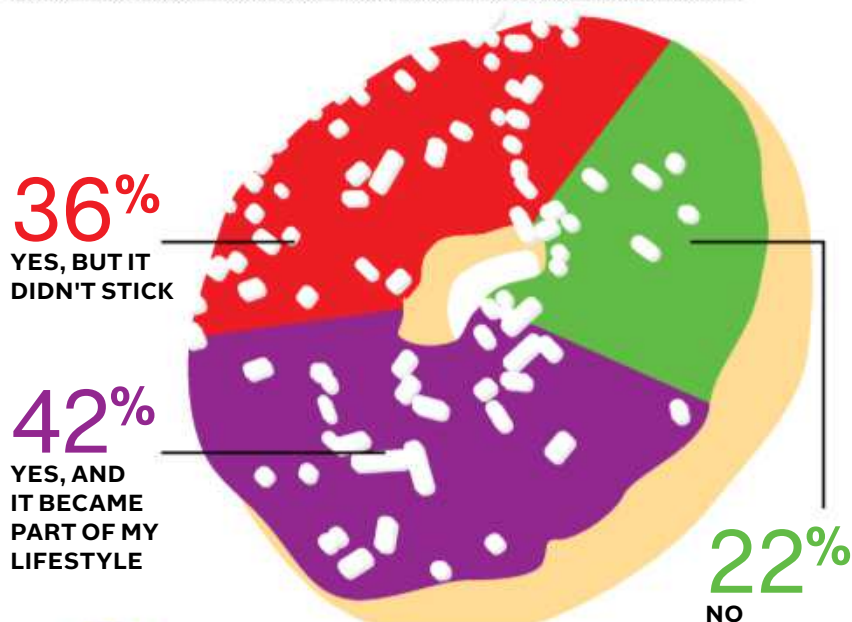


If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, it would be...

- "Avocados!"
- "Rainier cherries from British Columbia."
- "French toast."
- "Indian parathas."
- "Pizza."
- "Fresh fruit."
- "Potatoes."

"It's informal, but part of our mindful eating as a family is gratitude."

Have you ever followed a restrictive diet?



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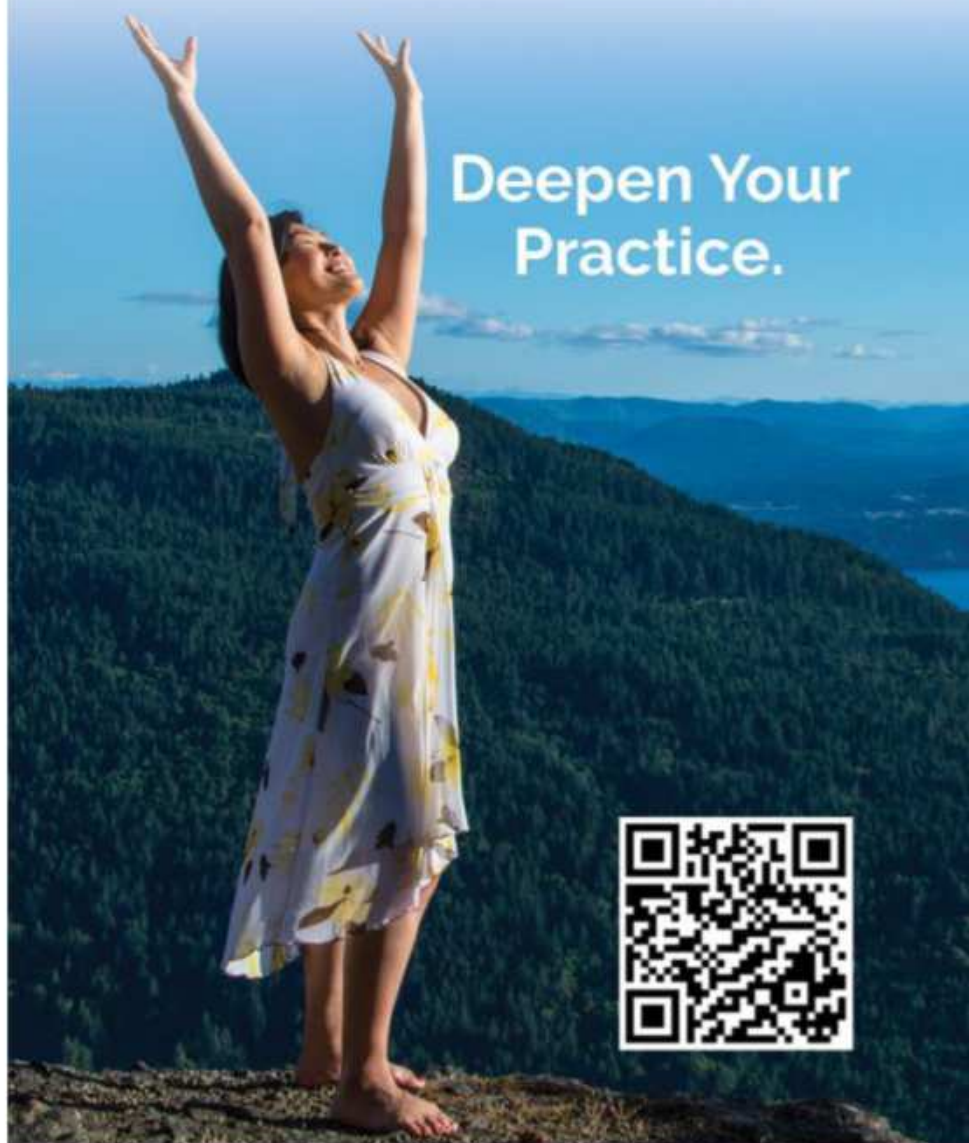


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Thank you!



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The Power of Transformation

Top of Mind

Things that spark our minds, touch our hearts, make us smile—or roll our eyes. Keep up with the latest in mindfulness.



Meditation meets baby goats

Every meditator knows what it's like when your mind simply won't slow down. Now a mindfulness teacher in Brisbane has taken that inner challenge and put it out there...by having new students meditate with baby goats.

"It's a metaphor. Your meditation is not going to be perfect, and it

certainly won't be still," Berenice Tan told Yahoo 7 Australia.

The rescued kids are brought in halfway through Tan's popular "Breathe In & Bleat Out" introduction to mindfulness meditation events. And they offer a powerful teaching in self-compassion, she said.

"Beginner meditators have tremendous expectations the first time they attempt to sit, and it very rarely goes the way they hope," she continued. "You'll have thoughts, feelings, memories, fantasies, dreams jumping over you, gnawing at you, and hollering for your attention—just like the little goat."

Skating on thin ice

Canadian hockey player Ben Meisner penned an online article about his lifelong anxiety and fear of failure, offering help to other young athletes—and within three days, he got over 1,000 responses. That's a goal scored for ending the harmful silence around mental illness in sports.

Gaming for good

There is plenty of hand-wringing these days about the supposed dangers of adolescents playing video games. But some games, it seems, can actually foster empathy and positive brain changes.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin developed a video game

in which players had to identify the intensity of emotions on the faces of human-like aliens. After just two weeks, the researchers found that the middle schoolers who played the game had more activity in brain regions linked to empathy and perspective-taking than kids who played a typical video game.

EXTRA-ORDINARY ACTS OF KINDNESS



When a betrothed couple's wedding officiant broke a leg during the rehearsal dinner, the event's catering manager happened to be a licensed officiant, so he stepped in and married them.



A Tennessee truck driver bought a school bus to rescue animals during natural disasters. When Hurricane Florence hit, he rescued 64 dogs and cats from South Carolina shelters that were in the storm's path.



Over the last 10 years, a 93-year-old man in Iowa has bought about 6,000 chocolate bars and handed them out to friends and strangers.



Could a park a day keep the doctor away?

Not every health issue has an easy fix, but one DC pediatrician believes that kids today suffer from a lack of outdoor play. Robert Zarr, MD, founder of Park Rx America, a nonprofit that

encourages doctors to prescribe time in parks, told the *New York Times* he writes at least one prescription a day for park time, with a suggested activity, duration, and frequency. Evidence shows

that spending time in nature has positive impacts on physical and mental health, including common childhood and teenage problems of obesity, diabetes, depression, and anxiety.

The art of taking a walk

"Answers are everywhere": Such is the promise of Street Wisdom, a nonprofit urging pedestrians to wander mindfully and, in so doing, amp up their creative problem-solving skills. Through its volunteer-run "walkshops," which happen all over the world, Street Wisdom encourages participants to tune in to their senses, and then—while taking a mindful stroll around their city—employ this heightened awareness to see where the streets offer "hidden messages, chance meetings, and unexpected discoveries."



"I'm always bringing myself back to the moment by acknowledging the wind and paying attention to digging my feet into the sand."



—Kerri Walsh Jennings, professional beach volleyball player, Olympic medalist, and mindfulness practitioner, in *Shape* magazine

what's new

BIKES AND BEERS WITH A MINDFUL TWIST

Have we hit peak mindfulness? These two playful guided meditations prove that the increasingly popular practice can crop up where we least expect it.

Vroom vroom

Harley-Davidson offers a two-minute meditation, grounded by the sound of a revving motorcycle engine throughout, to help Harley riders de-stress. Compared to the “complete freedom” of the open road, Harley’s marketing director says, it’s “the next best thing.”

Glug glug

Stella Artois has created an audio guide to mindfully enjoying a beer. The 20-minute track is narrated by actor Luke Evans, who invites listeners to discover the “complexities” of the brew “through attentive, mindful sipping.”

It's OK to take it back

Dana Carney and colleagues created a stir in 2010 with a *Psychological Science* paper claiming that power poses—e.g., standing with legs apart and hands on hips like Wonder Woman—induce positive behavioral and hormonal changes. After a TED talk went viral, power posing was touted at conferences for years, including many mindfulness gatherings. In 2016, Carney walked it back: The results could


not be replicated. Many psychologists feel that far too many studies cannot be replicated, and yet few, like Carney, come forward to inform the world. Now, several psychologists have started the Loss-of-Confidence Project, which collects accounts of research findings that have not been borne out in an effort to “destigmatize declaring a loss of confidence in one’s own research.”



Waste not wear not

For 30 days, Rob Greenfield lived like an average American, save for one detail: Every piece of garbage he generated, he wore on his body. The end result was a massive suit that makes a big fashion statement about how much trash we produce—in 2015, according to the EPA, nearly 4.5 pounds per day, per American.

Mindfulness-based therapy may keep depression at bay

 In a study of people in remission from major depression, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) prevented relapse just as well as traditional cognitive therapy. While both treatments teach people to observe how their thoughts, feelings, and habits fuel depression, MBCT adds meditation to the mix.

In the study, Canadian researchers asked 166 adults in remission from major depression to attend either an MBCT group or a standard cognitive therapy group for eight weeks. Two years later, fewer than a quarter of people in both groups had suffered another bout of major depression.

Those in the standard group were better at managing distressing thoughts and emotions, but both groups got better at not believing all of their thoughts. This particular skill, called decentering, can be helpful in managing a negative mood. What's more, people who got good at decentering were less likely to relapse.

Experts have cautioned that mindfulness-based therapies may not be suitable for treating people in the midst of a depressive episode. But MBCT, it appears, can provide real protection against relapse.

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REACHING THE NEXT GENERATION— MINDFULNESS TEACHER TRAINING

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what's new



Time to get off your phone?

Are the days of mindless scrolling coming to an end? With concern growing around “phone addiction,” Facebook and Instagram have rolled out new time-control features, allowing users to monitor how long they use the apps and set custom reminders to stop for the day. Instagram Product Director Ameet Ranadive says users should feel like “they can be mindful and intentional about how they’re spending their time” on social media. Psychologists say these tools will help some users, but others may need a bigger intervention to curb their unhealthy Insta-habits.

To get happy, connect



Your loved ones may be the key to happiness. German researchers asked more than 1,000 people to identify ways they thought they could be happier. Then the scientists followed up a year later to see whose lives had actually improved. Turns

out the only people who got happier were those who'd planned to spend more time with friends and family—and followed through on their intentions. Focusing on individual goals like quitting smoking didn't lead to greater happiness.




Research gathered from Greater Good Science Ctr. at UC Berkeley, Ctr. for Healthy Minds at U of Wisconsin–Madison, Ctr. for Mindfulness at UMass Medical School, and American Mindfulness Research Association.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAWPIXEL.COM

Mindful or Mindless?

Our take on who's paying attention and who's not

Got grit?

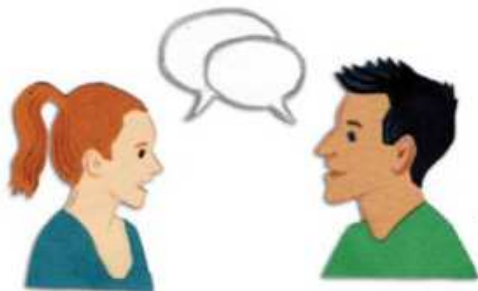
 The quality of grit—perseverance in the pursuit of meaningful goals and the ability to bounce back from setbacks—has been linked with all sorts of positive life achievements. A study looking for dispositional qualities that promote grit found that acting with awareness and nonjudgment—key components of mindfulness—were important precursors of grit.

Suit up and meditate

The IoT—internet of things—is a whole new world of tech where objects (anything from toasters to cars) hook up to computer-based systems. Among the wackiest IoT innovations are wearables. Now, a Dutch inventor has brought the IoT to meditation with the Silence Suit. Eleven sensors in the suit—measuring breath, skin temperature, heart rate, etc.—help to deliver “ideal” meditation. Next stop: a robot who meditates for you. ●



A new state policy in Kerala, India, means the government will cover the costs of gender reassignment surgery for transgender citizens, as well as working to improve trans people's access to education and jobs.



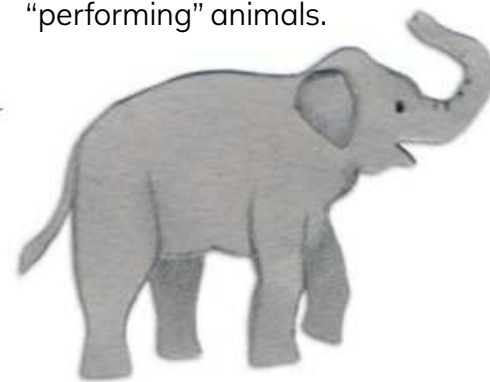
Alexa, mind your own business! A couple's Amazon Echo device turned on, recorded part of their conversation, and emailed it to one of their contacts—all without their knowledge.

A vegan food festival in Calais, France, was cancelled to prevent “an outbreak of public disorder.” Local butchers and farmers had threatened to hold a huge barbeque in protest of the pesky plant promoters.



mindful

At the start of 2018, Illinois made a leap toward kindness to fellow creatures: They became the first US state to ban circuses from using elephants and other “performing” animals.



A great mystery of the universe has been solved: Physicists at Cornell University and MIT figured out how to use the laws of physics to make dry spaghetti noodles—which usually crack into three or more pieces—break perfectly in half.



A woman in Ontario accidentally stole a car from a parking lot, mistaking it for her rental (both cars had key fobs). The truth didn't come out until she tried to return it two weeks later. ●



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mindful living



"You need to let the
little things that would
ordinarily bore you
suddenly thrill you."

ANDY WARHOL



The Power of Thanks

Science suggests that expressing true gratitude boosts your health and spreads happiness. Here are simple ways you can unleash its power for the benefit of all.

We say “thanks” a dozen or more times a day: when someone holds a door open, bags our groceries, puts a report on our desk. It’s a reflex, an almost knee-jerk reaction to simple daily transactions. We mutter it, often without really acknowledging the person we’re thanking.

Yet as easy as it is to engage in the quotidian “thanks—no problem” exchange in our daily routines, we’re often left, in moments of larger generosity, feeling unworthy or embarrassed by what’s being offered. If you’ve ever thwarted a friend’s attempt to treat you to dinner or received a gift that you insisted was “too much,” you may be struck by that thankfulness gap.

