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**mindful**  
SPECIAL EDITION

# mindfulness

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99 WAYS  
TO

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tips for  
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# An invitation to mindfulness

**I**t has been our honor and privilege over the past several years to share our passion for mindfulness and all the wonderful ways it can help us be more intimate with life.

On the following pages you'll find easy and practical advice on how to bring mindfulness into your life. For example, in your relationships, when you feel anxious or stressed, if you want to feel more compassionate toward others or are finally ready to forgive an old hurt, and more. These tips and teachings are an invitation to be more present, more kind (to yourself, too!), and more playful every day. We believe that this is the formula for living a life of connection, ease, confidence, and well-being.

In all the years that we've been practicing mindfulness, it's become clear that it is the essential thread that helps keep us grounded, clear, and able to focus on what really matters in all aspects of our lives—professional, personal, family, and as members of

a community. This doesn't mean we don't get stressed, angry, or imbalanced. But it does mean that through our dedication and practice, we've gotten a lot better at working through our difficult moments and are able to recalibrate with greater perspective.

Along the way we've learned five key lessons that have become integral to the way we practice and can hopefully serve as a foundation to support you in living a mindful life:

**It's simple, but not easy.** While learning mindfulness isn't difficult, it's not always so easy to practice. And here's why: When we attempt to disrupt the mind's desire to control everything, it serves up all sorts of reasons why we shouldn't. It tells us that we're too busy, that it's too much work, or asks, *Just what is this thing called "mindfulness" anyway and why should I believe in it?* If you experience any of these reactions, don't be alarmed. Instead, know that they're the mind's attempt to stay in the



driver's seat. Just note the complaints, and come back to the breath.

**Your practice isn't a performance.** Judgment about whether a meditation session was "good" or "bad," or whether mindfulness is "working" or not, isn't helpful. In fact, this performance-based mindset misses the point entirely. If there is a goal to any of the practices it's simply to learn. Bringing a learning mindset to this practice is the fastest route to growth and mastery.

**You'll be imperfect at mindfulness, and it's OK.** If time goes by and you forget to meditate, why not try a practice that we call Forgive, Investigate, Invite (see page 22)? Forgive yourself for the time gone by, investigate what took you off course, learn from it, and then, in that space of awareness, invite yourself to begin again.

**Acknowledge that your effort matters.** Remember, you are an active participant in your well-being, and every time you choose to engage mindfulness it is with the intention of loving

yourself. Indeed, perhaps the most mindful thing you can do is acknowledge this effort to learn, to grow, and to care for yourself.

**Community matters.** You can practice this work on your own, but there is nothing more powerful than having friends or a community that naturally inspire you to stay engaged. It's the secret sauce for making an enduring practice easier.

Now let's get started. Read through the following practices and topics as they're laid out, or jump to those that speak to you the most. Either way you'll get what you need.

We wholeheartedly wish you all the best as you begin this playful adventure in your life.

In gratitude,  
*Elisha and Stefanie Goldstein*

If you like what you find here, and want to know more, please visit us at [mindful.org](http://mindful.org) or write to us at [mindful@mindful.org](mailto:mindful@mindful.org).



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We wish to thank the **1440 Foundation** for their enduring and sustaining support, and the **Hemera Foundation** for their visionary partnership in our founding years.

## The Foundation for a Mindful Society

*Mindful* is published by the Foundation for a Mindful Society. The Foundation's mission is to support mindfulness champions to increase health, well-being, kindness, and compassion in society.

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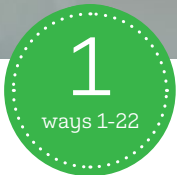
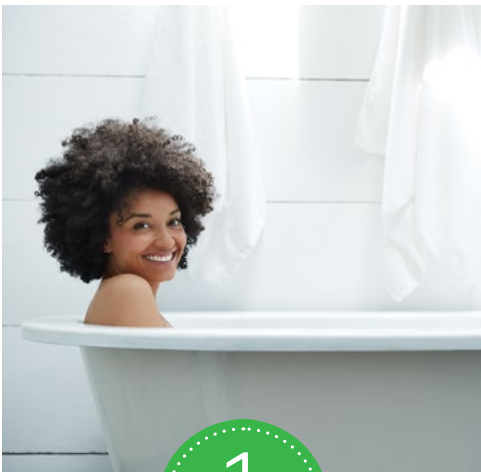
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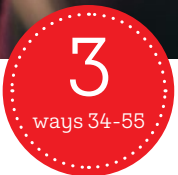
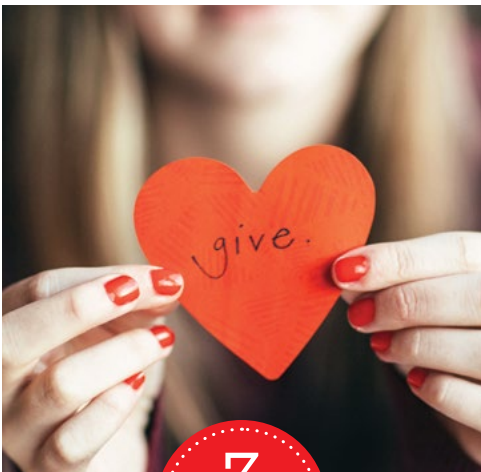


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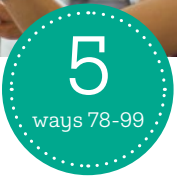
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# Take Care of You

\* How you start your day  
makes a big impact on how  
you experience the rest of it.

TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY



# Nourish Confidence and Ease

**H**ow often do you talk yourself out

of something before you've even tried? Or measure yourself against others — and inevitably find yourself lacking? Years (perhaps a lifetime) of self-criticism takes a toll on a person, until the loudest voice you hear is the one telling you that you're not enough. And its constant chatter masks the truth that every single one of us possesses a reservoir of innate confidence waiting to be uncovered. Even you. Start digging with these small behaviors, and see what you notice.

SERGEY FILIMONOV/STOCKSY

# 1 Check in before you go

Before you rush out into the world, take a moment to pause, check in with how you're feeling, and consciously relax your body. As you take a few deep breaths, think about what you're grateful for (it could be one thing, or many), and about a quality you'd like to practice that day. Then, as you go about your morning routine, bring a sense of presence to each step, embodying this version of a grateful, intentional, relaxed you.

# 2 Stand tall

Research shows that adopting expansive postures makes you feel more powerful and confident. Try slumping over and saying, "I feel like I can do anything!" It doesn't compute, does it? As you go through your day, consciously roll your shoulders back, stand up straight, and lift your gaze. Feel yourself grow tall through your spine while you simultaneously relax the muscles in your face, neck, chest, and arms. This may not feel natural at first, but go ahead and fake it 'til it does—your brain will soon get the message.

# 3 Build a confidence team

Make a list of the people who nourish and encourage you, the ones that when you're with them, you feel most like yourself: relaxed, uplifted, and present. Then, put in the effort to spend more



time with them (if in-person visits aren't possible, schedule phone calls, or email or text with them regularly), and less time with people who deplete you or make you feel small.

