



Thoughts from Linda:

Wherever You Go There You Are
Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life

Jon Kabat-Zinn
1994

It seems like February is a perfect month for us all, in the Age of COVID, to practice mindfulness, meditate and breathe well (even with a mask) as we contemplate these amazing past two years of living in a global pandemic. The two books for February are both quite interesting and helpful. They offer practical advice and techniques to help us all with disciplines at any time, but especially at this time, help reduce stress and increase our physical and mental well-being.

In keeping with our theme of 'something old and something new,' I selected this 1994 classic book on mindfulness meditation by the highly esteemed Ph.D. founding Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He is also Professor of Medicine Emeritus at that facility.

Dr. Kabat-Zinn is widely acknowledged as one of the founders of the modern domain of mindfulness meditation. This book is a foundational one for anyone—those who are new to this discipline and practice and long-time practitioners. The book has been around for almost 30 years and has been translated into twenty languages. Today, you can Google MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) and discover an entire industry devoted to these practices, with much supportive data describing the many benefits involved. As of 2015, 80% of medical schools in the United States report offering mindfulness training. And as of 2019, the industry was estimated to be at \$1.1 Billion. One survey found that 35% of employers use mindfulness in their workplace practices.

This is also a timely selection, as the Father of Mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hahn, passed away this year on January 22. He was Dr. Kabat-Zinn's teacher. His own 1975 book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, was credited with helping to "lay the foundations" for the use of mindfulness in treating depression through "mindfulness-based cognitive therapy." It

influenced the work of the University of Washington psychology professor Marsha M. Linehan, the originator of Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT.)

This book is easy to read, filled with concise chapters which include 'how to' sections. Each chapter is 1-2 pages in length, allowing you to pick it up and read briefly—back to front or in any fashion you please. The book has three Parts: The Bloom of the Present Moment, The Heart of Practice, and In the Spirit of Mindfulness.

Throughout this book, Kabat-Zinn reiterates the 'is/is not' of mindfulness itself, reflecting the general readership of some 30 years ago when this concept was much misunderstood. These paragraphs offer great perspective and framing, even for the more advanced practitioners of today.

In his introduction, he notes: "The book you have in your hands is about waking up...Not knowing that you are (just moving unconsciously through life) ...is what the Buddhists call 'ignorance' or mindlessness. Being in touch with this not knowing is called 'mindfulness.' The work of waking up...is the work of meditation, the systemic cultivation of wakefulness, of present-moment awareness. The waking up goes hand in hand with what we might call 'wisdom,' a seeing more deeply into cause and effect and the interconnectedness of things, so that we are no longer caught in a dream-dictated reality of our own creation. To find our way, we will need to pay more attention to this moment. It is the only time that we have in which to live, grow, feel and change."

He notes that he conceived and developed this book to contain enough information and instructions so that you could engage in meditation practice on your own. However, he does have many YouTube and other readily available web-supported additional material that serve as companions to the book.

You will find Kabir, Lao-Tsu and Thoreau scattered throughout, along with Walden Pond's many mysteries and wisdom.

I loved remembering the old New Yorker cartoon: Two Zen monks with robes and their heads shaved—an older one and a young one—are sitting cross-legged side by side on a floor. The young one looks at the older one with a quizzical look on his face as the older one says, "Nothing happens next. This is it." And, of course, it is true. As Kabat-Zinn notes, "...ordinally when we undertake something, it is only natural to expect a desirable outcome for our efforts. We want to see results, even if it is only a pleasant feeling. The sole exception I can think of is meditation. Meditation is the only intentional, systematic human activity that at the bottom is about not trying to improve yourself or get anywhere else, but simply to realize where you already are. Perhaps its

value lies precisely in this. Maybe we all need to do one thing in our lives simply for its own sake.”

The chapter names give you an indication of what’s in store for you as you move through the content. Here are a few I love: This Is It; Keeping the Breath in Mind; You Don’t Have to Go Out of Your Way to Practice; Waking Up; Keeping It Simple; Doing Non-Doing; Patience; Letting Go and Meditation: Not to Be Confused with Positive Thinking.

In the second section of the book, he offers specific types of meditation for your consideration, including a section on the use/positioning of the hands and feet from the yogic traditions, known as mudras. He references the experience of going through a museum and carefully observing Buddhist paintings and statues and the hundreds of types of different depictions of meditation that are revealed. In a fascinating chapter called, What To Do With Your Hands, he goes on to note many of the various configurations, including one called “cosmic mudras.” Basically, he encourages you to experiment with your hands, but in a mindful way, acknowledging the different energies embodied by the hand mudras.

He then goes into specific types of meditations, such as The Mountain Meditation, The Lake Meditation, Walking Meditation, Standing Meditation, and the Lying Down Meditation. There is much more, but the idea in each of these is to offer a description, some information on technique, and note barriers that can emerge, with good advice for both beginner and more seasoned meditation practitioners as well.

As a walker myself, I really enjoyed the Walking Meditation section. I learned that in informal walking meditation, you attend to the walking itself. The suggestion is to focus on the footfall as a whole; or isolated motion segments such as shifting, moving, and placing. The idea is to pair the awareness and intentionality of walking with the awareness and intentionality of breathing. As our author notes, “ultimately, walking is stillness in motion, flowing mindfulness.”

This chapter begins with Thich Nhat Hanh’s quote: “Peace is every step,” and this quote seems like a good place for an ending to this review.

I hope you will step into this book and enjoy it. It is indeed a classic.