So, if “thank you” is too easy to say in some instances, and out of our reach in others, how can we go beyond a muttered “thanks” to one that’s truly underpinned with gratitude? And why would we want to?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephanie Domet is a writer and editor in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she is thankful for warm radiators, hot coffee, and the kindness of strangers.



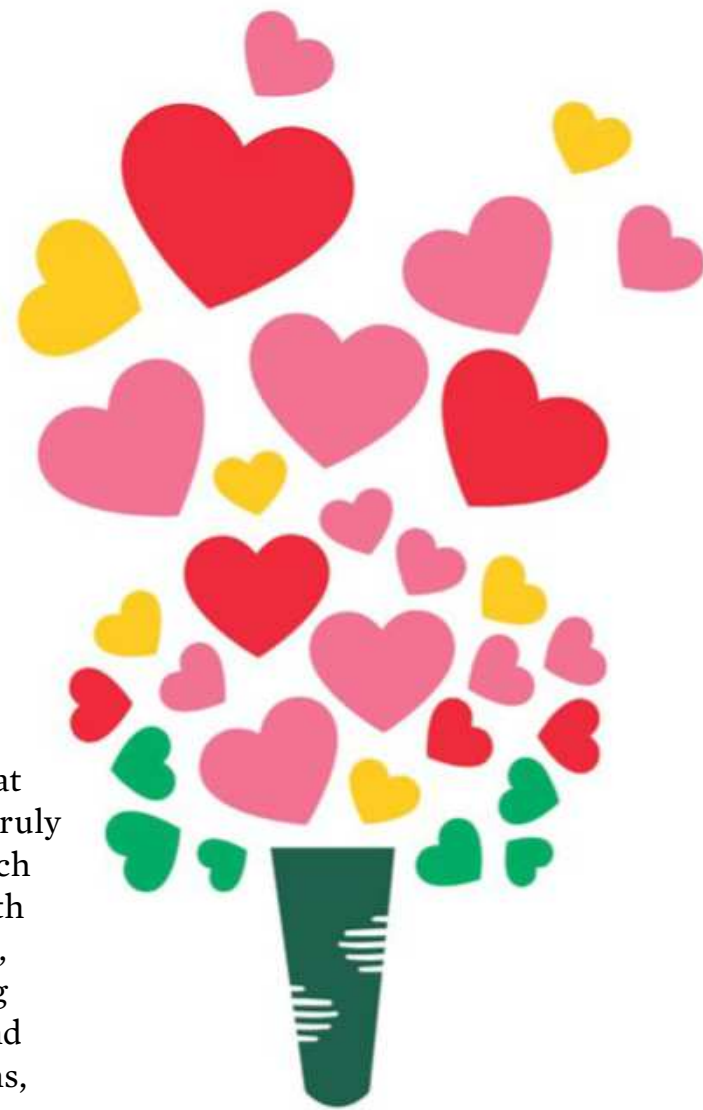
IT'S GOOD FOR YOU

Turns out, there’s a great deal to be gained from truly feeling grateful. Research has linked gratitude with a wide range of benefits, including strengthening your immune system and improving sleep patterns, feeling optimistic and experiencing more joy and pleasure, being more helpful and generous, and feeling less lonely and isolated.

It even helps to mitigate depression. Researchers at Indiana University recruited 300 people (mostly college students) receiving mental health counseling, and randomized them into three groups. In addition to the counseling sessions, one group was asked to write a letter of gratitude each week for three weeks. The second group journaled their thoughts and feelings about negative experiences. The third group only received counseling but did no writing. Four and 12 weeks later, the gratitude-letter group “reported significantly better mental health” than either the journalers or those who received counseling alone. Other studies have found that counting blessings and gratitude writing reduces the risk of depression.

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Think back to that impulse to rebuff a gift or gesture for being “too much.” What would happen if you didn’t get involved in that narrative, and just allowed yourself to let that gift, that kind gesture, really sink in? To just feel...grateful? And if that still feels difficult, consider this: There’s scientific evidence that feeling and expressing gratitude in relationships of all kinds strengthens them. Researchers from both the University of North Carolina and University of California found that gratitude acts as a “booster shot” for romantic relationships. And a review of close to 100 studies by researchers at the University of Nottingham determined that those who feel and express gratitude tend to be pro-social—kind, helpful, and giving.



Feel It

Building your capacity for gratitude isn't difficult.
It just takes practice.

The more you can bring your attention to that which you feel grateful for, the more you'll notice to feel grateful for! Those researchers at Indiana University did a further study. Using an fMRI scanner, they compared brain activity in the gratitude letter-writers with those who didn't write a letter. The letter-writers showed greater neural sensitivity in the medial prefrontal cortex, a brain area associated with learning and decision-making—and the effect persisted three months later. “Simply expressing gratitude may have lasting effects on the brain,” they concluded, noting that practicing gratitude can lead to greater sensitivity to the experience of gratitude in the future. And that bodes well for everyone.

TRY THIS:

Start by observing. Notice the *thank you*s you say. Just how habitual a response is it? Is it a hasty aside, an afterthought? How are you feeling when you express thanks in small transactions? Stressed, uptight, a little absent-minded? Do a quick scan of your body—are

you already physically moving on to your next interaction?

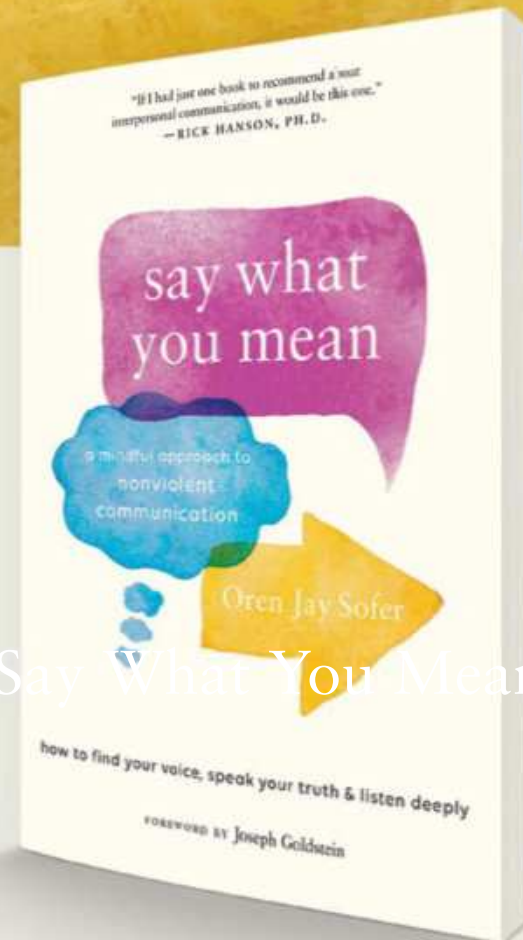
Pick one interaction a day. When your instinct to say “thanks” arises, stop for a moment and take note. Can you name what you feel grateful for, even beyond the gesture that's been extended? *Then* say thank you.

IT'S GOOD FOR HUMANITY

It's relatively easy to feel gratitude for help offered when we're in need—a stranger who stops when you have a flat tire, the neighbor who watches your kids when you have to run out, the friend who makes you soup when you're sick. And starting to dig into what motivates that stranger, that

neighbor, that friend can help us see the larger picture, and how we are interconnected. It may be harder to parse the motivation behind our smaller interactions. The last time you held the door for a stranger, you no doubt did so because that's just what people do. Still, can you see how even that tiny gesture ripples outward into something much bigger than any one of us alone? ●

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Jewels of Winter

By Claire Ciel Zimmerman



As the days grow colder and darker, the food we eat can get rich and heavy. Pomegranates add much-needed brightness to a winter diet, with their glossy seeds (called arils) glowing ruby red with delicious juice. Opening a pomegranate can seem a messy and meticulous task, but it can also be both beautiful and fun. Bring some festive color into your life with this simple technique. As you go, take your time and feel your way through, stopping to notice the textures, shapes, and colors of each step.

TRY THIS:



1 About half an inch down on the flower end of a pomegranate, slice the skin in a circle around the fruit. **2** Carefully peel off the circle of skin to reveal the segments of the fruit. **3** Score lines in the skin from top to bottom, using the membranes dividing the arils as a guide. Score roughly along each segment, but don't worry if you're not spot on. **4** Stick the tip of your knife an inch or two into the center of the pomegranate. **5** Wiggle back and forth to break apart the segments along the score lines. **6** Pull apart the segments to reveal the arils, which you can lift out in chunks and peel apart. Enjoy the seeds on their own or sprinkled on salads, in cocktails, or with whatever your heart desires. ●

Tahini Dill Dressing

Serves 6 Prep Time 5 minutes

- 1/2 cup Unsweetened EDENSOY
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- 1/4 cup EDEN Tahini
- 1/2 tsp EDEN Ume Plum Vinegar
- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp fresh dill, minced

Combine all ingredients in a blender & serve with fresh vegetable or bean salad.

Tahini is hulled sesame seed.

Sesame Butter is unhulled sesame seed.



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ONCE A FIGHT
WITH CANCER
IS OVER, YOU
COPE WITH THE
END OF YOUR
ROLE AS THE
STAR IN YOUR
OWN DRAMA.

Recovery in the Real World

Even for the survivor, writes Pat Rockman, cancer leaves little unscathed—and resuming life-as-usual is easier said than done.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia Rockman, MD, is a family physician with a focused practice in mental health. She is Senior Director of Education and Clinical Services at the Centre for Mindfulness Studies, Toronto, and an associate professor at the University of Toronto, Department of Family Medicine.

A friend told me that after the treatment of her cancer, it took her a year to return to being a “normal” person, getting on with the day-to-day business of living. Recovery is not typically recognized as a transition requiring adjustment. It’s kind of like when you lose a loved one and you get three days off work to grieve: We often need more time than expected. Likewise, once a fight with cancer is over, you cope with the end of your role as the star in your own drama.

And, as with any significant life event, while you may outwardly seem the same, often there is an internal change, some wisdom gained about the preciousness and fragility of our brief lives. We may appreciate what it really means to be mindful of each moment as best we can.

Fortunately for me and for many, breast cancer is now a treatable disease. So here I am, alive, for the moment a survivor. Having come through a change—the end of my pre-cancer life, a chaotic and emotional period of coping, and finally a new, cancer-free beginning—I find myself granted a somewhat different life. I try to be more present, more giving, and to spend less time doing what I don’t want to do. I now *really* know that life is short.

My friend the filmmaker Mike Hoolboom reminds me that “everything is just waiting to be noticed.” This is true of whatever compels us, repels us, or leaves us indifferent. So, the path of a catastrophic illness has a beginning, a middle, and an end that mindfulness →



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NOTHING IS AS IT SEEMS. I CAN PASS AS MY OLD SELF WHILE CLOTHED, BUT I AM NOT THAT SELF.

can help us to be present and awake for. Mindfulness helps us to face what we would rather not: learning from the unwanted, perhaps even being enriched by it.

Serious illness often marks both body and mind. I used to have a pretty good body; now I look like Sally from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. While I love what the plastic surgeon did for my cleavage (post-mastectomy and reconstruction), the new belly button is right of center. I continue to mourn the old one. Perhaps, though, it's time to let go of the outie that is now an innie, bordered by a circular scar. We wear our history on our skin. On the upside, reconstruction meant I got free liposuction. So many things have a silver lining, if you can just take notice.

Mindfulness helps us to hone this ability, granting us more options than we had without it. For example, I still deal with the adverse effects of medications that prevent the cancer's return. A significant one—also a very common one—is difficulty with sexual function. This can happen for a multitude of reasons, physical or psychological, but sex post-cancer isn't often discussed. I wonder how many sexless couples there are living in the aftermath of cancer?

I went for a follow-up assessment at the cancer

clinic. The nurse asked about nausea, vomiting, bowels, pain, and appetite...none of which tend to be a problem if you're not getting chemo. I asked her, "How come you don't ask about sex? Who cares, at this point, about the rest of these issues?" She didn't really have an answer, but the next time I saw her she had started researching it.

Meanwhile, I discovered the estrogen ring. If you're taking drugs that inhibit estrogen, sex is going to be difficult. The ring isn't recommended for people who have had estrogen receptor-positive tumors, but we lack evidence that it's actually harmful—and I wasn't ready to let that part of my life go. So after much trial and error, a lot of preparation, lubrication, dilators, and the ring, sex became possible and pleasurable. Sometimes, in order to be in the present, you stop worrying about the future.

Nothing is as it seems. I can pass as my old self while clothed, but I am not that self. Because everything is always changing, so are we—and it can help to remember that as we move along the conveyor belt of life. If we can bring a mind of experimentation and resilience, and a focus on the journey rather than the destination, our three score and ten will be nothing less than an adventure.



Opening Up Is a Compassionate Act

One of the best ways to adapt and to learn to manage the aftereffects of serious diseases that change your life is to talk about them and ask questions.

Too often, we simply don't. And that's not healthy. Remember, if you have a problem, others likely do as well. Bringing it into the open can be a compassionate act.

You need to ask yourself some pointed questions and make some decisions:

- Does the issue I'm experiencing need to be addressed?
- Can it wait, can I let it be, or can I let it go?
- How much do I care what people think?
- Can I work with that?

This is how we can employ contemplation and self-care to move skillfully toward openness—with ourselves and others—when we practice mindful perspective-taking. ●

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Let Go of Your Labels

You know all those tiny boxes we try to fit our spacious, colorful, uncategorizable selves into? We could all take them a little less seriously.

Growing up, were you labeled the “sensitive genius”? The “rebel”? The “problem child”? The “nice guy”? I’ve especially enjoyed sporting the “smart aleck” persona, which is just one of the many identities I’ve walked around with, or have been dragged around by, over the years. Some were self-imposed, others gifted to me from hither and yon. Labels come and go, and they are incredibly subjective.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elaine Smookler is a registered psychotherapist with a 20-year mindfulness practice. She is a senior faculty member at the Centre for Mindfulness Studies in Toronto.

For instance, where one person might find me “a good listener,” or “kind,” another might label me “controlling,” “impatient,” or “obsessive.” Whether we recognize them or not, we all move through our lives wearing a hodgepodge of sticky labels. And these labels frame our experience in a powerful—though not always helpful—way.

It’s not all bad. Labels can help us bring order to chaos in an instant. The challenge is that each person and situation is more than any one label you might give it. Nothing and no one is *only* wonderful, or *only* terrible, or beautiful or ugly or right or wrong. Ignoring this fact can make a big difference to our overall experience of life.

Recent research from the University of Pennsylvania suggests that we may actually ignore information that does not support our ideas about “who we are,” and our behavior follows suit. We can essentially get stuck with a confirmation bias toward our own selves, where we receive information in a way that confirms our preexisting ideas and beliefs, and we don’t investigate any further than this. So, once we determine which category something falls into—including our own personality—we lose all curiosity. Living with blinders on limits our potential for growth and well-being. When we become too certain or fixed upon any given label, we restrict our chance to experience →

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life's vast array of surprises
and opportunities.

Try this: Grab a piece of paper and a pen and write down some of the labels you hold tightly to as truth, starting with your early years. Most of us encounter labeling within our own dear families. Do you think your mother labeled you with the same labels your father used? How about your siblings, or your grandparents, or your nieces and nephews?

Now go beyond your home and consider your friends, teachers, romantic partners, employers—think about the various labels you've wound up with in all facets of life. How did these spoken or unspoken labels affect you? Did you try to live up or down to these labels? Did you fight them or embrace them, or even notice that you were letting yourself be typecast?

And how about your present situation? Have you taken on new labels? Are there old ones still peeking out from the past? Imagine your life as a sitcom, with

you as a central character. Who's in your main cast? Who have you tagged as trusted friends? Nemeses? Love interests? As you move through your daily life, notice how quickly you label and are labeled. If you can, go a step further and consider: Which labels are you taking on yourself? Which labels are you imposing—perhaps unfairly—on others?

Then imagine all those labels falling down around you like rain. See if you can let yourself be present without any labels at all. Just here. Just now. Breathing. Being.