# 4 Do something you're good at

One of the best ways to stoke the natural confidence within is to engage in something you feel "good" at. It could be anything—cooking, whistling, being a friend. The key is to do more of it, filling up with all the positive feelings that this activity inspires and reminding you of your unique talents and interests.

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

## \* Start Your Day Right

How you greet the morning has a fundamental impact on how the rest of your day unfolds.

**CURATE YOUR FIRST SOUNDS** Rather than waking up startled to the sound of a blaring alarm, choose a sound that will gently rouse you from sleep—chimes, bells, gentle music.

**HYDRATE BEFORE YOU CAFFEINATE** Before gulping down hot coffee or tea, drink a big glass of water. Your body

loses water overnight, and will start to wake up naturally as it becomes rehydrated. *Then* enjoy your latte or green tea.

**OBSERVE NATURE** Start off your day by looking (or step-ping!) outside. Look up at the sky and the trees—allow your eyes and mind to take in the full spectrum of nature.



PRACTICE

# Update Your Sleep Routine

**Do you find it difficult to get a decent night's rest? Then you might be among the 30% of adults in the United States who are regularly sleep deprived.**

If sleep regularly evades you, a few new habits might help, says Jason Ong, a sleep psychologist at Rush University Medical Center. "Each night is a new night. Be open and try something different. What you have been doing to this point is probably not working well."

## LEAVE YOUR SCREENS BEHIND—BIG AND SMALL

If a phone, tablet, or watch is lighting up on your nightstand, it's going to disturb your sleep patterns. Plus, just their presence in the room creates activity in your mind that pulls at your attention.

**DON'T FORCE IT** Think about it: How has it worked for you to try and fall asleep when you're awake in the dark at 2:00 a.m.? Our brains are way too smart to fall for that. The moment we *try* to do something, we add energy, and in the case of sleeplessness,

added stress to the mix. It may seem counterintuitive, but see if you can let go of the notion of *trying* to fall asleep at all.

**BRING MINDFULNESS TO BED** Start with a gentle body scan, starting from your feet and slowly moving your awareness all the way up your body as you let the breath naturally flow in and out. Notice any sensations as you visit each part of your form. If your attention wanders, just take note and gently come back to the body. When we allow ourselves to be with what's here, right now, the body naturally falls into a state of rest, and the mind might just follow.

Tip

### Do a tension check

Even lying in bed, your body may be holding tension that keeps sleep at bay. Starting at your feet and moving up, tense and then relax each body part and muscle group. Finally, soften your neck, jaw, tongue, ears, brow, and last, your eyes.

## 5 Invite your fears for tea

We each carry around deep-seated fears about ourselves, from "I'm not good enough" and "I'm not worthy" to "When will they see that I'm a phony?" What if instead of running away from your fears, you invited them in with curiosity? Ask yourself, "What am I believing right now, and is it *absolutely* true?" You may be surprised by the answer, and by how much this inquiry can zap the intensity out of your fear.

## 6 Set small, achievable goals

We often make big goals without thinking through what's realistic given our circumstances. For example, going from never exercising to saying you're going to start exercising for an hour every day will most likely just set you up for failure—and reinforce the self-critical voice that chips away at your confidence. Instead, try setting smaller, achievable goals that you know you can win, and build from there. Your confidence will grow right alongside the "mini" goals you accomplish.

## 7 Keep track of the good stuff

Because the brain is wired to detect negative experiences more easily than positive ones, it's easy to focus on what we *haven't* done and lose sight of all the cool stuff we *have* done. But focusing on the good stuff is exactly what you need to do in order to commit it to long-term memory. Try taking stock of the things

you accomplish in a day. Every time you cross something off your to-do list, even the smallest of tasks, it builds your faith in yourself.

## Tip The Upside to Downtimes

**You can't avoid them, so why not use tough moments to take care?**

It's said that life is full of 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows. Try as we might to avoid the hard times, some will always find us. But there's an upside: Tough moments give us the opportunity to practice self-compassion, a skill that serves our lives in three important ways:

### PERSONAL CONTROL

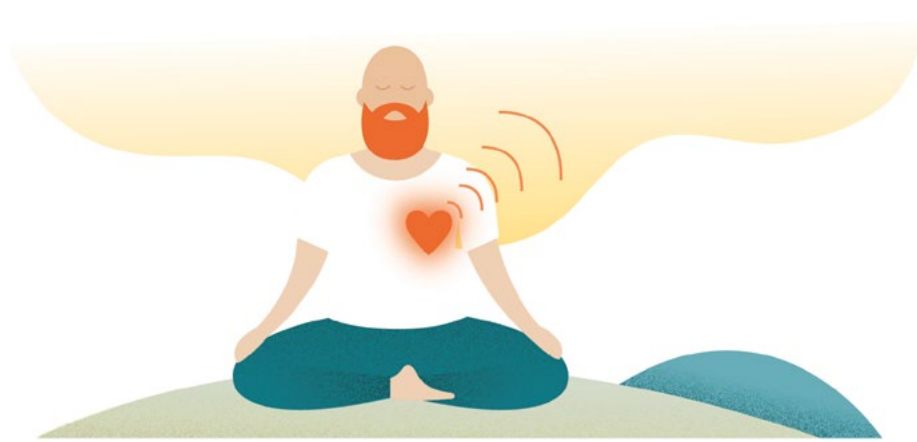
With self-compassion, you learn that the power to work with difficult circumstances—and to enjoy the good times—lies within. It's been yours all along.

### SELF-LOVE

As you pay attention to yourself in a supportive way, you begin to notice that you're *worthy* of loving attention.

### CONFIDENCE

At some point each one of us realizes that no matter what comes our way, we'll conclude, "I can handle it and it's going to be OK." Knowing this truth is a foundation for happiness, and self-compassion helps you to see it.



## 8 Be kind...to you

The truth is, sometimes life is hard. Yet your ability to recognize a difficult moment and apply a caring attitude toward *yourself* shuts down the inner critic. It also creates stability and awareness, and helps redirect your attention back to what really matters.

## 9 Remember: You deserve love

Feeling “less than” can eat away at your confidence. But if you sent out a search party, you would not find anyone more deserving of love than you. Stop, breathe, and let that message touch you for a few moments.

## 10 Embrace difficult people

Say what? Sometimes there are people in our lives who challenge us. See if you can recognize that underneath their

irritating behavior is a person, with the same needs as you. Often when someone is “being difficult” it’s because they are having a hard time themselves. Underneath, they want to feel cared about and understood, too. Seeing this truth helps bring us back into balance within ourselves.

## 11 Adopt a learning mindset

If there’s one thing that kills confidence, it’s our limiting beliefs of what we “can” and “can’t” do. Obstacles to your confidence are inevitable (everyone experiences them), but instead of allowing them to shut you down, get curious. Learn from these trials by exploring a bit (“I wonder what’s going on here? What’s triggering this feeling? Where am I experiencing this in my body?”). With curiosity, self-judgment fades into the background, and your awareness provides a bit of a boost that can help move you toward your goals—including becoming more confident.

