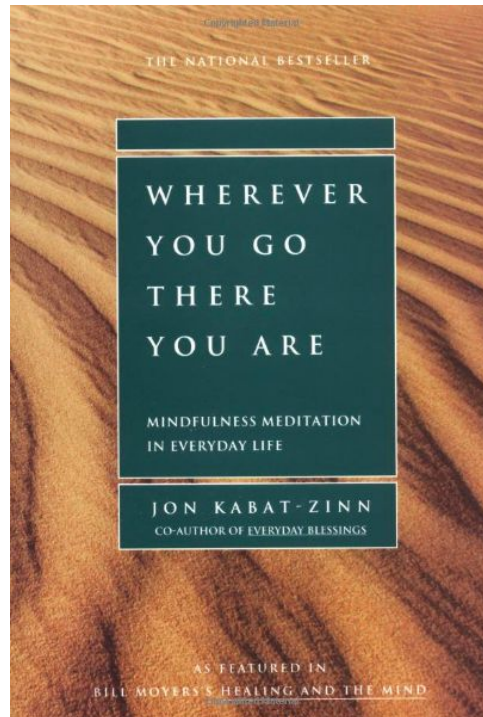


Opening Quote:

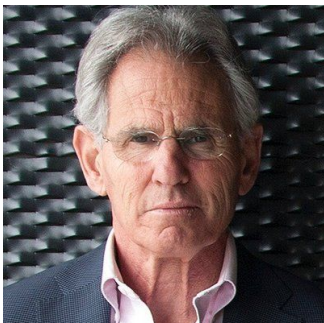
“Meditation does not involve trying to change your thinking by thinking some more. It involves watching thought itself. The watching is the holding. By watching your thoughts without being drawn into them, you can learn something profoundly liberating about thinking itself, which may help you to be less of a prisoner of those thought patterns—often so strong in us—which are narrow, inaccurate, self-involved, habitual to the point of being imprisoning, and also just plain wrong.”



Summary: first published in 1994, *Wherever You Go There You Are* is a book designed to help you cultivate the habit of mindfulness through meditation. The book is structured into 3 parts across 71 chapters (only a few pages each), and takes us on a journey to discover the *what*, *how* and *why* of mindfulness meditation. The end goal: get out of autopilot and reclaim the richness of the present.

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

He is the author of numerous scientific papers on the clinical applications of mindfulness in medicine and health care, along with 6+ books. He has trained groups of CEOs, judges, members of the clergy, and Olympic athletes (the 1984 Olympic Men's Rowing Team) and congressional staff in mindfulness.

Part One: The Bloom of the Present Moment

Overview: the author introduces us to what mindful meditation is and, helpfully, what it is not, along with the benefits given the headwinds imposed by our reductionist and materialistic Western culture. The author reveals his admiration for Thoreau's philosophy which values observation, nature, intentionality, non-doing and non-attachment.

Favorite Quotes

- “Only that day dawns to which we are awake.” —Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*
- “The definition of ethics is obedience to the unenforceable.” —overheard on the radio
- “You have to be strong enough to be weak.” —title of chapter on p. 65

Notes

- Meditation helps us wake up from this sleep of automaticity and unconsciousness, thereby making it possible for us to live our lives with access to the full spectrum of our conscious and unconscious possibilities.
- The author argues **our Western culture is predominantly reductionist and materialistic** and oriented toward controlling and subduing nature rather than honoring that we are part of it.
- The less aware we are, the more likely our action and behaviors will be driven by deep-seated fears and insecurities.
- The mindfulness philosophy is the direct opposite of taking life granted. Life is a gift.
- Buddhism is fundamentally about being in touch with your own deepest nature and letting it flow out of you unimpeded.

Meditation means learning how to get out of the current, sit by its bank and listen to it, learn from it, and then use its energies to guide us rather than tyrannize us.

- . . . with the intention to understand rather than to judge.
- Meditation is about stopping. Most of the time we run around *doing*.
- With practice, we begin to see that the mind has gotten cluttered over the years like an old attic.
- **Fun fact:** Thoreau spent a total of 26 months at Walden Pond (in Concord, Massachusetts).
- **Call to action:** try asking yourself throughout the day, “Am I awake now?”
- Meditation is neither shutting things out nor off. Don't try and artificially suppress the waves of your mind.
 - Similarly, it's not about feeling a certain way. It's about feeling how you feel.
- **The author recommends: if you start meditating, don't tell people about it. Keep it for yourself, and chalk up a win on the inner scorecard.**
- If you seek to explore the habit of mindful meditation, you need two things: 1) intentionality, and 2) discipline. People that say “I can't meditate” are missing one of these ingredients.

Patience is an ever present alternative to the mind's endemic restlessness and impatience. Scratch the surface of impatience and what you will find lying beneath it, subtly or not so subtly, is anger.

- Patience is allowing and appreciating the natural unfolding of things in their own time.
- Part of mindfulness practice is to cultivate a trusting heart: one that observes the choices we make, their consequences, and developing a candid appraisal of self.
- If you are truly strong, there is little need to emphasize it to yourself or to others.

Call to action: Recognize the ways in which you meet obstacles with harshness. Experiment with being soft when your impulse is to be hard, generous when your impulse is to be withholding, open when your impulse is to close up or shut down emotionally. When there is grief or sadness, try letting it be here. Allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling.

- In Pali, the original language of the Buddha, the word *bhavana* translates to *development through mental training*. It is the closest word to ‘meditation’ that we know of.
- Jungians refer to “soul work” meaning developing depth of character by facing the tortuous labyrinthine depths and expanses of our own minds with running away or numbing ourselves.
- **Wonderful metaphor: a waterfall represents our continual thought, and meditating is going behind the waterfall where we can see and hear the water, but we are out of the torrent.**

Part Two: The Heart of Practice

Overview: the “how” of meditation including techniques, poses, and duration. The author also introduces the now-famous method of “Loving Kindness Meditation” described below, along with walking, standing, sitting, lying meditation postures.