Once you've spent some time getting to know your labels, having a little fun with them can be a great practice. For instance, if you're the quiet one, see what happens if you label yourself outgoing and start a conversation. If you identify yourself as a "Type A" person, what happens if instead you label yourself as laid back, and slow down on the freeway? We don't have to like how it feels. We can try on different hats, exploring as many experiences as we can.

We aren't likely to ever stop labeling. It's so automatic, and it's completely natural. But we can take time to notice, to see what we lose or gain when these labels remain unexamined, and through that we can gain an exciting new perspective on ourselves. We can break free from our personality prisons—even if just for a little while—and with that new freedom we can open up to a life of discovery, richness, and fresh possibilities. ●

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Why Are You Crying?

Researchers suggest that there may be a deep-seated need served by having a good cry, and that tears do far more for us than clean dust and dirt from our eyes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Begley is senior science writer with *STAT*, a national health and medicine publication. She is also author of *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* and, most recently, *Can't Just Stop: An Investigation of Compulsions* (2017, Simon & Schuster).

If you are a Harry Potter fan, the deaths of Fred Weasley, Nymphadora Tonks, and Remus Lupin during the Battle of Hogwarts might do it. If you're more of a traditionalist, maybe it's Beth's demise in *Little Women*. If your lachrymal glands don't respond to the written word, surely they do to the scene in *The Green Mile* where a terrified John Coffey, in the prison's death chamber, tearfully begs the warden not to lower the executioner's hood over his head...because, he explains piteously, he's afraid of the dark.

Or if you're unmoved by flights of fictional fancy, maybe it's the moment when the bride takes her first steps down the aisle, or the choir launches into a hymn that speaks to your heart...or you stand beside the grave of someone who loved you more than anyone in the whole world ever has or will.

You cry. Even when you're not in danger, you're not pleading for help, you're not in physical pain—all situations where crying serves

what scientists suspect is its primary purpose: signaling the need for comfort or rescue. That crying serves that function is a little puzzling, since this biological signaling device appears to be reserved only for humans. But it's even more puzzling to put together why we cry emotional tears. For some reason, the mind is wired in such a way that when it processes sadness, joy, relief, or other complex emotions it sometimes sends a signal to the eyes to unleash the waterworks that otherwise protect the retina against smoke, dust, and other potential harms. Although a small percentage of people never cry (they also tend to have difficulty expressing and processing emotions), the behavior is a nearly universal human trait. And when a trait is this widespread, it suggests that it became part of human nature because it brought evolutionary benefits (though Darwin himself believed that emotional crying was purposeless). Evidently shedding tears helps people survive. →

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SOCIETY | Cry Like a Man?

Over time and across culture and ethnicity, studies indicate that women cry more often and more intensely than men. One explanation is that testosterone, usually more plentiful in males, inhibits tear production—as do traditional stereotypes that conflate masculinity with strength and emotional reserve. In contrast, women are expected (and pressured) to show vulnerability in many

circumstances, making their tears more socially acceptable. However, studies discredit the notion that crying harms a man's social standing. Some researchers, in fact, suggest that because men cry less often, observers may believe “something genuinely important must have happened for adult males to cry,” therefore lending disproportionate credibility to men's tears.

“The study of tears is in its infancy,” says Ad Vingerhoets of Tilburg University in the Netherlands, an expert on the psychology of crying. “I strongly believe, though, that tears have played an important role in our evolution, and still play an important function. Without tears, we humans would never have become the empathic, ultra-social species we are.”

An honest signal

Crying is a form of communication, Vingerhoets argues, whose purpose is to elicit help and comfort from others. From an early age we recognize crying as a distress signal. When we see a child wandering alone and seemingly lost, most of us try to help; if that same child has tears running down his cheeks and is racked with sobs, only the most hard-hearted would walk on by. Crucially, tears are what biologists call an honest signal: It is harder to fake crying than to utter false words. So we respond to them more reflexively than we do to language.

Facial muscles simply aren't up to the task of conveying certain psychological states, Vingerhoets argues, so evolution stepped up and produced the capacity for emotional tears. And unlike facial expressions, tears are visible for many minutes (including by red eyes and puffy skin). Crying's communicative power is enhanced because humans tend to focus on the eyes when looking at others. In fact, when study participants see pictures of crying where the actual tears have been digitally removed, they're terrible at identifying which emotion the crier is feeling.

But seeing tears for just one-twentieth of a second is enough to recognize sadness and need for support, and after seeing tears only briefly, people are more willing to provide support than to people without tears, Vingerhoets and his colleagues found in a 2013 study. Early in human evolution, reacting to an ‘I need help’ signal from a family member or compatriot “was crucial for daily cooperation with in-group members,” the scientists wrote. “We propose that tears...became associated with a need for help and succor, first in infants and then gradually also in children and adults.” Crying was “literally related to life or death because it elicited support when individuals were not able to take care of themselves.”

Can you have a “good cry”?

And why would people be wired to respond? Because those who do offer solace reap the evolutionary benefits of helping a family member or of collecting an IOU: I comfort you today, you might help me gather nuts and berries tomorrow.

Curiously, though, the old adage about feeling better after a “good cry” seems more myth than fact. When people recall “good cries,” they tend to say the waterworks made them feel better, leading to the idea that crying serves a cathartic function. But the empirical evidence is more complicated: When research subjects are induced to cry by sad movie scenes, they immediately feel sadder than before their tears flowed, Tilburg's Asmir Gračanin and colleagues showed in a 2015 study. (One reason they might feel worse is that instead of bringing comfort—the evolutionary purpose of crying—tears cause them embarrassment, at least in this artificial setting surrounded by strangers.) But because mood eventually rebounds from that low, in retrospect we think crying made us feel better. That's mostly an artifact of memory.

In real-life settings, outside the lab, mood also often plunges after a good cry. In one study, scientists had about 100 women record when they cried (it ranged from once to 52 times during the 6-to-10 weeks of the study), what was happening (most commonly: experiencing conflict or witnessing suffering), and how they felt before and after. The women felt better afterward only one-third of the time, almost always because crying brought social support. Absent that, they felt even greater grief than before they cried and became even more upset.

“We observed very little evidence of psychological benefits associated with crying,” the researchers wrote. “Emotional tears were generally preceded and followed by a period of

SEEING TEARS FOR JUST ONE-TWENTIETH OF A SECOND IS ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE SADNESS AND NEED FOR SUPPORT.



worsened mood.” And that, they say, challenges “theories of crying that posit its core function as providing benefits to the crier.” Those benefits come not from crying per se, but from the *response* to crying.

That may explain why studies have found that people in romantic relationships cry more often, on average, than singles, and that lonely people cry less than those with more social attachments. Cord Benecke of Germany’s University of Kassel, for instance, has found that people who have relatively few social connections didn’t tend to cry often, perhaps because they feel there is no-one around to care. If people mostly cry when someone sympathetic and caring is around, and not into the void, it reinforces the idea that crying is a signal for social support.

More years, different tears

As we age, the causes of crying change. In infancy and childhood, tears elicit care, protection, and love, and can be aimed at a single individual—unlike audible crying, which can be heard by anyone within range (which could be dangerous). In adolescence, tears flow from loss and separation and disappointment. In adulthood, our capacity for crying expands to the suffering of others, as

“WITHOUT TEARS, WE HUMANS WOULD NEVER HAVE BECOME THE EMPATHIC, ULTRA-SOCIAL SPECIES WE ARE.”

Ad Vingerhoets, psychologist



our empathic skills develop, as well as to reunions with loved ones. We cry over acts of heroism, altruism, self-sacrifice, and other virtuous behaviors: During screenings of *Titanic*, the sound of sniffles and tissues being pulled out filled the theater when Leonardo DiCaprio floated away into the icy Atlantic so Kate Winslet could live.

The purpose of these seemingly purposeless tears may be to communicate to others that we feel deeply invested in society’s moral values, cementing our position in a larger social order as a member who deserves to be in good standing. “Tears are a signal to ourselves of our ultra-social nature,” says Vingerhoets. “They are not just a signal to others.” If we are able to cry, we are able to feel. It doesn’t hurt to be reminded of that from time to time, whether by the death of fictional wizards and witches, or by moments of pain and grief and heroism in the lives we lead and witness. ●

Crossing Borders

Trained in East Asian medicine in Japan and in psychology at Harvard, **Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu** teaches throughout Asia and at Stanford University. His Heartfulness program at Stanford combines traditional wisdom practices such as mindfulness with current science. Among his courses is “Transforming Self and

Systems: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation, Gender, Sexuality, and Class.” His book, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: Transforming Self and Society with Compassion* (published February 2018), focuses on how mindfulness practices can contribute to a meaningful way of living with gratitude, compassion, and social responsibility.

In what sense does your hyphenated surname—Murphy-Shigematsu—speak to the integration that’s so present in your work?

I found a sense of purpose in making meaning of an existence that was created by two people from different worlds—an Irish-American father and a Japanese mother. They were people from different sides of a great war who came together in peace and created children.

Your career has shifted from providing individual psychotherapy to working exclusively with groups. What drew you in that direction?

With the one-to-one professional relationship, there is a hierarchy and power structure: The patient, client, always has less power than the professional caregiver. I found that limiting. I wanted to return to what is practiced in much of the world—coming together

in a healing community in which you engage as equals.

In a group, when someone is open and vulnerable about the humanity and imperfection and woundedness in themselves, then others in the group will sense that a safe space is being created. They’ll feel the desire—or even the need—to be open and vulnerable. It becomes a reciprocal process of healing—of reconnecting with the hidden, fragmented, traumatized parts of self.

So in a sense, your new book—and use of the word “heartfulness”—is an extension of that concern for integration.

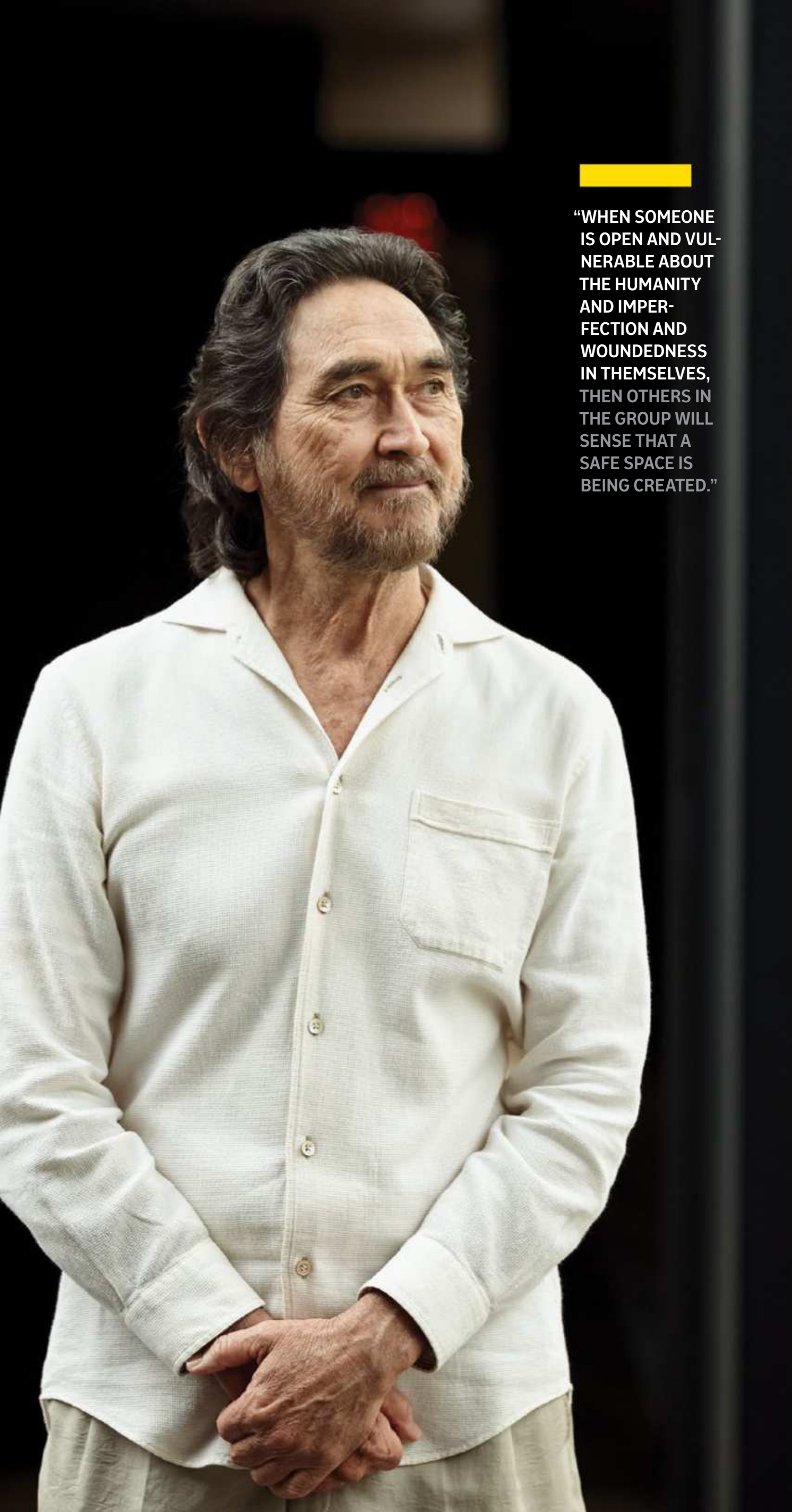
The book is an attempt to refocus us on the broader meaning of mindfulness. For me, “heartfulness” is a way of saying that mindfulness extends beyond the head—into the heart and into the hands. It’s a way of extending mindfulness beyond the individual self and into the realization of our interconnectedness with others.

And this starts in your own classroom?

My class meetings begin with a three-minute walk from the classroom—through a beautiful sculpture garden—to Windhover, the university’s contemplative center. Once we arrive, we meditate for 15 minutes. Later in the quarter, we extend that time to 30 minutes.

What happens when you get back to the classroom?

When we return to the classroom we are working with mindful values. When you begin in a place of mindfulness, people bring themselves to an encounter in such a different way. I’ve repeatedly seen the results: We are more able to see ourselves clearly and be open to what’s happening, accepting ourselves as we are, bringing forth an authentic self, and being more open to accepting another’s authentic self. Mindfulness helps to lessen prejudice, encourage a



“WHEN SOMEONE IS OPEN AND VULNERABLE ABOUT THE HUMANITY AND IMPERFECTION AND WOUNDEDNESS IN THEMSELVES, THEN OTHERS IN THE GROUP WILL SENSE THAT A SAFE SPACE IS BEING CREATED.”

sense of equal status, and lead to good relations.

What prompted you to start the Heartfulness program at Stanford?

When I was a substitute teacher in Cambridge public schools and later when I taught in medical schools, I was told by students—and observed myself—that mindfulness in the classroom works. At Stanford, there was a perceived gap between student services, like counseling, and academic classes. The personal and spiritual needs of the students weren’t being addressed and they were hungry for something like this.

What is your daily practice?

I practice first thing in the morning and later in the day for a little while. It’s a personal blend, starting with yoga and qigong, a series of movements coordinated with the breath, and then I sit for a while, observing thoughts and feelings and not getting attached to them.

I also integrate into my daily ritual a reflection on mortality, the Bushido or samurai practice of bringing attention to death and dying as, paradoxically, a means of developing gratitude for living another day.