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

## PRACTICE

# Stop Stress in its Tracks

**T**wo-thirds of Americans say they need help for stress. But stress itself is not the problem—how we relate to stress is.

The stress response is critical to our survival. It can save our lives or enable a firefighter to carry a grown man down 20 flights of stairs. Of course, most of us usually experience stress in response to thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations. If we’re worried about whether we can put food on the table or pull off an important presentation, presto: The stress response activates. And if the systems involved in this response don’t slow down and normalize, the effects can be severe. Over time, we can succumb to, among other things, high blood pressure, anxiety, insomnia, gastro-digestive complaints, and a suppressed immune system.

Creating space in the day to stop, come down from the worried mind, and get back into the present moment has been shown to be enormously helpful in mitigating our response to pressure.

The next time stress starts to build, remember STOP.

**S** **Stop** what you’re doing; put things down for a minute. Get comfortable in the position you’re in, almost as if you’re relaxing into this moment.

**T** **Take** a few deep breaths. See if you can tune in to the subtle sensations involved with inhalation and with exhalation, as if this were the first time you’ve ever noticed your breathing.

**O** **Observe** your experience just as it is. If your mind wanders, gently guide it back to this moment. Notice any feelings present and how they’re being expressed. Research shows that just naming your emotions can turn the volume down on the fear circuit in the brain. Turn your attention to your body. How is your posture? How does it feel?

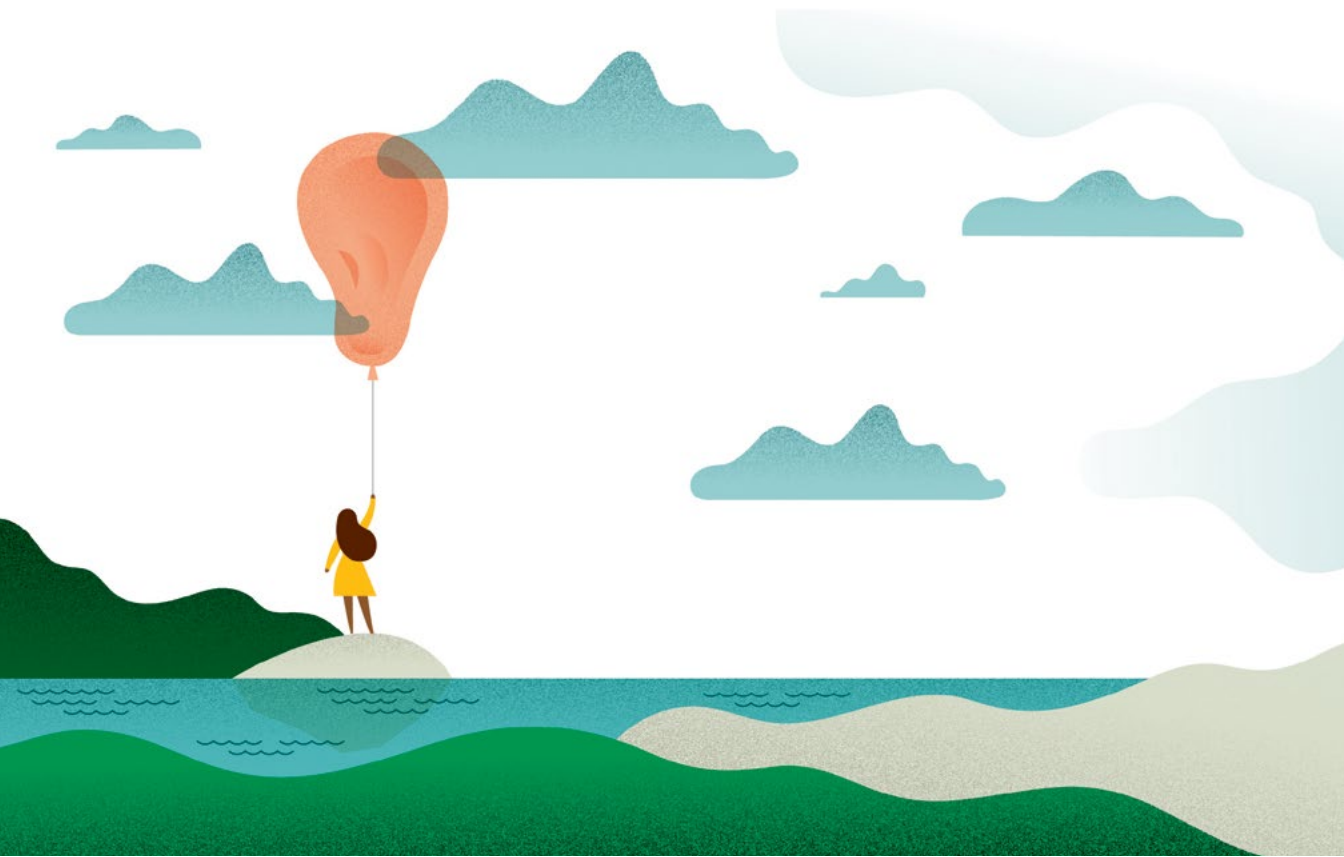
**P** **Proceed** As the stress response begins to calm, ask the question: *What’s most important right now to pay attention to?* Whatever comes up in your mind, that’s what you’ll continue with.

# Soothe Your Anxious Mind

**A**long with joy and excitement, stress and anxiety are an inevitable part of life. And they serve a purpose: Things, people—heck, *you*—matter. Fear that something will happen to what’s most important to you is only natural. But you needn’t be enslaved by these emotions. The ever-seeking mind loathes a vacuum, which it will rush to fill with the worst-case scenarios it can imagine—if you let it. Instead, what if you could build and strengthen mindful skills to help you to take a deep breath, gain perspective, and re-establish your footing when anxiety and stress threaten to overwhelm? Read on to learn how.

JILL CHEN/STOCKSY





## 12 **First, slow down**

When we're anxious, everything speeds up—thoughts race, the heart pounds, our breathing accelerates. This makes it difficult to think clearly and make calm decisions. At the first sign of this acceleration, move a little slower and see what else you can do to intentionally *slow things down*.

## 13 **Come to your senses**

Take a few moments to connect with your senses to bring you back into the moment. Practice 3x3 (or 5x5) by bringing your awareness to at least three senses, and name three things you notice through each. In other words, three things you're seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling, or hearing. This can help interrupt the automatic catastrophic thinking that fuels anxiety.

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

## 14 **Be mindful of a simple task**

Life is full of simple tasks: walking, eating, answering emails, gardening, drinking water, cooking. When we're anxious, we feel out of control. Being mindful of one simple task helps remind us we're in control of our choices. Choose a task—any task—and imagine it's your first time doing it. Dip into the richness of the experience.

## 15 **Do a reality check**

Anxiety often stems from fear about events that haven't taken place. Our minds are very creative and powerful and often tell stories that aren't true. When you have a catastrophic thought, ask yourself, "Is this thought absolutely true?" Chances are your worst fears are just that—fears, not facts, not the reality of what is happening.