Favorite Quotes

- “Develop a mind that clings to nothing.” —[Diamond Sutra](#)
- “The birds have vanished into the sky, and now the last cloud drains away. We sit together, the mountain and me, until only the mountain remains.” —[Li Po](#)
- “If you miss the *here*, you are likely to miss the *there*.” —author
- “My religion is kindness.” —The Dalai Lama

Notes

- Technique tips: sitting meditation is all about a strong foundation. Keep your hands face up to embody receptiveness.
- How long to practice? **45 minutes per day for 2 months.**
- **Another great metaphor:** mindfulness needs to be kindled and nurtured, protected from the winds of a busy life or restless and tormented mind, just as a small flame needs to be sheltered from strong gusts of air.

It may help us to see that our thoughts and feelings, our preoccupations, our emotional storms and crises, even the things that happen to us are much like the weather on a mountain. We tend to

take it personally, but its strongest characteristic is impersonal.

- The author, Jon Kabat-Zinn, is a big fan of hatha yoga which he describes as “folding movement and stillness into one another.”
- **Loving Kindness Meditation:** our society has an epidemic of low self-esteem. When materialism and image crafting are rampant in capitalistic societies, it's easy to understand why self-esteem affects so many. The author proposes a solution:

“If I become a center of love and kindness in this moment, then in a perhaps small but hardly insignificant way, the world now has a nucleus of love and kindness it lacked the moment before. This benefits me and it benefits others. Start by centering yourself in your posture and breathing. Invite feelings or images of kindness and love to radiate until they fill your whole being. Embrace that you deserve loving kindness. Invite peacefulness and acceptance.”

- Perhaps Western culture is overdeveloped outwardly and underdeveloped inwardly. Perhaps it is we who, for all our wealth, are living in poverty.

Love and kindness are here all the time, somewhere, in fact, everywhere. Usually our ability to touch them and be touched by them lies buried below our own fears and hurts, below our greed and our hatreds, below our desperate clinging to the illusion that we are truly separate and alone. Loving kindness meditation is the ever-expanding realization of interconnectedness.

Part Three: In the Spirit of Mindfulness

Overview: after sharing some excellent tactical tips for meditation throughout life, e.g. eating, showering, as a parent, the author abstracts mindfulness into a spiritual realm where we explore the “why” of meditation, the notion of karma, and how “the self” is often overrated.

Favorite Quotes

- “All of us are apprenticed to the same teacher that the religious institutions originally worked with: reality. Reality-insight says. . . master the twenty-four hours. Do it well, without self-pity.” —Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*
- “I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor.” —Thoreau, *Walden*
- “People measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is. . . Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*
- “Insist on yourself. Never imitate.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*
- “The present moment is never a new beginning because we keep it from becoming one.” —author

- “Ordinary men hate solitude. But the Master makes use of it, embracing his aloneness, realizing he is one with the whole universe.” —Lao-Tzu, *Tao-te-Ching*
- “The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and sense in which he has attained liberation from the self.” —Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*

Notes

- **On watching TV:** it soaks up time, space, and silence, a soporific, lulling us into mindless passivity.

The underlying thinking is that the reason for all your troubles is outside of you—in the location, in others, in circumstances. It is easier and less threatening to our sense of self to project our problems onto other people and the environment.

- Even blaming yourself or subscribing to the victim mentality is still avoiding ownership.
- There is no escaping yourself in the long run, only transformation. **There can be no resolution leading to growth until the present situation has been faced completely and you have opened to it with mindfulness.**
- **Call to action:** practice mindfulness while showering, eating, bathroom—the mundane. Are you really feeling the warm water on your neck? Are you truly tasting the confluence of flavors when you eat?

We are at risk of never realizing our uniqueness—at least as long as we remain in the shadow cast by our thought habits and conditioning.

- Having an awareness of impermanence might help us take things and circumstances and relationships less for granted while they are around.

- **On karma:**

Overall, when we speak of a person’s karma, it means the sum total of the person’s direction in life and the tenor of the things that occur around that person, caused by antecedent conditions, actions, thoughts, feelings, sense impressions, desires.

Ultimately, it is our mindlessness that imprisons us. We get better and better at being out of touch with the full range of our possibilities, and more and more stuck in our cultivated-over-a-lifetime habits of not-seeing, but only reacting and blaming.

- Once again we encounter what the Buddhists call “unawareness,” or ignorance. It is ignorance of how unexamined impulses, especially those colored by greed or hatred, however justified, rationalized, or legal, can warp one’s mind and one’s life.
- We can all be imprisoned by incessant wanting, by a mind clouded with ideas and opinions it clings to as if they were truths.

- **Poem I like:**

*Midnight. No waves,
no wind, the empty boat
is flooded with moonlight.*

—Dogen

Inquiry doesn't mean looking for answers, especially quick answers which come out of superficial thinking. It means asking without expecting answers, just pondering the question, carrying the wondering with you, letting it percolate, bubble, cook, ripen, come in and out of awareness, just as everything comes in and out of awareness.

- If you stop trying to make yourself into *more* than you are out of fear that you are *less* than you are, whoever you *really* are will be a lot lighter and happier, and easier to live with, too.
- The chapter **Parenting as Practice** should be required reading for current and expecting parents.
- Meditation really is the one human activity in which you are not trying to get anywhere else but simply allowing yourself to be where and as you already are.
- The word spirit is derived from Latin *spirare* meaning “to breathe.”