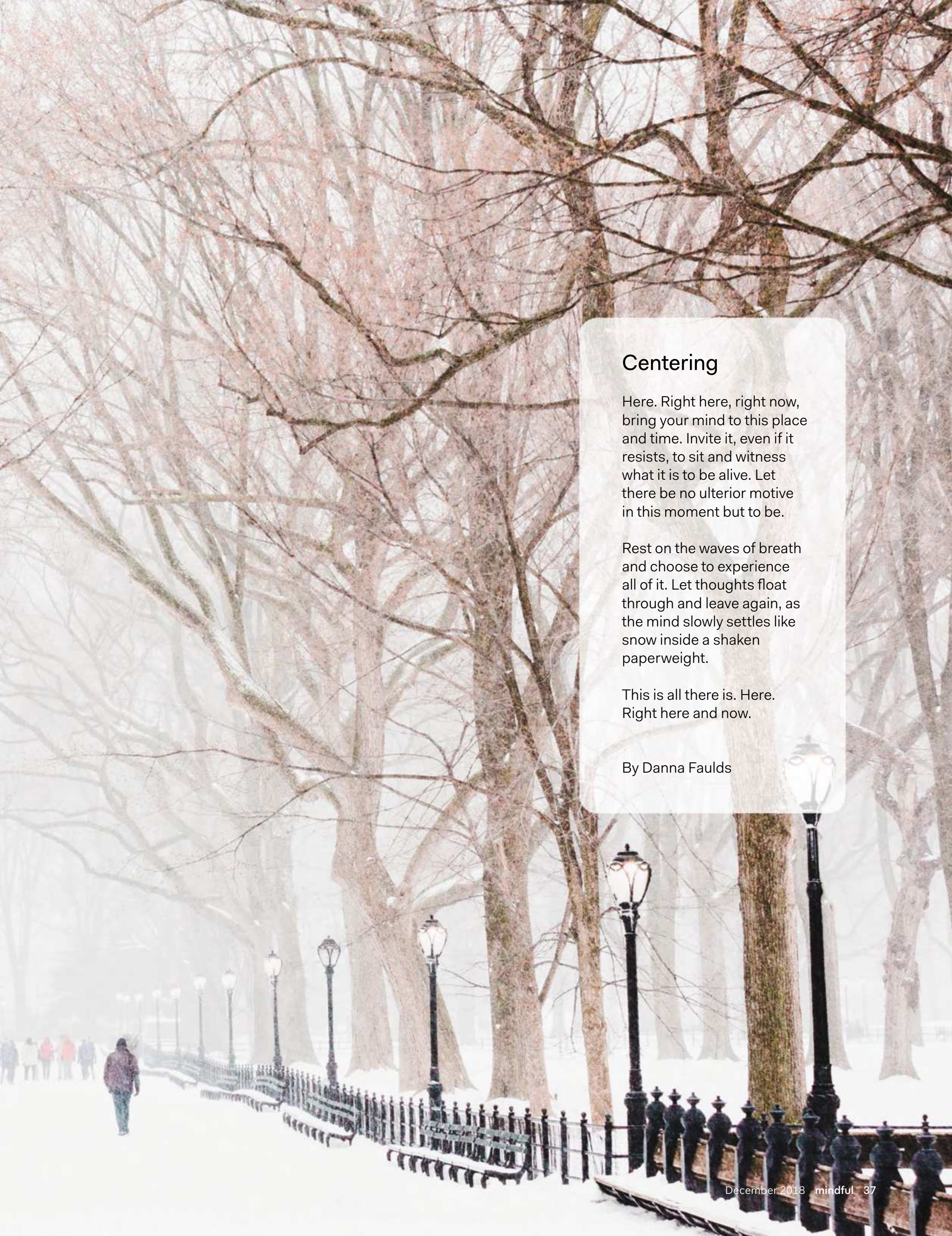
In these polarized times, what gives you hope?

Connecting with people who are trying to make their lives, their relations with other people, and the world better, even if it may seem overwhelming or impossible at times. That continuing desire replenishes and renews me. ●

exhale



PHOTOGRAPH BY EMANUEL HAHN. POEM REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF DANNA FAULDS.

A photograph of a park in winter, covered in snow. Bare trees line a path, and a person is walking in the distance. A white text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Centering

Here. Right here, right now, bring your mind to this place and time. Invite it, even if it resists, to sit and witness what it is to be alive. Let there be no ulterior motive in this moment but to be.

Rest on the waves of breath and choose to experience all of it. Let thoughts float through and leave again, as the mind slowly settles like snow inside a shaken paperweight.

This is all there is. Here. Right here and now.

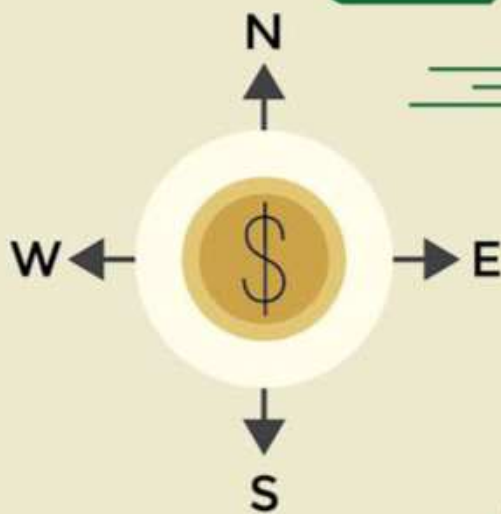
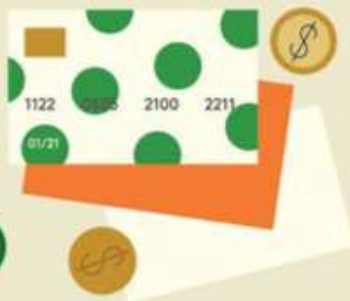
By Danna Faulds



30%

50%

SALE!



get real

The Path to Prosperity

Ready to bring your current finances into harmony with your bigger life goals? Money mapping offers a mindful way forward.

By Bari Tessler

Illustrations by Asia Pietrzyk

The true litmus test of a budget—what I like to call your “money map”—is whether it’s leading you toward a happy life. And you’re the only one qualified to define what a happy life looks like for you—and what steps you’re willing to take toward it. For some people, this may mean earning more money, spending less, or aggressively paying down debt. For others, it might actually mean working a little less, so they can enjoy time with family or recoup from a health crisis. Money mapping is about discerning what’s important to you in life (knowing there are rhythms and cycles to this), and then reverse-engineering a lifestyle that supports your version of happiness. →

The Three-Tier Money Map

Most traditional approaches to budgeting have us list out a single, master-plan version of our income and expenses for the month. And while this may be helpful for some people as an initial money practice, it ignores the richness and complexity of our money relationship as something that is always unfolding, shifting, and evolving over time. The Three-Tier Money Map is the antidote for this oversimplification. Here is the framework:

1

BASIC NEEDS LEVEL

These are the bare-bones, bottom-line needs for your life. And only you decide what that means. Is it just groceries, rent, and utilities? Does it include a particular kind of food? Is a daily coffee a must for you to function? Does it include savings and debt repayment? You're the boss here.

2

COMFORTABLE LIFESTYLE LEVEL

Here, introduce some more comfort into your lifestyle. What's included? How much? Does this mean a monthly (or even weekly) massage or pedicure? Some disposable income for movies, restaurant dinners, or the latest electronic gadgets? The ability to gift a little money to friends and family?

3

ULTIMATE LIFESTYLE LEVEL

Here we progress another step. Imagine having sufficient income to live out the fullest expression of your desires. All your intentions are funded. Does this look like millions of dollars in the bank, jet-setting from Tokyo to Buenos Aires to Paris, anytime you like? Or is it a surprisingly simple lifestyle, living debt-free on a rural sheep farm? Take the time to clarify what this means for you.

Everyone defines their Three-Tier Money Map differently: One person's Comfortable tier is closer to another person's Basic Needs or even Ultimate tier. Our definitions and dreams for each of these levels are as unique as we are, involving not only different types of expenses, but also vastly different amounts.

This framework is supportive and illuminating no matter what your income level or expenses are. Anyone can get out of control with their spending habits, bury their head in the sand about their income or debt, or lose focus on their priorities. And no matter how much or how little money you have, directing it with intention is always a pathway to greater clarity, connection, and empowerment.





3

ULTIMATE LIFESTYLE LEVEL

2

COMFORTABLE LIFESTYLE LEVEL

1

BASIC NEEDS LEVEL

TIME FOR REFLECTION

Some people create their first two lifestyle tiers and find themselves ready to stop, right there; it's simply too challenging for them to plot out their Ultimate lifestyle at this moment. While I always encourage people to list out all three tiers if at all possible, just to see the largest view of their financial landscape as possible, always take your time and honor your limits. Some people plot out their Basic Needs and Comfortable tiers, then come back to add their Ultimate in a few days, weeks, or even months, when they feel ready for it. Listen to your resistance, and find the right balance for you for working with and through it.

Most of all, remember that everyone defines each of these three tiers in different ways. By allowing yourself to dream in big ways, you will transform what might have been a dry, dusty budget into a pathway for greater self-awareness and connection with your values. Give yourself the gifts of curiosity, wonder, and joy as you play with your money map. →

Creating Your Map

Take a moment to prepare and set the scene: Gather anything you need to feel prepared and comfortable. Grab your financial tracking data or recent bank statements and income and expense reports. Pull out a journal and pen or open a fresh document on your computer. Pour yourself a favorite beverage, light a candle, play music, nibble chocolate, and put your phone on Do Not Disturb—do whatever you need to feel ready and wonderful.

1

FEELINGS

Freewrite about each of the three tiers of your money map: Basic Needs, Comfortable, and Ultimate. Don't include any numbers, yet. Turn within and get a felt sense of what each of these levels means to you. Write out your personal definitions for each tier, what you associate with them, how you imagine them making you feel day-to-day and month-to-month. This is completely subjective, and there are no wrong answers.

2

THINGS

Once you have a felt-sense description of each of your three tiers, it's time to look at what items are included at each level. What expenditures do you need to be able to afford to create the feelings you identified for each level? Does your "Basic Needs" tier include rent, groceries, health care, transportation to and from work, and that's it? Does a daily coffee or monthly movie feel like a Comfortable expenditure, or do these expenses feel like Basic Needs to you? Does your Comfortable lifestyle include cable television, a cell phone, and books? Does an annual vacation to visit your family go under Basic Needs, Comfortable, or Ultimate, for you, at this phase of your life?

3

NUMBERS

Get specific and take all of that prioritizing and bring in the real numbers. On three separate sheets of paper (or three separate spreadsheets), list out all of your monthly expense categories, for each lifestyle tier. Apply numbers to every expense item. If you've already tracked your expenses for several months, you may be able to look at recent averages to help you or you may do some quick, back-of-the-envelope estimates. Don't forget those big-ticket and rainy-day expenses that happen less frequently, like insurance premiums, car repairs, dental bills, etc. Divide annual expenses by twelve to calculate average monthly expenses. Also include savings, debt repayment, and investments in any tier those fit into, for you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bari Tessler is a financial therapist, author, and creator of the online Art of Money program at baritessler.com.

Stay tuned! Bari Tessler will be back with more money tips and insights in our February 2019 issue.



Note: Your Comfortable Lifestyle will include all of the expenses from your Basic Needs tier, plus any additional expenses that come into play for you at this level; likewise, the Ultimate level will include everything from your Comfortable Lifestyle, along with additional items.

Keep referring back to the feelings, definitions, and included items you came up with a few moments ago. Consider what additional expenses you'll include at each level, and do your best to estimate what they might be.

Once you've listed everything out, total up your expenses for each of the three tiers, and calculate your average monthly expense.

4

COMPARE INCOME AND EXPENSES

Once you have expense totals for each tier, it's time to calculate your monthly income. Some people have a set, predictable salary each month, which makes this calculation delightfully simple. However, if your income fluctuates over the course of the year (whether you freelance, own a new business, wait tables, or shift income streams periodically), just use your best estimates. Take a breath, take your time, and do your best with what information you have.

5

GET HONEST: WHAT LEVEL ARE YOU LIVING?

Now that you have your average monthly income, compare it to the numbers for your map. Is your planned income enough to meet your Basic Needs level? If so, wonderful! Are you actually living at your Comfortable or even Ultimate level?

Some people don't like what they see when they compare their income and Three-Tier Money Map. You might find that your current income doesn't cover your Basic Needs expenses, or that you're light years away from living your Ultimate lifestyle. It is very easy to feel discouraged here. Remind yourself that you're looking at these numbers so you can start making positive changes. Honor any feelings that arise with as much compassion as possible.

6

CELEBRATE!

Once you have all of your numbers in front of you, do a body check-in. Hug yourself: You have just taken a huge step. It is a really big deal to look squarely at your numbers in this way. ●



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FINDING STRENGTH

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRENDAN GARA / MILLENNIUM IMAGES, UK

IN SOLITUDE

Spending time by ourselves can seem like either a rare gift or a desperate last resort. **David Rome** explores our underrated need for a kind of alone time that helps us connect with our deepest self.



M



y father died suddenly during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of college. The loss unhinged me. Even though I lived with two roommates and was surrounded by fellow students and teachers, I spent the next three years of college in a fog of depression and isolation. After graduation I joined the Peace Corps, partly in order to avoid the draft—it was the height of the Vietnam War—and partly from having no idea where I wanted to go with my life.

Arriving in East Africa as a minimally prepared secondary-school teacher, I experienced being completely alone in a culture totally different from the one I'd grown up in. Paradoxically, instead of miring me in loneliness, being in this utterly new and different environment drew me out of my isolation. After a few weeks there, I woke up with a sense of shock to the realization that the way people were living in this part of the world—still organized in traditional tribal societies and cultivating and hunting their own food—was far more representative of how human beings had lived for thousands of years than the lifestyle I'd come from. American culture by contrast seemed like an artificial, self-involved, materialistic aberration.

Making peace with time alone and finding the means to do it in the healthiest way may be essential to living life well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Rome is the author of *Your Body Knows the Answer*, a book about accessing deeper knowing through mindfulness of the body.

This refreshing experience of solitude gave me the space to find myself, my own values, a sense of purpose. I enacted this new direction primarily in teaching young people who were the first in their families to receive a Western-style education, but also through organizing an anti-war protest among my fellow Peace Corps volunteers in Kenya. It was a formative time that, along with encountering Buddhism shortly after my return to the States, set the course for the rest of my life. Ever since that time, I've appreciated solitude, and contemplated its relationship to its close cousins: isolation, loneliness, and aloneness. Making peace with time alone and finding the means to do it in the healthiest way may be essential to living life well.

Henry David Thoreau famously wrote in *Walden*, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Thoreau's celebration of solitude has itself been celebrated widely ever since. Yet, between 1825 (when Thoreau was eight years old) and 2000, use of the word "solitude" in printed books declined by over 70%. In the same period, use of the word "loneliness" increased by over 500%.

What may this curious statistic be revealing?

It suggests, perhaps, that we are living in the midst of an epidemic of loneliness accompanied by a famine of solitude, increasingly isolated from each other and yet starved for the kind of time alone that rewards us—and those who come in contact with us—deeply.

Both loneliness and solitude are conditions of *aloneness*—which simply describes the state of being by yourself and doesn't carry a positive or negative connotation—but the actual experiences the two words evoke are very different. *Loneliness* involves feelings of sadness and yearning for what is absent: family, friends, home, native land, culture. This yearning for people and places that hold great meaning for us expresses a basic human need to belong—to be in active relationship with the things that make us who we are. Loneliness is an instinctive response to feelings of social isolation, moving us to seek and reach out to others. But at times this seeking and reaching behavior can turn →



Isolation vs. Solitude

What research suggests about the boundary between healthy alone-time and harmful loneliness.

Not surprisingly, loneliness has been shown to lead to overall negative health outcomes. In a frequently cited article on social isolation and health, published in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* in 2013, John Cacioppo and Louise Hawkley reported on studies showing that socially isolated young adults “rated everyday events as more intensely stressful.” They coped with stressors passively rather than directly (“suppressing emotion” in lay terms), a risk factor for high blood pressure, and their isolation contributed to slower wound healing and poorer sleep.

Subsequent studies have continued to show negative effects of social isolation, including a 2017 meta-analysis by Adnan Bashir Bhatti and Anwar ul Haq, published in *Cureus*, that indicated a connection between isolation and illness in a variety of systems: “cardiovascular, inflammatory, neuroendocrine, cognitive, and affective.”

And yet, many researchers point to the benefits of solitude. There is a key difference, however, between social isolation and solitude. Isolation is usually forced on us, whereas solitude is a choice.