## 16 **Interrupt the critic**

Not only is anxiety painful enough, but we often get hit with a second round of self-critical thoughts. But do the judgments make you more or less anxious? The answer is almost always, more. When you notice the self-critic, see if you can interrupt it by dropping into your heart and saying, "May I learn to be kinder to myself."

## 17 **Channel anxious energy**

Anxiety isn't all bad. Like most mental events, it lies on a spectrum. If your anxiety isn't severe, you can actually channel that energy into something productive. If you're nervously waiting to hear some news, get active—go for a brisk walk, clean, make a list of things to do, or garden instead.

## 18 **Lie down and look up**

A natural experience of mindful awareness sets in when we just lie down, look up at the sky, and watch the clouds. Experience the nature of how all things naturally come and go.

## 19 **Intend to listen**

As an experiment, take the day and set an intention to listen. Listen to the sounds of leaves in the wind, of kids playing, or someone speaking to you. When we pause and listen, we can get back in touch with the simplicity of life, and anxious thoughts begin to simmer down.

## 20 **Know your triggers**

What makes you anxious? Being late? Performing for a crowd? Social situations? If you know your triggers, you can prepare for them. When the mind feels prepared, it's more at ease.



## 21 Nurture patience

Impatience is to anxiety as patience is to calm and ease. If you want to create mastery around patience, you need to be on the lookout for impatience and get curious about it. How does it manifest in the body? Can you let it be? Patience isn't only a virtue; it's a pathway to emotional freedom.

## 22 Be with what's here

Bring mindfulness to both pleasant and unpleasant events. If you notice something pleasant, bring awareness to how it feels in your body. Smile as you enjoy the feeling without grasping too tightly to it or needing it to be anything more. If something feels unpleasant, bring that same awareness, knowing that it, too, will pass. And ask yourself what you need in that moment. Most likely, it's some form of self-love.

## Tip 3 Ways to Savor the Good

Happiness is available to each of us when we learn to accept what's difficult and to savor the good. Too often, however, we dwell on the difficulties, giving in to excessively negative thinking and self-judgment. If you lose sight of your intentions, or fall short of your goal, remember to **forgive** yourself. **Investigate** what pulled you off track without judging yourself, and then **invite** yourself to begin again.

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM (2)

## PRACTICE

### Be Like a Mountain

This grounding visualization is a powerful way to channel courage when anxiety starts to rise.

#### Sit

Take a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths, in and out. Allow each breath to be an anchor to the present moment.

#### Imagine

See yourself as a mountain, covered in forest foliage, dark and cool. Feel the expression of nature—the soil, rocks, roots, waterways. Spend some time here, doing your best to get in touch with the sense aspects of this visualization.

#### Experience

Go through the different seasons on this mountain: autumn's coolness, shortening days, and preparation for slumber; the winter freeze, when all grows silent and north winds blow; spring's unfolding with the warming sun, as new life stirs beneath the soil; and summer with its riotous bloom, its heat, and its dryness.

#### Reflect

After you experience each of these seasons in your visualization, ask yourself, "Has the *mountain* actually changed?"

Change happens across the mountain, above the mountain, atop the mountain, but the mountain itself remains the same: solid, stable, and grounded.

#### Tip

If you feel anxiety building, tell yourself, "Breathing in, I imagine myself as the mountain. Breathing out, I am grounded and solid." Can you feel the natural balance that's there?



Q+A with **JG LAROCLETTE**

# Teaching from the Heart

The baseball diamond and soccer field were JG Larochette's refuge. One afternoon when Larochette was on the basketball court, other kids pelted him with rocks. He was determined to respond with love. Making spaces safe and loving became his passion, first on the court, then as a classroom teacher.

But as a full-time teacher, Larochette lost the habit of daily physical activity through which he had previously channeled stress. He struggled with insomnia, anxiety, and depression. Just as he began to contemplate leaving the classroom, he found a lifeline: mindfulness.

BY VICTORIA DAWSON

## Tell me about your time at Coronado Elementary School.

I fell in love with the kids and families, and I went really hard for those nine years. The kids were dealing with trauma and suffering, and I kept trying to do more—rally the community, help on the playground, collect signatures to get the resources we needed. Five years in, when I was 28, I started having bouts of anxiety and depression. I did not know what self-care was, and I kept pushing. Eventually, I was sleeping only two or three hours a night. I tried everything: therapy, medication, acupuncture, craniosacral therapy. I tried and tried, but I was sliding into an abyss.

## How did you end up turning to mindfulness?

Someone suggested meditation. I'm a movement kind of person, so stillness was an interesting alternative. I tried one meditation place and left feeling even more anxious. But someone else mentioned mindfulness. After taking an introductory class through my health-care provider, I attended a Monday night talk and meditation practice at Spirit Rock, a nearby Insight meditation center. That was the moment: I felt at home in myself.

MCNAUL/REVANS





*Within 15 seconds, every kid in the room was still. Eyes closed. No fidgeting. I saw their facial muscles and their bodies dropping into relaxation.”* —JG Larochette

#### That quickly?

My brain was in such a state of haywire that even the second it started to rewire was significant. The light went on: This is what I’ve needed for my whole life, especially the last 10 years. Within weeks, my sleep improved.

#### Would you elaborate about this sense of feeling “at home”?

I’m an immigrant kid. My father is Argentinian. My mother is Jewish and Israeli. My first language was Spanish, but I wasn’t really Latino. I’m a six-foot-three-inches-tall white guy. I never really felt comfortable in my own skin, never felt that I belonged to a community that I could relate to. As a child, I was a worrier. When I look back, I realize that sports were my mindfulness practice: On the field, I was in the present moment. But I couldn’t name it then—what it was that made me feel empowered, comfortable, at home.

#### You were quick to bring mindfulness into your third-grade classroom. Why?

Earlier that year, I had been so caught up with resolving classroom conflicts, settling kids down, redirecting their attention and assigning consequences. I had students who had lost family members, a couple of students whose fathers were incarcerated, a student whose

father was on the run from immigration—it was a significant trauma group. I realized that my anxiety and fear—my being disconnected from the present moment and trying to avoid my humanity—had been causing my students to feel the same way.

#### How did that first session go?

I’d been practicing for two or three weeks. I had no idea how to lead meditation, but I kept it simple—two minutes. *If you don’t like it, I said, I won’t force it on you, but I’ve found something that’s helped me, and maybe it will help you. We’re going to focus on sounds and on breathing.* They looked at me: *What? We thought you were the cool teacher!* Within 15 seconds, every kid in the room was still. Eyes closed. No fidgeting. I saw their facial muscles and their bodies dropping into relaxation. After two minutes, when I rang the bell, no one moved. Twenty-five kids! I thought, *Are they messing with me?* After a few minutes, they began to open their eyes, and then, they shared: *I felt relaxed. It was like floating in the clouds.*

#### And you’ve never wavered in your own practice?

It’s funny. I’m actually more disciplined about practicing mindfulness than I am about flossing my teeth. I haven’t missed one day of practicing or sitting in stillness.

#### PRACTICE

## 3 Steps to Unhook from Negative Thoughts

Recognizing our thoughts and where they’re taking us is the first step to changing our relationship to them.

**B**y taking a few mindful moments, we can create space between us and our reactions, and have some freedom from what triggers us—we don’t have to respond the same way every time. It’s a practice in breaking our habitual negative responses by first tuning in to how a thought or action makes us feel and how it generates certain storylines in our minds. And we can step back for a moment and recognize: *Hey, that’s not a tried-and-true fact—it’s just a thought.*

Try these three simple approaches and see if you can change your relationship to certain patterns of thinking.

### Recognize the Thought

If the thought is *I’m not good enough, life is never going to get better*, or some form of complaining or blaming, take a moment to recognize that the thought is forming in your brain.

### Relax the Body, Release the Thinking

When you’re experiencing negative thoughts, your body is also reacting. You’re going through some form of a fight-flight-freeze response, so take a moment to relax your body. Through mindful breathing, use the exhalation to release tension throughout your body, as well as any negative thoughts. Just imagine them drifting away with the out-breath.

### Name a Positive

Now that you have a little space between you and your negative thoughts, consider for a moment: What’s actually good right now? What’s going on that’s good in life? Could it be that you’re safe, your health is OK in this moment, you have some friends you can count on, you have a job—whatever it might be, see if you can name a few of these positives, recognize them, and let them rest in your consciousness for a bit.

# Connect

ROB AND JULIA CAMPBELL/STOCKSY



Be curious and interested in those close to you, as if getting to know them for the first time.



# Bond with the People in Your Life

**W**e are social beings by nature.

Connecting with others is what provides richness in life, makes us feel safe, and has us recognize that we're part of something greater than ourselves. Yet we sometimes choose to stay behind a wall of emotional (or physical) distance, even in our closest relationships. As a result, our world contracts and we're robbed of living a fully dimensional life. Mindfulness helps us wake up to the "choice points" in our relationships when we can decide to connect a bit more by listening and communicating.



## 23 Really see each other

Making eye contact with someone activates what psychologist Stephen Porges calls our Social Nervous System, which can relieve stress and create a deeper sense of connection. It is hard not to feel intimate and vulnerable when looking into the eyes of another person—even a stranger. Try it! It may feel funny at first, but you will find a softening in your heart and a sensation of love flowing before you know it.

## 24 Listen with all of your senses

There's a difference between hearing someone and actively listening to someone. The next time you're having an in-person conversation, notice the posture and body language of the other person. Tune in to the tone of their voice, and absorb the meaning of their words. See if it's possible to put aside your own response while listening to them speak. When we feel listened to, we feel cared about, and this increases a sense of mutual love and connection.

## 25 Reach out and touch someone

As mammals, physical contact is essential to our well-being. American psychologist Harry Harlow's famous study on maternal deprivation with rhesus monkeys demonstrated that touch provides a crucial psychological and emotional resource in our development. Touch is also a primary way we communicate, feel safe, soothe our

nervous systems, trust one another, and convey love and compassion. Take a day to experiment with actively reaching out to your loved ones with small touches (on the hand, shoulder, knee, or arm) and see what you notice—perhaps it's a greater sense of connection, increased compassion, or an open heart.

## 26 Hug like you mean it

Very few things feel better than a good hug. Science shows that hugging can reduce blood pressure, alleviate fear, soothe anxiety, and release the “love” hormone oxytocin. Psychologist Stan Tatkin suggests that in order to align nervous systems, prevent arguments, and feel more connected, people hug until both bodies feel relaxed. Who can you hug today?

## 27 Be interested

The late rabbi and social activist Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Life is routine, and routine is resistance to wonder.” One of the essential attitudes of mindfulness is curiosity, and we can bring this into our relationships to foster warmth and trust. Our minds often tell us that we “know” someone so well that we can predict their behaviors and responses. While this may be true some of the time, it also stops us from clearly seeing the person in front of us—instead we just see our “idea” of that person. See if you can be open, curious, and interested in those close to you as if you are getting to know them for the first time. You might be surprised what you find.



## 28 Make plans and keep them

Nothing breaks a bond like flaking on plans. Sure, sometimes there are good reasons why we don't follow through on commitments. But it might simply be that we said “yes” when we really meant to say “no.” Going forward, be honest with yourself, and only take on what you can handle. And identify the people in your life who nourish and energize you, and figure out how to nurture those relationships. Our connections flourish when we're intentional about making time for others.

## 29 Communicate your needs

Most of us have been guilty at one time or another of not being clear about what we needed. And as a result, we probably didn't experience the outcome we wanted. When we learn how to identify and express our own needs clearly, we naturally move toward greater understanding, compassion, and connection with the people in our lives.

## 30 Be kind

Kindness is like a magnet. People like to be around others who are kind because they feel cared about and safe with them. The age-old Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would want them to do to you,” still rings true today. It’s also reciprocal. When we practice kindness, not only do we feel better, but we help others feel good, too. And this just increases opportunities for positive connections throughout our day, which, in turn, contributes to our own health and well-being.

## 31 THINK before you speak

We’ve all been guilty of saying or doing something we wished we hadn’t. It happens. But we can certainly make more of an effort to be thoughtful with our words and actions. Try this experiment for a week: Before speaking to someone, consider the following: Is it *True*, is it *Helpful*, am *I* the best one to say it, is it *Necessary*, is it *Kind*? See how your interactions change. We might even imagine what the world would be like if everyone practiced this a little more.

## 32 Lighten the load

Recognizing someone else’s suffering with the inclination to want to support them has plenty of science-based correlations to a meaningful and purposeful life. Commit to smiling more, saying thank you, or letting someone merge in front of you in traffic. You can also give financially or volunteer your time. Recognize you are part of a larger network, and, as my late grandmother-in-law Margie Lipman said in her Ethical Will, “Reach out to those who ache for some comfort, search for ways you can lighten their load.”

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM



## 33 Practice “Just like me”

DNA research has revealed that regardless of gender, ethnicity, or race, humans are 99.9% the same. If you want to foster a greater sense of connection in your life, as you go through your day and encounter someone who you think is different from you, silently say, “just like me,” and see what comes up. You might experience the awareness that each of us wants the same things: to feel cared for and understood, and to experience a sense of belonging.



## Create Digital-Free Zones

If eye contact, touch, and the way we use vocal tone (prosody) can help create connection, technology dilutes it. It pulls our gaze away and reduces human physical touch and can give us a sense of connection that often stays at the surface. Consider how you can create some tech-free zones throughout your day to increase your relational awareness and foster deeper connections.

Q+A with **MANOUSH ZOMORODI**

# Make Space for Creativity

The only way Manoush Zomorodi's infant son can be soothed is when she walks him in his stroller through the streets of Brooklyn. She walks for hours. She finds her mind wandering in a way she hasn't experienced since childhood. Years later, she has a new job as a radio reporter. She's given the chance to host her own show. It's called *Note to Self*, about how technology is shaping our lives. Manoush asked her listeners to try the Bored and Brilliant challenge: will you change your digital habits, get bored on purpose, and see what happens? Twenty thousand people signed up within 48 hours.