In *The Handbook of Solitude* (2014), developmental

psychologist Kenneth Rubin, of the University of Maryland, lists four conditions required for solitude to be beneficial:

- you are spending time alone **voluntarily**
- you are capable of **regulating emotion**
- you are able and willing to join a **social group**
- you can also have **good relationships** outside of that group.

In the same handbook, Jack Fong, a sociologist at Cal State Polytechnic, contends that alone time has a

key role to play in transcending social crises: By getting to know who we are, we can counteract the forces that want to shape us into who we are not.

More recently, four studies from Thuy-vy Nguyen, Richard Ryan, and Edward Deci, from the University of Rochester, published in 2017 in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, showed that people who deliberately took time alone (away from all devices) experienced increased peacefulness, calm, and relaxation. While some participants felt sadder, lonelier, or more bored, a greater number felt less anxious and angry.

Mindfulness allows the clear, calm, and spacious innate nature of the mind to appear.

into grasping and clinging. Becoming fixated on what we think is missing in our lives can itself become an obstacle to getting our needs for belonging and intimacy met.

Solitude, on the other hand, is time we choose to spend alone in a special way. It's not just taking time for yourself. It's not merely R&R, as important as that is in the midst of the over-pressured lives many of us lead these days. Rather than taking time *for* ourselves, genuine solitude is about taking time *with* ourselves: time devoted to cultivating a deeper, more intimate, and more authentic relationship with ourselves.

We become who we are in relationships. The very sense of being a self—a “me” who is different from “you” and “them”—develops through an infant's attachment relationship to their mother, whose voice and smiles and reactions teach it that it possesses agency, the ability to cause things to happen outside of itself.

As social animals, we live in a mesh of relationships. Much of what's most important and meaningful for us is mediated by our relationships with others. At the same time, these vital relationships also constrain us. Naturally, there are times when these constraints are socially beneficial, such as when a friend or lover is able to interrupt a damaging habit we've fallen into. At other times, though, the tangle of relationships can constrain us in a way that suppresses essential aspects of our nature and limits our potential for growth and change and self-realization. We can get trapped inside a version of who we are expected to be that is out of touch with who we are.

As we grow from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, eventually our most fundamental relationship becomes the inner relationship with ourselves. This relationship is not always easy or comfortable, but it is through consciously recognizing and taking responsibility for our feelings and needs and desires, rather than seeking

solutions from others or blaming them for our problems, that we develop inner strength. That inner relationship can be fostered in solitude, which can provide us a kind of strength that can counteract the frequent demands to be shaped by others' agendas to the exclusion of our own deepest aspirations.

In solitude, the relatedness of our lives doesn't go away, but its demands become less immediate, giving us the opportunity to check in with feelings and values at a deeper level, to experience a positive quality of aloneness (including perhaps some pangs of loneliness). In this deeper engagement with ourselves, our sense of identity and self-worth becomes less dependent on input and affirmation from others.

As we learn to be less psychologically and emotionally dependent—and our sense of who we are matures—we find greater freedom in how we experience and interact with others. As our own need lessens we are more able to see others as they are, whether for better or for worse, and more able to genuinely give of ourselves to support and benefit other people—certainly those who are closest and most important to us, but also those with whom our relationships may be less deep or lasting.

While aloneness does sometimes involve feelings of loneliness, in a positive sense it represents our ability to stand on our own two feet, to function autonomously, to not be constrained by unhealthy dependence on others. It is a state of being “self-possessed.” Excessive time alone, of course, is unhealthy for most people. It can lead to psychological breakdown (as the movement to eliminate solitary confinement in our prison systems attests). But insufficient time alone, like an unbalanced diet, deprives us of essential nutrients for living a whole and rewarding life.

Practicing mindfulness can greatly enhance the benefits of solitude. Since it is about paying attention to whatever is occurring in the present moment, mindfulness practice allows the background clutter of thoughts and fantasies to subside and the clear, calm, and spacious innate nature of the mind to appear. At the same time, mindfulness is about cultivating a life-enhancing inner relationship between whatever arises in our experience and our simultaneous awareness of →



PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA STOLFI / STOCKSY

its arising. This special quality of awareness is sometimes referred to as “witness consciousness.”

As the mind settles and becomes more clear and focused, awareness grows both deeper and broader. We start to notice what is going on below the level of our everyday discursive consciousness (discursive literally means “running on and on”). We get more in touch with our body and how it has its own, nonconceptual way of knowing. This bodily or somatic knowing is intuitive, holistic, and open-ended. And because, unlike our thinking minds, the body never lies, it gives us trustworthy feedback for navigating life’s ups and downs as well as accurate insights into right next steps.

Mindfulness also sharpens our sense perceptions, keeping us appreciatively engaged with our surroundings. Literally as well as figuratively, we see more clearly and are able to act in the world more skillfully and effectively.

William Wordsworth evokes “that inward eye/Which is the bliss of solitude.” The inward eye sees the contents of our inner life, much of which occurs out of view of our outward-oriented senses, below the radar, as it were. In solitude, we have the opportunity to bring our hidden parts into the light of awareness.

Actually, it’s not we—our familiar goal-oriented selves—who bring what is hidden to light. Rather, we learn to create a safe, caring space that allows these parts to start to show themselves to us. Like shy animals coming out from behind the bushes, they appear and even permit us to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship.

Many of these shy animals have their origins in childhood experiences. The child part of our self doesn’t disappear as we grow older—it’s still there, often in hiding, and it should be cherished. Its feelings, its fears and wants, deserve our attention: the attention of a mature person able to discern and respond with understanding and compassion. Old emotional wounds that are no longer experienced directly are like scars that can inhibit growth and enjoyment of life—until they’re able to show themselves and feel recognized and accepted by our grown-up selves.

This inner journey of self-disclosure can be painful and scary at times, hard work to undertake and stick with. But the rewards are great, as inner resources and aspirations we never knew were there present themselves.

In solitude we encounter our vulnerabilities, fears, and self-doubt. As we make friends with these “negative” feelings, we become less

In solitude, our hidden parts are like shy animals coming out from behind the bushes into the light of awareness.

self-critical, less burdened, and more self-compassionate. Best of all, the life-enhancing inner relationship we cultivate during times of solitude also empowers our relationships with others. We are able to listen more deeply, process more empathically, and respond from a genuine caring for the other. We become less needy and more confident, more appreciative, and more grateful for those we share our lives with.

And solitude itself can be a powerful shared experience. Participating in group meditation sessions—time alone together—often evokes this. So does attending a concert where we touch into deep personal feeling while surrounded by other people: Rather than interfering, the atmosphere of attentive silence shared with the other listeners present supports and deepens our own experience of a rich, meaningful solitude.

Practicing solitude brings about growth and change. Change can be destabilizing, so resistance to change is natural. But “becoming who we are” is a journey without end. Our lives are most wholesome and authentic when we overcome resistance and embrace the change the world asks of us, enabling us to make a contribution that is true to ourselves. In that journey solitude is a vital ally.

And we become less lonely. Far from hiding out in isolation and self-involvement, our embracing of solitude makes us more engaged, more able to contribute to building a society that is sane, peaceful, and just. As Thoreau wrote in his journal, essentially notes to himself that others would later read, “You think that I am impoverishing myself withdrawing from men, but in my solitude I have woven for myself a silken web or chrysalis, and, nymph-like, shall ere long burst forth a more perfect creature, fitted for a higher society.” ●

Being Alone, Two Ways

If you find it hard to be alone, that's OK! Here are two practices to help you find a sense of ease through keeping yourself company.

ALONE WITH YOURSELF

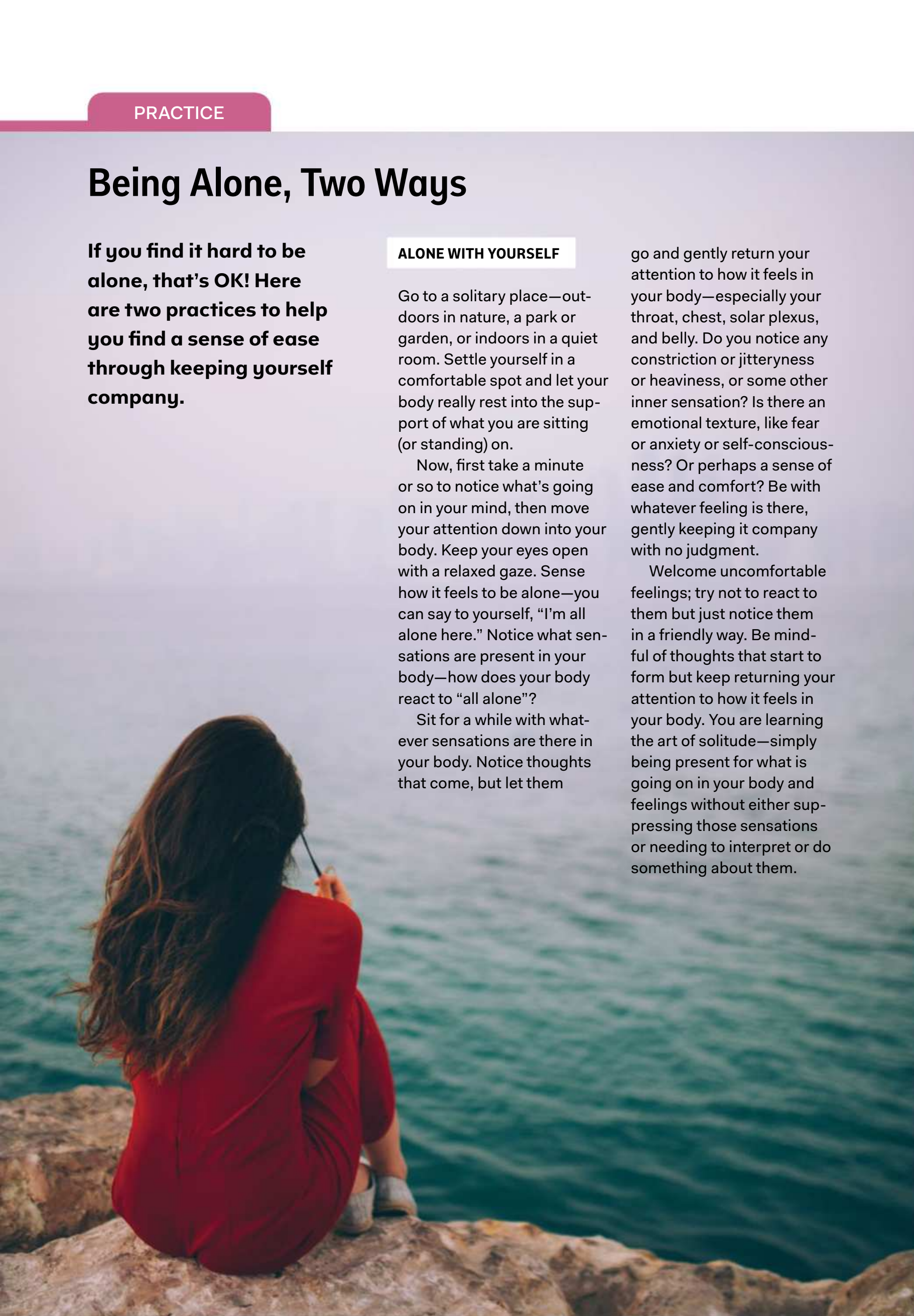
Go to a solitary place—outdoors in nature, a park or garden, or indoors in a quiet room. Settle yourself in a comfortable spot and let your body really rest into the support of what you are sitting (or standing) on.

Now, first take a minute or so to notice what's going on in your mind, then move your attention down into your body. Keep your eyes open with a relaxed gaze. Sense how it feels to be alone—you can say to yourself, "I'm all alone here." Notice what sensations are present in your body—how does your body react to "all alone"?

Sit for a while with whatever sensations are there in your body. Notice thoughts that come, but let them

go and gently return your attention to how it feels in your body—especially your throat, chest, solar plexus, and belly. Do you notice any constriction or jitteriness or heaviness, or some other inner sensation? Is there an emotional texture, like fear or anxiety or self-consciousness? Or perhaps a sense of ease and comfort? Be with whatever feeling is there, gently keeping it company with no judgment.

Welcome uncomfortable feelings; try not to react to them but just notice them in a friendly way. Be mindful of thoughts that start to form but keep returning your attention to how it feels in your body. You are learning the art of solitude—simply being present for what is going on in your body and feelings without either suppressing those sensations or needing to interpret or do something about them.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAJA TOPCAGIC / STOCKSY AND VISUALSPECTRUM / STOCKSY



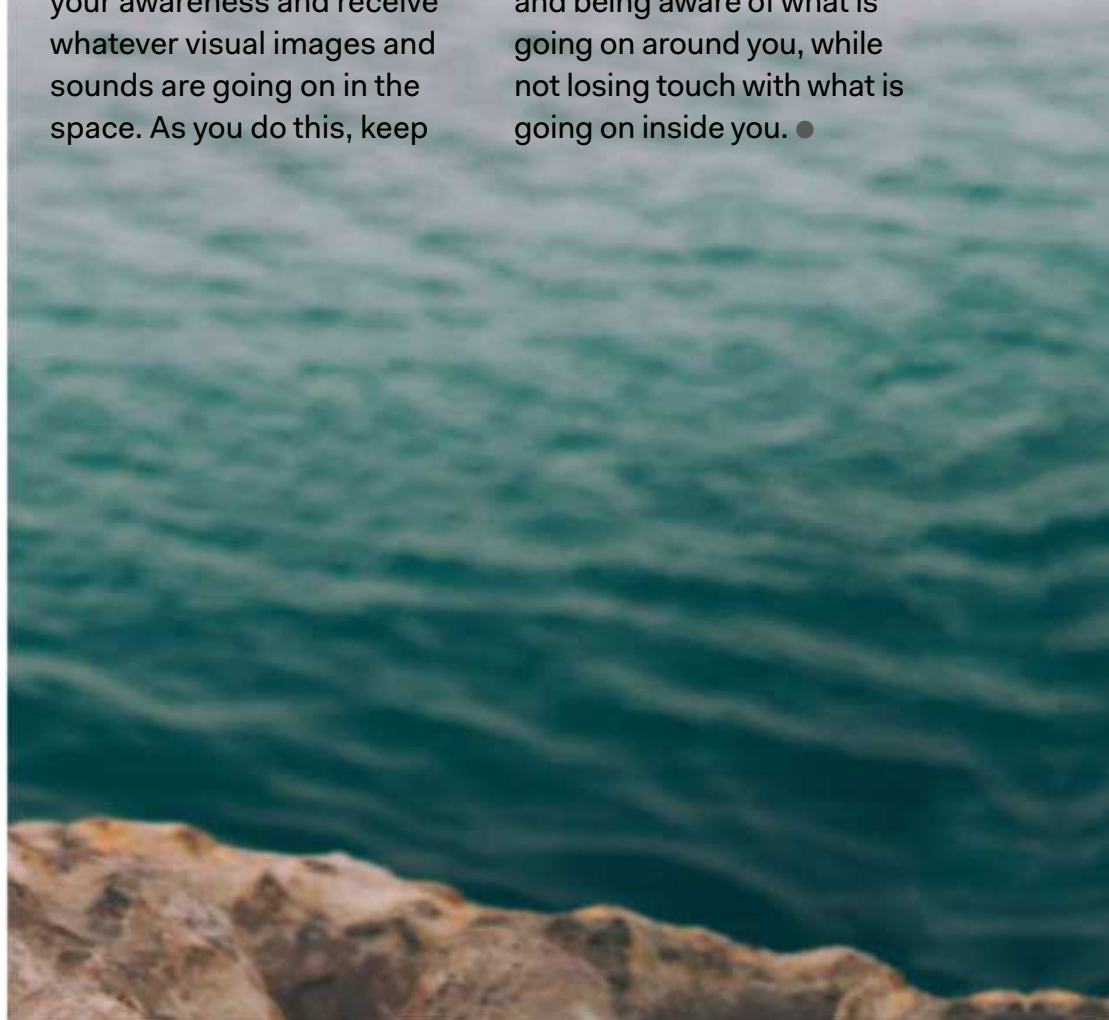
ALONE WITH OTHERS

Now, do this exercise in a busy public place like a shopping mall, airport, or train station. Find an unobtrusive place to sit or stand. As before, take some time to let your body settle and feel the support of your seat or the ground. Lower your gaze, notice what's going through your mind, then drop your attention down into your body—sensing especially inside your torso. Notice any sensations in those areas such as tightness, pressure, or a fluttery feeling. Whatever you find, just be with it, give it your friendly attention.