BY BARBARA PAULSEN

## Why do you think boredom can be a good thing?

We think boredom is something to be avoided. But we've gone to an extreme, technology means we don't ever have to be bored. Because all those little cracks in our day, those moments of walking someplace or waiting in line for coffee or sitting on the subway, are filled with our phones. The moment we get that uncomfortable feeling, we can immediately be distracted with texting or scrolling. So once I started to notice I was never bored anymore, I wondered: Is that a good thing? What would happen if we got rid of boredom entirely? Would we be missing something?

## What did you find out?

I discovered that neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists are coming to understand that boredom is actually very important because it's the gateway to mind-wandering. And allowing your mind to wander—some people call it daydreaming—is necessary to your creativity. It's the time when you take one disparate idea and another disparate idea, and you smash them together to make something new. When you're bored, you find the space to ask, "What if?" It ignites a network in your brain called the default mode, which some scientists refer to as the imagination network in your brain.

STEPHANIE DIANI



### Is the default mode the same thing as being on automatic pilot?

So yes, physically you're on automatic pilot, right? You're folding laundry or you're walking or you're not doing anything that requires focused attention. And so you click over into the default mode, and you just kind of space out. And it turns out this default mode is where you do your original problem solving—including something called autobiographical planning. This is where you look back at your life, you build a personal narrative, and you plot out the steps to reach where you're going to go next. When I learned this I was like, well, what if we changed our digital habits? Could we make ourselves more bored on purpose?

### But doesn't it seem like the state we really want is where you're totally immersed in what you're doing?

Yeah, but you don't just snap your fingers. I always think of how, when I was a kid, I'd draw and then two hours would be gone. And I'd be like, "What just happened?" It was this wonderful feeling of having lost yourself in time and space, and I wanted to feel like that all the time! But how did I get there? It requires the proverbial blank page. It requires me to feel the discomfort of "I don't know what to draw. But there's nothing else to do. All right, well, I'll just start with a circle." And then suddenly the minutes fly by. And what I hear from young people is that the moment they could press on and get away from the bored and into the flow, that's the moment where they're like, I'm just going to check Instagram or get on Snapchat.

### So do you think that we're at a turning point in understanding the way technology might be interfering with our ability to space out and savor the moment?

I do think people are starting to understand that the idea that tech is always going to make things better is a utopian ideal—it's not reality. There are fundamental questions about the next



*What would happen if we got rid of boredom entirely? Would we be missing something?"*

—Manoush Zomorodi

chapter of the internet. And while we wait for regulation or new business models or maybe it's a Hippocratic Oath for software engineers, that's all going to take some time. Meanwhile we have immediate work we can do on ourselves, on self-regulating. That's something we have to teach ourselves and teach our children in schools. The people who participated in the Bored and Brilliant challenge were able to reduce the amount of time they spent with their phones. But more importantly, they created habits—like keeping their phones out of sight, and not using them while in transit—that made them more likely to connect with their own thoughts and with other people.

### You're a fan of the tiny hack. Can you think of one small step that you would suggest people try?

I guess it would be to realize that we have to schedule time for reflection into our lives. What we're discovering is that the constant connectivity and easy access to information and other people means that we have to prioritize things that we've never had to teach before like eye contact, conversation, reflection, boredom. The future economy will require you to sit with a problem and work it through and not move to distract yourself with something else. You have to sit and be uncomfortable and go deep. That's hard, but that's where the good stuff is.

### PRACTICE

## How to End a Family Dispute

**Relatives can be a source of connection and joy — and they can trigger some of our most difficult emotions. If you've experienced a family feud and are ready to mend fences, try these tips.**

**MAKE CONTACT** Contact each family member involved by sending them a neutral, friendly email or card. If you don't get answers, try until you have a response from at least a majority of key estrangees. Maintain a positive tone and ensure everyone knows you're ready to leave the past behind and move forward.

**GO SLOW** Don't expect things to proceed quickly — there's no low-hanging fruit or easy wins in trying to return to normal after long-term estrangement. Accept superficial contact as meaningful and take cues from other family members — they'll probably approach you warily. Be friendly. Use a special occasion — a family wedding, a special anniversary, or the holidays — as an opportunity for forgiveness.

**LOSE THE SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS** Be open to everyone's point of view, even if you don't agree with it. Finger pointing and name calling get you nowhere but back to the feud — be willing to listen with open mind and heart.

**CANCEL YOUR STORYLINE AND THE RERUNS** Whether your sad tale involves betrayal, intrigue, cruelty, or "Mom always liked you best," it's time to retire the storyline and get past what you feel is an injustice against you. No matter who did what to whom, no one should waste any more time thinking about it.

**DON'T EXPECT APOLOGIES—AND BE READY TO FORGIVE** Forgiveness is powerful. The minute you really mean it, all the anger, resentment, and hatred will disappear instantly. Forgiveness brings peace.

### Tip

#### Wish everyone well

Broaden your experience of love and caring for others while nourishing your own heart. This meditation can also reduce clinging in relationships, because it takes the focus off of *me, me, me*.

You can start with yourself, then think of a loved one, then someone neutral, then someone difficult, then, if you like, the whole world. Repeat the phrases a few times with each type of person as you hold their image in your mind.

*May (I/they) be unharmed.*

*May (I/they) be happy.*

*May (I/they) be healthy.*

*May (I/they) be at ease.*



# Grow Your Heart

\* There are many ways to tap into the heart of self-compassion, and the best ways don't cost a thing.