After a while let your gaze rise to take in everything that's going on around you. You don't need to look around with your eyes, just open your awareness and receive whatever visual images and sounds are going on in the space. As you do this, keep

sensing inside your body. How is your body receiving the presence of all the other people? How does it feel to be alone in their presence? Try not to focus on any particular person or detail, keeping your awareness as broad and open as you can.

If you feel self-conscious, that's fine—notice the physical sensations that come with feeling self-conscious. The point of the exercise is simply to notice how your body is responding to your environment as you also hold a sense of solitude in yourself. Allow yourself to become aware of these inner sensations without having to react to them. If you find yourself getting anxious, lower your gaze again and let your inner sensations subside or change. Experiment with raising and lowering your gaze and being aware of what is going on around you, while not losing touch with what is going on inside you. ●



TO BOLDLY MOVE ON

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine actor **Nana Visitor** shares how mindfulness helped her recover from personal trauma and professional burnout.

Interview by Tony Stultz
Photographs by Blake Farrington



Actor **NANA VISITOR**, 61, has been in “the biz” her whole life. Her aunt was the actor and dancer Cyd Charisse; her father, Robert Tucker, was an esteemed choreographer; and she was married to fellow actor Alexander Siddig. She is well known for her roles playing Major Kira Nerys in the long-running television series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (DS9) and on Broadway as Roxie Hart in the musical *Chicago*. Behind the scenes, however, Nana struggled for years from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stemming from a brutal attack in 1994, when, while driving home from the film set, she was abducted at gunpoint by two men and sexually assaulted.

Mindful spoke with the veteran actor and mother of two about her journey through show business, using mindfulness to heal emotional wounds, and her desire to share this practice with her fellow actors.

Mindful: *How did you get into mindfulness?*

Nana Visitor: I actually started meditation when I was five years old. When things would get weird at my house—it was a very chaotic family—I’d go into the closet and I’d send my mind somewhere else. That’s how I thought of it: sending my mind up. And I found comfort from that. So I would do that regularly when I was in trouble or when I wanted to escape what was happening. But real mindfulness started about five years ago, as a way to deal with issues that had arisen in my life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Stulz is the founder and director of the Center for Mindful Living in Paxton, Pennsylvania, and author of *Free Your Mind*.



And these issues were related to the assault you had experienced almost 20 years earlier?

After that experience, I went back to work on DS9, so I never, ever dealt with it. Never. And the doctors just gave me medication, of course. They did the best they knew how to do, but it was the worst. The medications just made everything so much worse. But I just muscled through, focusing on my career and my children. It was whenever I moved back to New York City, six years ago, that everything seemed to come to a head. I had become an empty nester, and I felt like all my personal relationships and career were shutting down. I was

really tired of being on all the medications and felt suicidal. That’s when I turned to a psychologist who specialized in PTSD. It was the psychologist who introduced me to the practice of mindfulness.

When I started my mindfulness practice, I was able to get off all the medications, and I haven’t taken any since. I went off the medications cold turkey, which is a bad way to do that, and went through a horrible physical reaction. But it was the mindfulness practice that gave me the ability to do so. Now, if I have the start of an anxiety attack, which almost never happens, I immediately know how to ground myself. Even just mindfully walking will get me out of it. It’s



Nana begins each day at her “centering space,” designed to support contemplation and meditation.



amazing. I’ve found that mindfulness has really changed my life.

What does your practice look like today?

I start every day by going before my centering space, which is set up above my fireplace. On it is a statue of a ram that serves as a symbol of my true self—calm, clear, creative, and compassionate. There are also flowers and a glass singing bowl. I light incense, bow, and spend some time using the singing bowl. Then I settle into meditation, usually for 20-40 minutes.

How would you say that mindfulness has influenced your work?

As a performer, understanding the power of being mindful and being able to play with the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems is just a huge toolbox to have available. But also, in terms of the business, to understand that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional is so powerful. You can make yourself miserable in this business, or you can look at people who say rude and horrible things or do strange things and say, “That’s interesting....”

And also, now that I understand what meditation can do, I find that it’s a low-flow state. It balances me so that I don’t have this desperate need to perform. Of course, any desperate need leads to things that aren’t healthy or just the frustration of going, “I don’t know how to feel OK in my body.” So, I’m now in that place of “I’m cool,” and if I get to act in a basement, or onstage or in an indie film, it doesn’t matter. I don’t have this driving need to succeed in a business that has nothing to do with fairness.

Which is life.

Which is life!

It sounds like mindfulness could benefit others in the profession...

Without a doubt it would. I would love to teach young actors because there’s so much abuse that happens. Part of it is being told “yes” for everything, but another part of it is dealing with unbelievable stress with no help whatsoever. They have nothing to fall back on. And it becomes very unhealthy.

The other thing is a strong belief among young actors that they need to be in a highly stressed state. Unfortunately, if you’re in a highly stressed state, you start to not care, you start to not attach yourself to outcomes. But you work better. I remember being that way. If I was breaking up and everything was a mess in my life but →



Nana played Kira Nerys from 1993 until 1999. “I was Major Kira in those days many more hours than I was Nana,” she says. “I would have her dreams instead of my own dreams.”

I had this job, I could focus in a laser-like fashion on my work, because I needed to block everything else out. So, I think actors tend to make their lives chaotic so they find that focus. They’ve found, “Oh, when my life is crazy, I’m better at work. I’m better in my acting.” Talk about suffering that is not necessary! They also can’t modulate themselves. If you’re in that state, you’re in that state on-camera and off-camera and you’re creating chaos for other people. Unfortunately, they don’t realize that they don’t need to do that.

Do you think that’s the case with a majority of actors?

I said young actors, but I think that’s the case with a lot of actors who haven’t done much work on themselves, and you know, it takes so many hours to be good at acting that I do think you tend to ignore the rest of your development as a human. It’s funny, you’re working in the capacity of being an expert in emotions and mental states, and yet some of it is just hoping for the best.

“Now if I have the start of an anxiety attack, I immediately know how to ground myself. Mindfulness has really changed my life.”

And how does mindfulness impact other areas of your life?

You want to give it to other people the minute you know what it can do for you. It’s that big. I have now shared my insights with my sons (Django El Siddig, 22, and Buster Miscusi, 26).

It was only five years ago that I started to get a lot of my better information. It was like, OK, I know what I told you before, but I will always bring you the best, “hot off the press” stuff I know. This is really it; now please listen to this.

Let’s talk about Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. It was actually my favorite show and something I shared with my son...

Thank you. That’s great. That kind of sharing imprints. A lot of families did that. We did that. We were in the middle of *DS9* when Django was born, and he had to be on set with me from the time he was two weeks old. He didn’t know anything else, and when he was four years old we came to New York and his teacher at the school said, “And where are you from?” And he said, “Star Trek, Los Angeles.” And it was true! It’s where he was from. (laughing)

Your character on the show, Major Kira Nerys, struggled with PTSD.

That’s exactly what was going on with that character. As you know well, my character belonged to a race called Bajorans. In the story, a militant race, called the Cardassians, had invaded my character’s planet. As Kira Nerys, I suffered through the horrors of war and torture and then helped fight back against the invaders. She was a survivor and was really tough and I loved that about her.

What was that like for you as you struggled with your own trauma?

My character’s experiences were featured throughout the series and were a big part of who she was; it took her seven years to somewhat recover. It took me way longer, personally. I was Major Kira in those days many more hours than I was Nana, and we’d work 16-20 hour days; it was a grind. And we did 26 shows a season, which is unheard of now. We worked nonstop. I would have *her* dreams instead of my own dreams. I would have panic dreams of being in an alien Cardassian camp and not knowing how to get out. So her stress is what I dreamed about. I kind of knew instinctively for the first two years how a soldier like my character would react emotionally, but I really understood once I got PTSD.

What’s in store next for Nana Visitor?

I’m moving back to Los Angeles and working on some new projects. I also hope to, at some point, share more of what I’ve learned, so that what I went through might be of help to others, whether it be someone who has experienced a trauma or a performer who wants to learn how to more mindfully maneuver being an actor. ●

Nana's black-headed
caique, Luciano, is her
frequent meditation partner
and teacher: "He reminds me
daily to approach him with
humility and a child's mind."





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THE REAL DEAL

As more and more of us seek mindfulness guidance and instruction, where should we turn to find teachers and programs we can trust and recommend?

By Peter Jaret

Illustrations by Irene Rinaldi

Search “mindfulness instruction” online and you’ll come up with all kinds of offerings, from private practitioners to independent mindfulness programs. There are Yelp listings of the top 10 mindfulness coaches and smartphone listings of the 10 best mindfulness apps. More and more medical centers offer mindfulness workshops; so do many colleges, universities, and corporations. But how can anyone know if the people who are teaching mindfulness are qualified? What does it even mean to be a qualified mindfulness teacher?

Teachers and leaders acknowledge the need for reliable standards. Counseling people about the mind carries the greatest possible level of responsibility.

People interested in exploring mindfulness aren’t the only ones asking these basic questions. So are many leaders in the field of mindfulness meditation, who have raised concerns about maintaining the appropriate level of integrity among teachers, which many refer to by talking about “professionalism.” While not everyone is comfortable with the commercial and clinical connotations of mindfulness teaching as a profession, almost all teachers and leaders acknowledge the need for reliable standards, since counseling people about the mind carries the greatest possible level of responsibility. “The growth of mindfulness over the past

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Jaret is a frequent contributor to *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, *Health*, and dozens of other periodicals. He is coauthor of *Impact: From The Frontlines of Global Health* and is a recipient of the AMA Award for journalism.

30 years has been very organic,” says Diana Winston, who directs mindfulness education at the University of California, Los Angeles’s Mindful Awareness Research Center. “The field has evolved without any kind of order. That’s been good in many ways. But now, really anyone can hang up a shingle as a mindfulness teacher. There’s no professional training required. A person with great marketing skills can start a successful practice with very little experience in mindfulness.”

Susan Woods, who helped develop and set up the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy certification training curriculum for the Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute at the University of California, San Diego, agrees. “These days there are apps for learning mindfulness. There are mindfulness programs that are just a couple of hours long. I see and hear of teachers who are doing things that are a very long way from what I would recognize as a mindfulness-based stress reduction program.”

The challenge, many leaders agree, is to set standards for *teaching* teachers that maintain the highest quality of mindfulness instruction.

To do just that, Winston, Dawa Phillips, and a small group of experienced teachers recently launched the International Mindfulness Teachers Association (IMTA). At first glance, its mission sounds fairly uncontroversial—“to oversee national and international mindfulness teacher education and training standards to ensure teaching and education programs continue to meet a level of depth and rigor needed to serve students and clients at the highest level and standardize the mindfulness teaching profession.” But almost as soon as its website went live last year, the fledgling association sparked a furor within the normally calm and collegial mindfulness community. Instead of bringing clarity to the field, Lynette Monteiro, a cofounder of the Ottawa Mindfulness Clinic in Canada, charged in an opinion piece in the magazine *Tricycle*, “IMTA has muddied the waters of existing professional certification processes.”

In an open letter to the IMTA signed by 10 leading experts from around the world, members of the International Integrity Network worried that the new association “will lead to added confusion in the field.” The writers accused →



the IMTA of ignoring the efforts of many other groups around the world, already well underway, to establish standards for mindfulness teachers. They also faulted the association for preemptively declaring itself to be an international association even when almost all of its members were US-based mindfulness practitioners.

The worries go deeper. In an effort to regulate mindfulness teacher training, some critics have said, the movement is in danger of ignoring the essential quality of a good teacher—wisdom—in favor of a set number of prerequisites and course hours. In an article in *The Huffington Post* not directly addressing the IMTA but rather the larger issues facing the mindfulness community, Ron Purser, a Zen teacher and professor of business at San Francisco State University, wrote: “This amounts to the professionalization of the role of the mindfulness teacher in conjunction with the student-as-consumer... Students are no longer learners seeking knowledge for knowledge’s sake, but have taken on the identity of the customer. Similarly, the professionalization of the role of mindfulness teachers has colonized not only the teacher–student relationship, but it introduces market logic with its demands for competition, savvy marketing, and entrepreneurialism.”

The intensity of the criticisms took the founders of the IMTA by surprise. “It was a shock at first,” Winston says. “We saw this as an altruistic effort, something that would help everyone in the field and everyone interested in learning to practice mindfulness.”

But perhaps it shouldn’t have been so surprising. In many ways, the uproar has exposed rifts in the mindfulness community that have been around for years—among them, the challenge inherent in creating a formal teacher training program for a practice that proponents agree is available to anyone. Of course, any field growing as rapidly as mindfulness is today will experience growing pains. Still, many leaders see this as a pivotal moment. How the debate over international standards and formal credentialing for mindfulness teachers plays out, they say, will shape the future of mindfulness as a practice and a profession.

Mindfulness comes of age

Almost everyone agrees that there’s a need for formal and widely accepted standards for teachers. “At the moment, the field is very much in flux, which is indicative of the nascent stage we’re in,” says Lynn Koerbel, director of mindfulness-based stress reduction teacher education and curriculum development at the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s Center for Mindfulness in Medicine. “The field of mindfulness has broadened and deepened, and the question is, now what?”

Rebecca Crane, who directs the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at the School of Psychology at Bangor University in Wales, agrees. “The field is moving along quite swiftly now,” she wrote in an email. “There is a strong recognition that in order to protect the integrity of this work, there needs to be transparent systems for the general public to discriminate between those who have undertaken in-depth training and those who have not.”

The same goes for educational institutions, medical centers, corporations, and other establishments that want to launch in-house mindfulness programs. “The problem at the moment is that it’s less and less clear who the qualified teachers are,” says Phillips, who is serving as the IMTA’s executive director. “Institutions should be able to feel confident that they are hiring the best mindfulness teachers, and that’s very difficult today.”

With an internationally accepted standard for credentialing mindfulness teachers in place, experts say, there’s better likelihood that health insurers will be persuaded to provide coverage

With an accepted standard for credentialing teachers, there’s a better likelihood health insurers will be persuaded to provide coverage for mindfulness services.



for mindfulness as an intervention in health care. “Because there has been so much evidence showing the efficacy of mindfulness, if we can establish rigor around the teaching, then it might get coverage by insurance companies down the road,” says Winston. That would benefit patients and mindfulness practitioners alike.

A formal certification process for teachers would also be helpful to support the advance of research into the benefits of mindfulness. To conduct any carefully controlled study, researchers need to make sure every participant receives the same treatment. In the case of an experimental drug, that’s easy. But when the treatment is mindfulness training, it’s much more difficult. For now, there is no way to measure mindfulness as a state. Instead, researchers try to make sure that study participants receive essentially the same mindfulness training—and that the training is generally accepted as the right approach by others in the field. “Certainly in terms of research, having a consistent standard is paramount,” says Koerbel. “It’s critically important that the delivery of all those classes be at the same level.”

Finally, an agreed-upon set of professional standards for training mindfulness teachers would benefit people who want to become teachers, by clearly indicating what will be expected of them, and the core competencies that need to be mastered. “If we create standards and requirements that everyone agrees on, mindfulness teachers will have more depth for themselves, and serve their clients better,” says Winston.