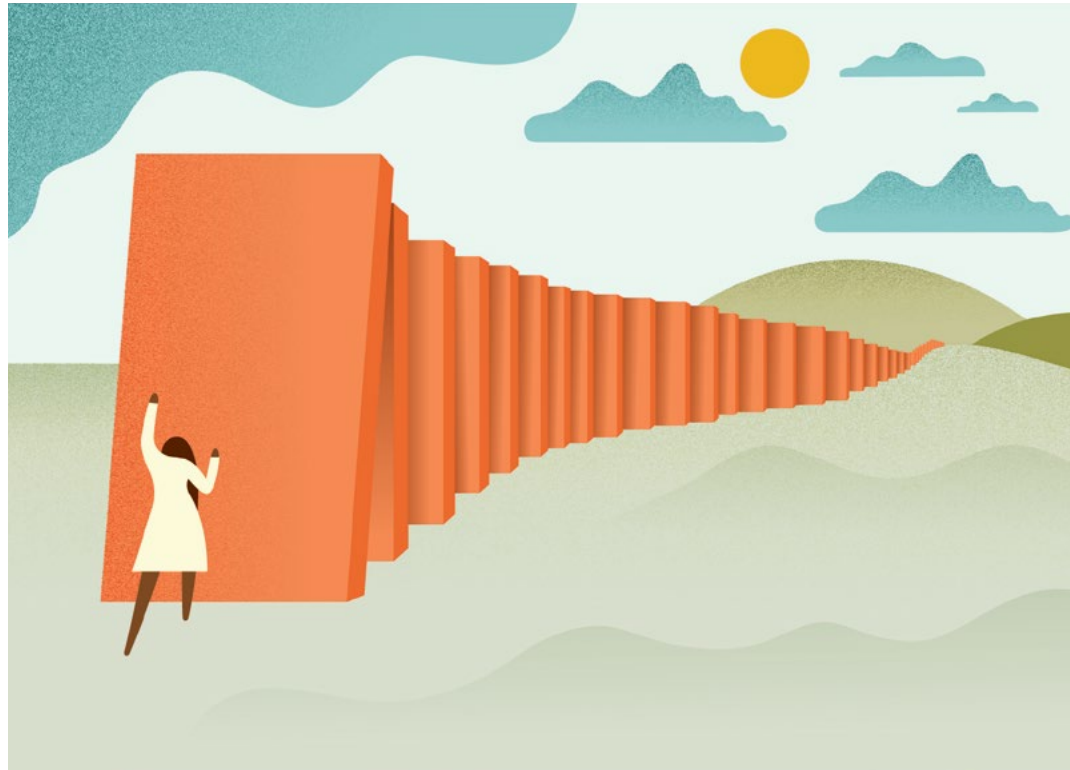


# Live a Compassionate Life

CAROLYN LAGATTUTA/STOCKSY

**C**ompassion is the feeling that naturally arises when you learn of the suffering of another, and that motivates you to want to do something to help. Far from being just a social nicety, compassion has a great evolutionary purpose: Human offspring are the most dependent and vulnerable of any species, and need the most care from others to survive. This total dependence is why Charles Darwin said that sympathy is humanity's strongest instinct. Simply put: Without compassion we wouldn't survive.





## 34 See beneath the rough exterior

When someone acts unpleasantly or is just generally difficult, it's hard to feel compassion for them. But there's almost always a reason for such behavior. If we can pause and try to recognize this, our heart can soften and create an opening for the possibility of greater connection and healing. Is there a "tough personality" in your life that you can try to see in a different light?

## 35 Create ripple effects

Turns out, kindness and generosity are contagious. A 2010 study discovered that when we witness generosity, it inspires us to be more generous. In fact, researchers found that the ripple effect of this kindness spreads by three degrees. Acting compassionately does the same thing. Where can you pay it forward today?

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENA AGENCY.COM

## 36 One thing a day

Look around and notice who in your life is having a difficult time and could use some support. The gesture can be big, such as bringing a meal to someone in need, or relatively small, such as sending an email or note to let someone know you're thinking of them. Begin the practice of doing one thing each day for someone else.

## 37 Practice gratitude

Most of us have been the recipient of kind and compassionate gestures at some point in our lives—an introduction that led to a new job, a compliment or kind word at just the right moment, an unexpected gift. Take a few moments to recall one of these experiences and see if you can tap into the gratitude you felt at the time, and maybe still do.

## 38 You deserve kindness, too

Sometimes it's easier to feel compassionate for another than for yourself. But true compassion doesn't discriminate. The next time you're having a difficult moment, see if you can offer yourself some kindness. You might be surprised at how much it helps—and helps you to feel kinder toward others.

## 39 Celebrate imperfection

One of the most corrosive sources of self-criticism comes from believing we need to be "perfect." Far from making us "better," this attitude can cause us to spiral into obsessive thinking, anxiety, and depression. Try this instead: If you make a mistake or aren't perfect at something, lift your arms and yell "Hooray!" or "Woo-hoo!" Taking a more playful approach to life is a great act of self-compassion, as it trains your brain to let go, learn from mistakes, and, simply, to begin again.

## 40 Just what the doctor ordered

Research shows that feeling compassion is good for us. It causes our heart rate to slow, which makes us more relaxed and calm; it leads to the release of the bonding hormone oxytocin, which helps us to feel more connected and loving toward others; and it activates regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving, and pleasure.

## 41 Compassion works

A study found that when people did a compassion meditation every day for just two weeks, directing their attention toward those they loved and “difficult” people in their lives, they acted more altruistically toward strangers. Also, the practice correlated with measurable changes in brain activity. “Doing these kinds of exercises is a little like weight training—the compassion ‘muscle’ is strengthened by practicing with people of increasing difficulty,” one of the study authors noted.

## 42 See, touch, go

When you face conflict with someone, it can be difficult to see anything but the struggle and that person’s role in it. This practice can give you a bit of space, and with it, the perspective to act from your heart instead of your head.

*See* the struggle that is there, within you or within the relationship as it is in the moment.

*Touch* your heart either mentally or physically. Sensing into this area of the body can turn down the volume on the chatter and connect you to what really matters right now.

*Go* from there. Ask yourself, *What do I need in this moment? What really matters? What action will align with these things?* Then do it.



### Tip

## Experience joy for others

Be on the lookout for moments when you notice that others are doing well, or even just having a good day, and see if you can be happy for them. Sometimes this joy for another naturally arises; other times it’s something you can foster. If you feel so bold, tell them, “Good job” or “I’m so happy for you.” Not only can this create or strengthen your connection, but it can amplify your own good feelings.

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM



## 43 Happier genes

Researchers have discovered that people who actively practice compassion and altruism have lower levels of inflammatory gene expression and higher expression of antiviral and antibody genes than people who lived for greater self-gratification or pleasure. “Doing good” and “feeling good” may be different things, but through “doing good” you can have both.

## 44 Meet your self-critic

You probably run the same self-defeating stories, the same criticisms over and over again. Make a “Top 10 Hit List” of self-critical thoughts. As you notice one arise (as it inevitably will), acknowledge it: “Ah, there you are. I was wondering when you’d show up.” Then, take a nice deep breath, and say, “May I be free from being so hard on myself, may all people be free from being so hard on themselves, may we all live with ease.”



Q+A with TARA BRACH

# The Power of Compassion

Tara Brach worked as a clinical psychologist for 16 years and is the author of three books: *Radical Acceptance*, *True Refuge*, and the just-released *Radical Compassion*. Her podcasted talks and meditations often originate from her well-attended Wednesday night meditation and class, held in Bethesda, MD, and in the half-dozen retreats that she offers annually. She and fellow teacher Jack Kornfield are cofounders of the Awareness Training Institute (ATI), which offers online courses on mindfulness and compassion, as well as the Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Certification Program. Brach is also the senior teacher and founder of Insight Meditation Community of Washington, DC. She has taught classes to staffers in the US Senate, and has offered teachings in the House of Representatives.

BY VICTORIA DAWSON

**You live near the Great Falls section of the Potomac River—an area of stunning natural beauty. Do you have a formal meditation practice that incorporates the area around your home?**

I begin each day by going to the river with my dog. Being physical and in nature takes me out of the habitual circling of my thoughts. A lot of the material for my talks—pieces, stories, illustrations—comes as I'm walking along the river. Depending on the weather, I'll meditate by the river for half an hour or when I return home. The meditation itself involves coming into stillness, a kind of collecting and quieting. There's always a current of sensing into loving awareness, whether through prayer or self-compassion or offering loving-kindness to others.