A work in progress

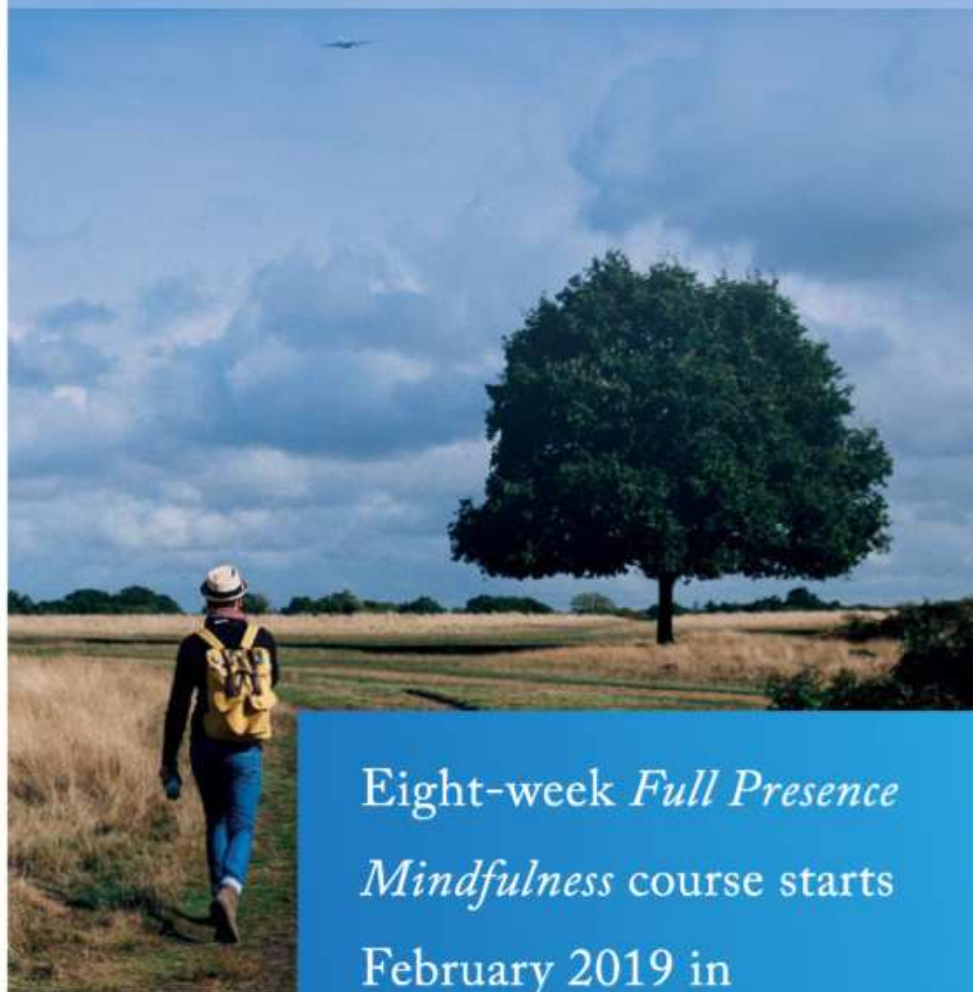
The fact is, efforts to establish teaching standards have been under way for almost a decade. UMass’s Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, for instance, has created its own curriculum, which includes very specific criteria to assess the competence of teachers of mindfulness. In 2013, Susan Woods helped create a similar curriculum for UC San Diego’s Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute.

In the UK, meanwhile, experts in mindfulness have been working on their own standards. The development process started around 2009, says Crane, “when Bangor University, Oxford University, and Exeter University, all of which →

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In ways that are difficult to define—let alone measure—teachers must *embody* compassion, nonjudgmental attention, and other qualities of mindfulness.



were interested in assessing teaching as part of their respective master's and research programs, came together to collaborate by pooling expertise and experience." Trainers from the three universities painstakingly refined the standards and created what they called the Mindfulness-Based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria, or MBI:TAC. "The MBI:TAC provides an agreed national benchmark for teaching competence—students graduating from these programs have all been assessed against the same criteria and judged to be competent or above," according to Crane.

Today MBI:TAC is widely used by many teaching programs in the UK, the US, and other parts of the world. "Between the criteria we've been using, and the MBI:TAC, we feel pretty clear that this process is rigorous and deep and affords the teacher and us a moment in time that says, yes, you've done this training, you've done this work, we see competence, we see a conveyance of the essence of the program," Koerbel says.

In order to help consumers connect with qualified instructors, several online registries of vetted mindfulness teachers and mindfulness programs have been launched. The UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teachers, for example, a collaboration between 23 training organizations, offers a listing of teachers who meet good practice guidelines. A website called "Your Guide To Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy," at mbct.com—created by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale—provides a variety of resources for people interested in MBCT, including qualified programs and teachers.

All of which raises the question of why, if most experts agree on the need for widely accepted standards for teachers and many

groups are already drafting them, the launch of the IMTA met such fierce criticism.

Part of the answer is that there *are* so many individuals and organizations already doing the hard work of testing requirements for teachers. Woods, one of the experts who signed the open letter criticizing the IMTA, explains, "The field of mindfulness-based interventions has been looking and struggling with how to come to an understanding about standardization for years. The IMTA didn't take time to talk to people who were actively involved in mindfulness-based programs. They reached out to some people, but then they didn't actively involve many of them. That was a mistake. They didn't acknowledge that the field of MBI programs was already deeply involved in conversation about standardizing the field."

To make matters worse, critics say, the IMTA's mission and mandate were unclear, at least at the beginning, creating confusion rather than clarifying the issues of credentialing teachers and accrediting mindfulness programs. "Were they setting themselves up as a training body, or a clearinghouse, or an adjudicating body?" says Monteiro. "It wasn't at all clear, and those three roles are very different."

In their defense, the founders of the IMTA acknowledge that the organization is evolving to meet the needs of the profession. "Obviously, this is a work in progress," says Phillips. "It's collaborative. We recognize that there are different credentialing programs out there based on specific curriculums or specific institutions. We want to go beyond that, to create an independent and collaborative organization that can provide standards that aren't based on a single curriculum or institution. We're still learning a lot. But I'm convinced that the IMTA can act as an aggregator of the knowledge, because we're not committed to a particular curriculum or institution."

Lofty ambitions, many challenges

As the uproar over the IMTA reveals, the effort to craft universally accepted standards and a single certification for mindfulness teacher training is likely to take time, hard work, and considerable cooperation. Interviews with leaders from around the world highlighted some of the most pressing challenges that lie ahead: →

6 Skills to Look For in a Mindfulness Teacher

The closest thing to a widely accepted standard for measuring mindfulness teacher competence today is the Mindfulness-Based Intervention Teaching Assessment Criteria, or MBI:TAC, created in 2008 by researchers from Oxford, Exeter, and Bangor Universities in the UK. The MBI:TAC focuses on skills required to teach a class of students, measuring competence in six areas, called domains. These include:

1

Coverage, pacing, and organization of session curriculum

This domain considers how well teachers are prepared and how well they cover the curriculum content of the session, balancing the needs of the individual, the group, and the requirements of teaching the course.

2

Relational skills

This domain addresses the interpersonal connection between individual participants and teacher. Characteristics of a good teacher include empathy, authenticity, compassion, warmth, curiosity, and respect, among others.

3

Embodiment of mindfulness

To embody a practice of mindfulness is to bring the core attitudes of mindfulness practice—non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go—to the practice of teaching mindfulness.

4

Guiding mindfulness practices

This domain assesses how well a teacher describes what participants are being invited to do in the practice, including all the elements required in that practice. The teacher guides students in the skills of recognizing when their minds have wandered and bringing their attention back, for example. The teacher's language should be clear, precise, accurate, and accessible while conveying spaciousness.

5

Conveying course themes through inquiry and didactic teaching

This domain assesses a teacher's skill in conveying the themes of the course interactively to participants, using a range of teaching approaches that make the themes come alive.

6

Holding the group learning environment

A competent teacher creates a learning environment that “holds” the group and within which the learning takes place. The teacher should be able to “tune in to,” connect with, and respond appropriately to shifts and changes in group mood and characteristics.

Adapted from “Summary Version of the Mindfulness-based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI:TAC)”, Crane et al, 2016.

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ACCESSIBILITY

One of the oft-cited criticisms of the professionalization of the field is elitism. Mindfulness, by its very nature, is available to everyone. Yet the programs that train teachers of mindfulness are expensive enough to be out of reach for many people. As an example, the eight-week course in fundamentals of mindfulness-based stress reduction at the Center for Mindfulness at UMass costs \$2,100—and that's just tuition, not living expenses or travel. The CFM's practice teaching program costs an additional \$2,750. Group and individual teaching supervision adds an additional \$2,300 to the bill. Add to that the cost of four silent retreats, also required for teacher certification, and the \$1,275 cost of getting certified, and the tab is well over \$10,000 in tuition alone to become a teacher. Scholarships and financial aid help defray some of those costs. But many experts say the field will have to do more to address concern about financial barriers.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

The rise of mindfulness as a teaching profession has its roots in the first world and in privileged cultural settings. But the issues that face practitioners in developing parts of the world and in marginalized communities are often very different. Creating standards and requirements that are appropriate for very different countries, cultures, and communities will pose a major challenge. "Obviously, one size doesn't fit all," says Phillips. "We have to address that, and find



ways to be culturally sensitive.” One approach, Susan Woods suggests, is to begin with agreement about the basic requirements, and allow for flexibility to allow them to be met in ways that recognize cultural and national differences.

EXISTING DEGREE AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

With the proliferation of mindfulness teaching programs around the world, thousands of people have already completed their training and in some cases received certificates and even degrees in the teaching of mindfulness. Many have been teaching for years. If the field adopts a single standard, administered by a single association, there will be a need to “grandfather” their credentials into the new standard. The IMTA has already acknowledged this issue. “In recognition of the fact that for many decades there have been rigorous alternative teacher training programs training qualified mindfulness teachers around the world,” the association acknowledges on its website, “the IMTA is committed to offering an alternate pathway for graduates of these in-depth programs to join the IMTA as we evolve, and receive provisional certification by meeting alternative eligibility requirements.” Ironing out the details, however, may not be easy.

THE RISE OF SUBSPECIALTIES

The first professional programs for mindfulness teachers focused on mindfulness-based stress reduction and, later, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. But a growing number of subspecialties have emerged, including mindfulness-based relapse prevention, mindfulness-based childbirth and parenting, mindful eating programs for weight control, mindfulness in education, and others. Should the same requirements for teachers apply to all these areas? Do people who are working in the field of addiction, for example, need additional focused training? The questions are particularly fraught in fields where mindfulness teachers work with vulnerable populations, such as those with mental illnesses. Should mindfulness teachers be required to have formal training in psychology or social work? “Obviously, these training programs will be very different,” says Woods, “and we’re just beginning to consider what those differences should be.” →



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CONTINUING EDUCATION

While there's general consensus about what a rigorous curriculum for teachers should include, less attention has been focused on the need for continuing education. Teaching mindfulness is a lifelong process, and there's growing recognition that it's important to build in a component of continuing education in order to ensure that teachers grow and learn and also that they don't drift from the accepted approaches. What mechanisms should the field of mindfulness put in place to require teachers to renew their credentials from time to time? One proposal from the IMTA is to require mindfulness teachers to attend a five- or seven-day silent retreat at least once every two years in order to maintain their teaching credentials. But even such a seemingly modest proposal has sparked concerns. "What about a mindfulness teacher with a small rural practice who can't afford to travel for a week-long retreat? What about a mindfulness teacher with a family with small children who just can't get away that long?" asks Monteiro in Ottawa. "I don't want people who have invested in this, and who are doing good and essential work in the community, to think that what they're doing is somehow not worthy."

EMBODYING THE PRACTICE

Unlike many professions, learning and teaching mindfulness is essentially experiential in nature, not knowledge-based. There will never be a written graduate exam for mindfulness instruction. Effective teachers are those who have experienced mindfulness for themselves and who are actively engaged in their own practice of mindful meditation. More than that, they must embody their practice. In ways that are difficult to define, let alone measure, they should convey compassion, nonjudgmental attentiveness, and other qualities we associate with mindfulness. Defining how to teach those qualities is a challenge. But one key component, almost everyone agrees, is mentoring. "There's something about teaching a program over and over again with mentoring or consultation, peer supervision, that's really helpful in developing skills over time," says Woods. But exactly what form mentoring should take, and what role it should play in continuing education, remains an open question.


OUTCOMES-BASED EVIDENCE

By far the most pressing question facing the field is also the most basic. What makes a good teacher of mindfulness—and do the qualities and experience most of us assume are important really make a difference to the people they are teaching? Surprisingly, no one knows, because very little solid research has been done. “We are still at an early stage in building our understanding about competence assessment in the context of mindfulness-based training,” says Crane. “The research on the reliability and validity of the MBI:TAC is promising but preliminary. So there is appropriate caution—but also considerable interest in proactively building out understanding.” In the one controlled study that has been published, Crane and colleagues Pauline Eva Ruijgrok-Lupton and Dusana Dorjee studied nine mindfulness-based stress reduction teachers with varying levels of experience and 31 people participating in their classes. The study, published in the journal *Mindfulness* in 2018, showed that well-being and reductions in perceived stress were significantly better for participants taught by teachers with an additional year of mindfulness-based teacher training and assessment. But no significant differences showed up in score increases for mindfulness, self-compassion, or other outcomes. A much larger study is now under way, sponsored by UMass Medical School, that should help shed more light on teacher competency and student outcomes.

Taking a mindful perspective

For all the contention that the IMTA initially provoked, however, most of the people involved in the effort to move the profession forward are upbeat about the future—buoyed by their belief in the benefits of mindfulness and the ability of its practitioners to collaborate constructively. “We all share the same values. We all wish the best for each other. How we enact that may be very different. There’s going to have to be some give and take. But I’m optimistic,” says Monteiro. “I think we’re on the path of consolidating what we mean by certification. What remains now is to see, is it working? Are our certified teachers doing what we are guaranteeing they will do?”

For his part, Dawa Phillips believes the current push-and-pull will ultimately help strengthen the movement. “When people criticize the →



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developments in the mindfulness field, they are really criticizing some of the unhealthy aspects of modern-day capitalism that have found their way into our profession. That's why collaboration is so important. By working together, we can all become better practitioners, and better teachers, and better teachers of teachers, and reach more people. If IMTA can contribute to this in some small way, then we will have accomplished something important."

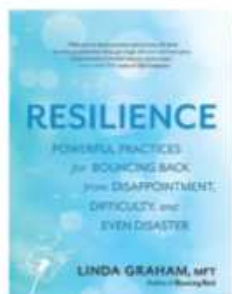
Diana Winston agrees. "The mindfulness field is going to continue to grow, and more and more people will want to become teachers. They will see it as a lifelong process, where they continue to grow and learn as teachers. In five or 10 years, I hope, whatever happens, that mindfulness teachers will be perceived by the general public as professionals."

In the end, the hope is that the values that inform mindfulness itself will serve to guide leaders in the field as they navigate the path toward standards and credentials the public can trust. "We are all in process. None of us is done," says Woods. "We all have a passion for bringing the practice and the benefits of mindfulness to more people. And I think all of us understand that it's a world that's increasingly reactive, where emotions are very strong—where the benefits of mindfulness are more important than ever. All of us, individually and collectively, are working toward the same goal, to maintain the highest quality of teaching and reach as many people as we can." ●



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That's where resilience comes in. The newest buzzword in psychological circles, *resilience* indicates our ability to recover from adversity. And after rigorous study, it's also now believed to be the greatest indicator of one's personal happiness and ability to thrive throughout life.

In this easy-to-read and hugely informative guide, Graham explains the neuroscience of resilience (spoiler alert: Our early influences shape our future coping skills) and how we can continue to develop it throughout our lives.

It's this last bit—our ability to override old neural patterns, create new ones, and strengthen our minds and bodies to withstand the inevitable hits in any life—that makes this already useful book priceless. Graham combs the research and her own trove of best practices to explain how anyone can become more resilient, no matter where they start from. Through practices that build somatic, emotional, relational, and reflective intelligence, she demonstrates how the mantra of “little and often”—small experiences repeated many times—is the best way to create new habits; undo the effects of negative, harmful, or traumatic experiences; and strengthen your inner reserves.



A DOCTOR'S DOZEN

12 Strategies for Personal Health and a Culture of Wellness

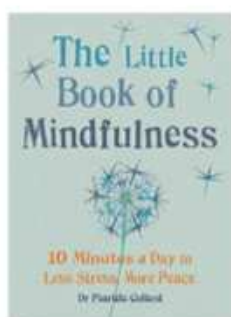
Catherine Florio Pipas, MD, MPH •

Dartmouth College Press

“For the first time in history, the current generation of young adults in our nation is less healthy than their parents.” This startling statement introduces Catherine Florio Pipas's clarion call for personal health accountability. In *A Doctor's Dozen*, Florio Pipas, a professor of community and family medicine at Dartmouth, demonstrates that many modern health concerns can be attributed to preventable behaviors and lifestyle choices. She

outlines the most common of these preventable issues and prescribes a three-pronged strategy for tackling each through the lenses of self-awareness, self-care, and self-improvement. She presents a holistic approach that influences well-being on every level.

“This is our human condition, and to accept it fully is the starting point for change.”



THE LITTLE BOOK OF MINDFULNESS

10 Minutes a Day to Less Stress, More Peace

Dr. Patrizia Collard • Gaia

Here's one of those books that fits in a purse or pocket—presumably to keep close at hand for when you're stressing out, zoning out, or simply want to take some time out. It's chock-a-block full of wee practices of five to 10 minutes' duration. (The 10-minutes-per-day in the

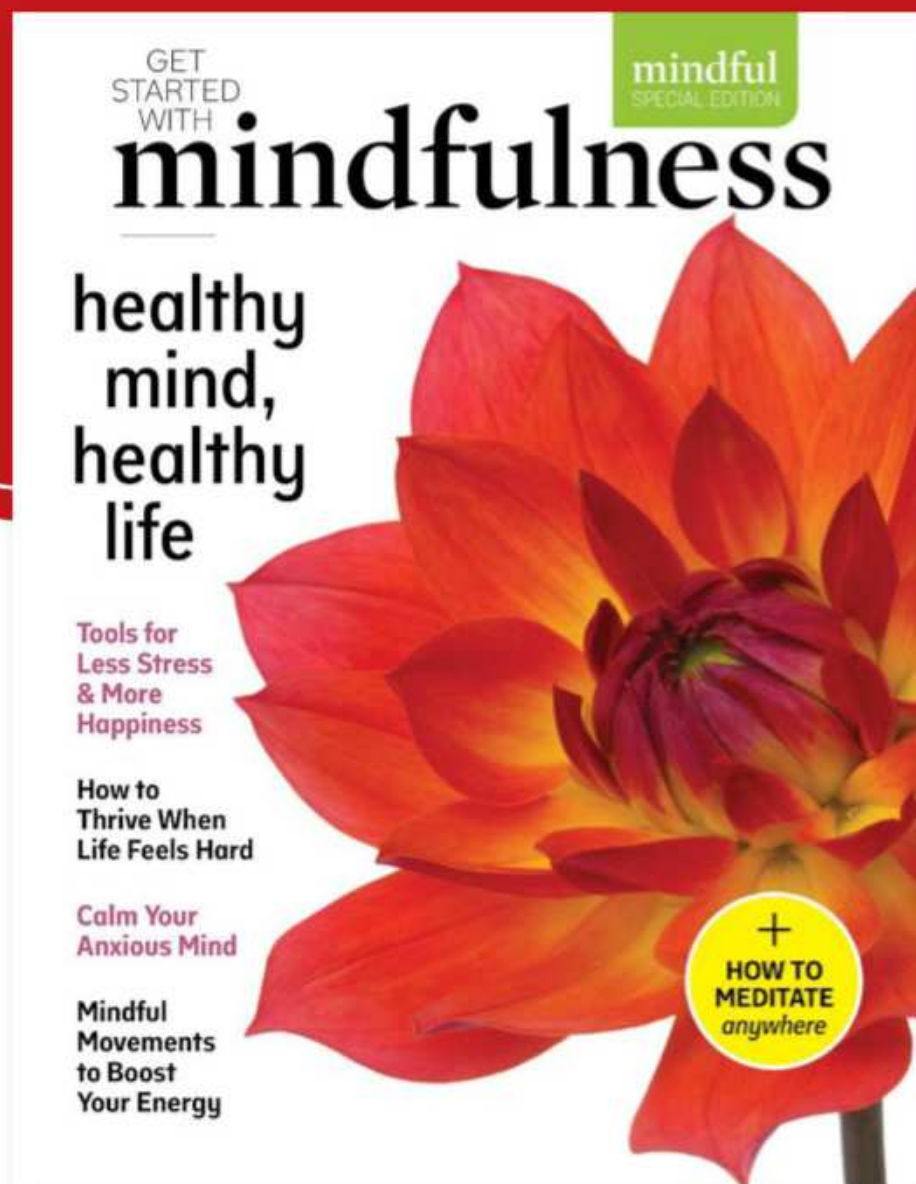
subtitle is a little misleading: If you did all of the more than 20 practices in a day, it would tote up to about three hours.) Many of them are cleverly or intriguingly named (like Standing Starfish and Foot Scan) and playfully illustrated. All are accessible and easy to follow.

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"Mental downtime is having the space and freedom to wander about the vast hallways of memory and contemplate who we are."



IN PRAISE OF WASTING TIME
Alan Lightman • Simon and Schuster

This slight, thoughtful text lauds "wasting" time from many angles: contemplation, creativity, divergent thinking, and enduring happiness. These qualities, Lightman asserts, are not trademarks of rare genius, but "habits of mind." Even better, we're already practicing them whenever we rest, play, or meditate. (As a nostalgic example, he

conjures an afternoon spent gazing into a tadpole pond and wondering, not Googling, about the world.) He suggests Western culture could benefit from reappraising where we waste our time. Untethering once in a while from society's hyperconnected, often counterproductive "grid" of distractions, we can simply be present, letting ourselves idle.



NO PLACE TO GO
How Public Toilets Fail Our Private Needs
Lezlie Lowe • Coach House Books

Ever gone into a store and bought something just so you could use the bathroom, been told a bathroom is for Employees Only, frantically searched for a place to go (perhaps, ugh, in vain), or waited in an interminable line at the ladies' loo? Here's a strong and thoroughly researched case for how

mindless our societies are when it comes to one of life's universal needs. With an aging population, gender fluidity, and shrinking infrastructure budgets, this problem is not going away. Here's a chance to learn how we got here and what some brave and bright souls are doing about it.

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PODCASTS

INVISIBILIA

Episode: Leave a Message

Let's face it: Voicemail may not be long for this world. Technologies like email and texting have largely taken its place: They're quicker and less intrusive. On the other hand, a 2016 study on the "cuddle hormone," oxytocin, found that when we hear a loved one's voice over the phone, our brain's oxytocin response is almost the same as if we'd actually hugged them. Screenwriter Cord Jefferson considers "the power of the human voice, and what we lose when the voice goes away"—particularly if a family member's life is cut short, glorifying the audible mementos in a voicemail inbox.

CBC RADIO, SUNDAY EDITION

Episode: You can't stop checking your phone because Silicon Valley designed it that way

Reporter Ira Basen digs deep into the "attention economy, where the biggest prize goes to those who can grab users' attention and keep it the longest." For Facebook, Snapchat, and the rest, your attention is what's for sale. Basen journeys back to the dawning of "persuasive technology," a term coined in the mid-1990s by Stanford behavior scientist B.J. Fogg. He taught tech pioneers how technology could supply beneficial tools for habit formation. But did it get out of hand? A lively debate ensues about who takes ultimate responsibility for the habits we form.

THE GUARDIAN

Episode: Is compassion fatigue inevitable in an age of 24-hour news?

Elisa Gabbert prides herself on her awareness of goings-on in the world, but lately she has a case of "creeping, psychic exhaustion": compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress. Psychologist Charles Figley defined this in 1995 as "stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person." STS commonly haunts first responders and other professional caregivers. But thanks to round-the-clock news cycles, many people now feel emotionally numbed. "What happens," Gabbert asks, "when the world wants more empathy than we can give?" This episode samples thought-provoking theories on empathy and considers how we might respond to its limitations.



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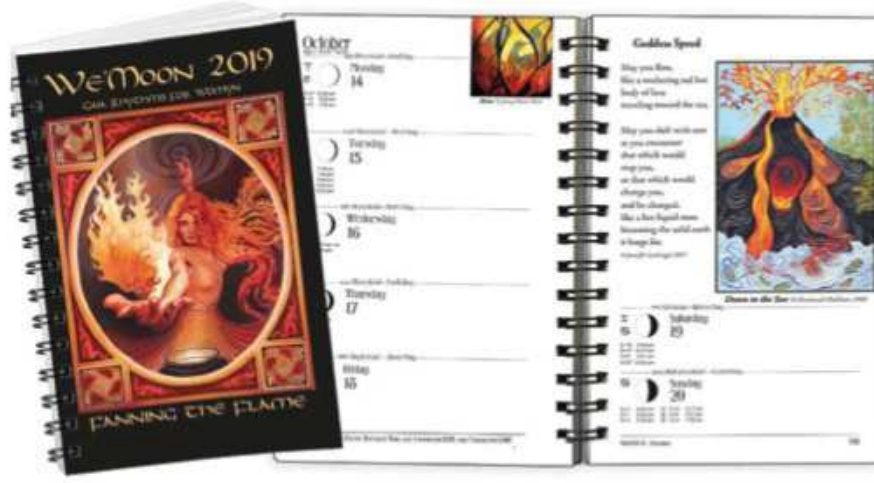


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Mindfulness & Meditation for Kids

Award-winning author Whitney Stewart creates mindfulness books to provide children with tools to nurture inner peace. Her two recent releases include: *Mindful Kids* card deck (ages 4 & up), which offers five categories of activities that foster kindness, focus, and calm; and *Mindful Me* (ages 8 - 12), an introduction to mindfulness to help

kids find clarity, manage stress, and handle difficult emotions through breathing and relaxation exercises and guided meditation.

Whitney teaches the methods she writes about when speaking at schools and conferences and in her workshops for yoga studios, fitness centers, and women's groups.

www.whitneystewart.com

whitney@whitneystewart.com



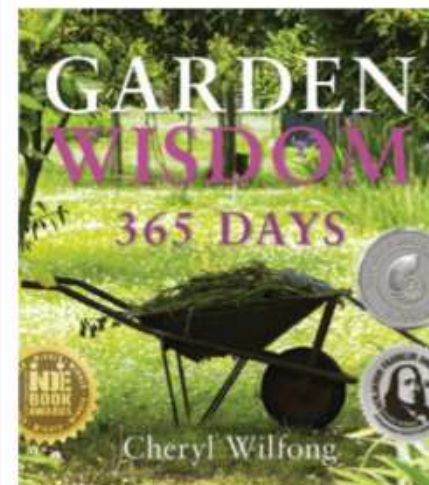
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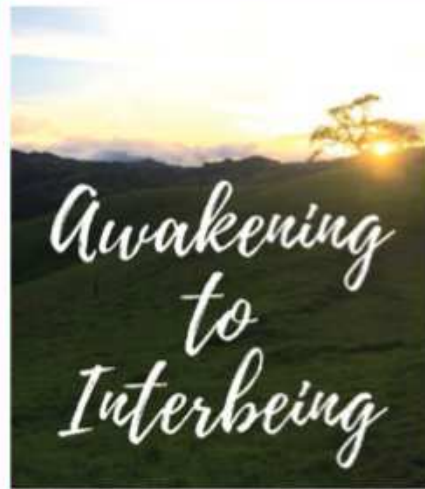
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Mindfulness and Compassion for Kids

Mindfulness and compassion practices offer tools for children to work with the normal challenges of life such as difficult thoughts and emotions, sleep problems, and grief.

Using bubble imagery, Heather Krantz, M.D. offers simple, engaging and practical children's books about mindfulness and compassion for ages 4-8.

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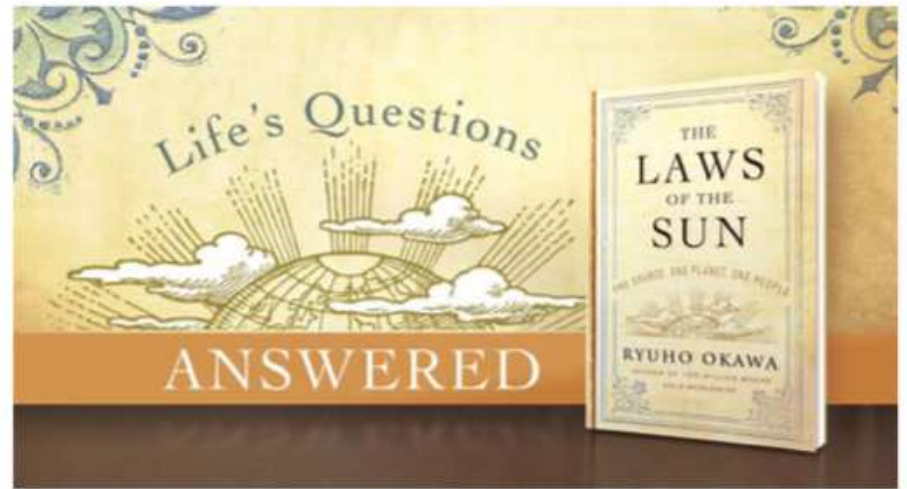


Two Award-Winning Children's Books on Mindfulness

Dr. Sileo's newest award-winning children's book *Bee Still: An Invitation to Meditation* tells the story of Bentley, a lovable honeybee who does not participate in the frantic buzzing of other bees. Instead, he uses meditation to help calm himself and find inner peace. Soon the rest of the forest animals are joining along with Bentley as they sit, breathe, and "bee" still!

Award-winning book *A World of Possibilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness* is an inviting introduction to mindfulness for children. Children will learn how to apply mindfulness to everyday moments and how days are filled with endless possibilities to take a pause.

To order both books:
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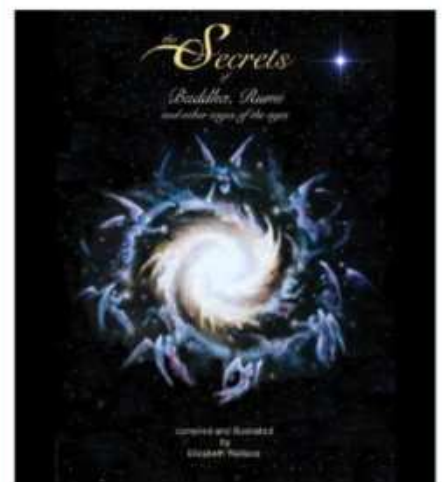
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A Mindful Solstice Tree

We love a mindful practice of any kind, and particularly one that celebrates our interconnectedness with nature. In the spirit of the season, we offer our take on a Solstice Tree. May your home be filled with wonder and light this winter.

* We recommend using as many all-natural ingredients as possible, to allow your tree to be composted.

TREE

Evergreens are an ancient symbol of longevity. Choose a farm-raised tree, or a potted tree you can plant. Or, simply decorate a houseplant!

LED LIGHTS

Bringing light into the darkness.

GARLANDS OF POPCORN, CRANBERRIES, AND CANDIED CITRUS SLICES

In Mexico, popcorn is called *palomita*, or “little dove,” and was traditionally used in ceremonial garlands. The cranberries and candied citrus can represent the “bitter” and “sweet” that is a natural part of life, and bring natural color to your tree.

PAPER STARS...

Beautiful reminders of our place in the universe.

...AND SNOWFLAKES


Remember making paper-cut snowflakes? Each one was perfect and unique just as it was—just like each one of us.

PINE CONES

Symbolically, pine cones represent illumination. Dip in soywax or beeswax to make a natural fire starter to be used later. Or dip in wax, then roll in Epsom salts for a frosted appearance.

NATURAL-DYE RAFFIA BOWS

A reminder that we're tied together in good will.



"I gotta be honest. I think the timing and the culture are right for this."

People are tired of being stressed."

Ben Dio, Firefighter
Worcester (MA) Fire Department

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in Medicine, Health Care, and Society

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