**You mention self-compassion, which brings us to the topic at hand: your new book, *Radical Compassion*. As your third book, where does it fit in the arc of your work?**

My motivation in writing my first book, *Radical Acceptance*, was a revelation that I'd been living in this trance of unworthiness—living in a constricted world with a preponderance of stories about a self who was failing or deficient or flawed, and all the fear and shame that went with that. I began to see how mindfulness and compassion could wake me up out of that story.

In a similar way, when I wrote *True Refuge*, I had been struggling with illness—a connective tissue disorder—and a downward spiral, with no sense I would recover and have my life back.

STEPHANIE DIANI

So, my trance then was the narrowed identity of “sick person,” and filled with anxiety and grief about loss. The inquiry was how to use mindfulness and compassion when we hit these big life difficulties that catapult us into a reactive trance.

### On the worst days of your illness, what was life like for you?

When I hit real lows, my joints were inflamed, and between pain and exhaustion, the most I could do was walk slowly around my house. When this went on for a stretch of days, I’d get depressed—grim and irritable. My meditation practice became very challenging and deep. Over and over, I had to face the raw vulnerability of loss, fear, and grief. And, with that, my heart became more compassionate. I increasingly found a refuge in loving presence, which felt more the truth of who I was than an identity of “sick person.” This awakening gave rise to writing *True Refuge*, and in a daily way, helped me become more intelligent about coping.

### And you're better?

Much, much better. The key has been to listen and become more truly embodied—qigong helped. I had to learn how not to injure myself and how to build back enough muscle strength to help stabilize my joints. I’m hiking and swimming now, and I’m grateful for every day that I can enjoy moving on this earth.

### Do you find that healing and self-compassion interrelate in some way?

A palliative caregiver describes the greatest regret expressed by the dying: I didn’t live true to myself. To “live true” we need to awaken self-compassion and love ourselves into healing. And we need to attune to others with an active caring, and include all beings in our heart.

### Why is self-compassion so essential?

Compassion arises when we experience suffering, and to experience suffering directly we need to be in touch with vulnerability in our body, where the suffering registers. Then the natural response is tenderness. Self-compassion then allows us to feel compassionate toward others: If we have not been with our own vulnerability, we cannot resonate with another person’s vulnerability.

### How do you practice self-compassion?

I habitually get stuck in a sense of needing to do more, checking things off the list, being anxious about the next presentation or the next class. As I’m speeding around, I’m cut off from my body and my heart. I’m more inclined toward silly mistakes, my memory is not as good, I’m less sensitive to the world. I lose contact with my deepest nature. When that happens, I recognize and allow that, OK, this is my speedy, anxious, doing self, trying to accomplish more, trying to control reality. I investigate, feeling the vulnerability underneath: that vague sense that I’m going to fail. If I can touch that, put my hand on my heart, and tell myself it’s OK, then a profound shift into compassionate presence occurs. I can re-enter the activity without the clench of anxiety, opened to a larger sense of who I am.

### How can compassion be “radical”?

What I call “radical compassion” is a mature, fully evolved expression of compassion, grounded in an embodied, mindful presence. There’s a movement to help, and it’s all-inclusive. That is, it’s not feeling compassion for one person but then being completely shut off, for example, from a politician whose policies or ideology I disapprove of. Radical compassion is an all-embracing tenderness.

## \* A Dose of Self-Compassion

In order to flower, self-compassion depends on honest, direct contact with your own vulnerability. The RAIN practice offers four simple steps you can take when you’re feeling hard on yourself.



### R Recognize What Is Happening

As you reflect on the situation, ask yourself, “What is happening inside me right now?” What sensations are you most aware of? What emotions? Take a moment to become aware of whatever is predominant.

### A Allow Life to Be Just as It Is

Send a message to your heart to “let be” this entire experience. Find in yourself the willingness to pause and accept that in these moments, “what is...is.” You can mentally whisper “let be.”

### I Investigate with a Gentle, Curious Attention

Bring an interested and kind attention to your experience. Ask yourself: What is the worst part of this; what most wants my attention? What is the most difficult/painful thing I am believing? What emotions does this bring up? Where are my feelings about this strongest in my body? Feel free to experiment with your own questions. And, instead of thinking about what’s going on, keep bringing your attention to your body. Listen for what your most vulnerable place truly needs.

### N Nurture with Loving Presence

As you sense what is needed, what is your natural response? Calling on the most wise and compassionate part of your being, you might gently place your hand on your heart or send a tender embrace inward. Discover what best allows the part of you that is most vulnerable to feel loved, seen, and/or safe. Spend as much time as you need, offering care inwardly and letting it be received.



# Learn to Forgive

**W**hen you've been hurt by someone,

it's not always easy to let it go. But holding on to a grudge will only make you feel worse — and not just emotionally. Resentment can cause your blood pressure to spike and trigger the release of stress chemicals that can make you physically sick. And the truth is: It doesn't really do any good anyway. As the saying goes: "Not forgiving is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

The paradox is, when you've been wronged, forgiveness is the only thing that provides relief from the pain. Sound like a bitter pill to swallow? Read on to learn how forgiving others (and yourself) can help you release the heavy burden of resentment and experience more freedom.

## 45 Understand forgiveness

Before you attempt to force forgiveness on your most tender hurts, consider what it is you're asking of yourself: Forgiving doesn't mean that you condone what happened or that the perpetrator is blameless. It is making the conscious choice to release yourself from the burden, pain, and stress of holding on to resentment.

## 46 Feel your pain

Hurts can run deep, even if at first glance they don't seem to make a big impact. It's important to give yourself permission to acknowledge and honor the pain that's very real for you. Notice where you feel it in your body and ask yourself, "What do I need right now?" Maybe you need to feel supported, take more time, or do something kind for yourself. Allowing space for the pain in this way can help you know whether you're ready to release it from your heart and mind.

## 47 Call it by name

Whether you've hurt yourself or have been hurt by another, allow yourself to be honest and simply name the feelings that are there. They might include guilt, grief, shame, sorrow, confusion, or anger. As you consider the act of forgiveness, any of these feelings can arise. A study at UCLA found that when

you name your emotional experience it turns the volume down on your amygdala, the emotion center of the brain, and brings resources back to your pre-frontal cortex, the rational part of your brain. So, by naming the feeling you can create space and not get overwhelmed.

## 48 Let it out

Keeping hurt feelings bottled up only causes additional stress to your mind and body. Even if the memory is difficult to confront, see if you can share how you're feeling. You can write about it in a journal or talk about it with a friend or a professional counselor. Sharing helps you expand your perspective and perhaps even see what happened through a different lens.

## 49 Flip it

If possible, see if you can flip the focus of being the victim to putting yourself in the other person's shoes. For example, consider the life the person lived that led them to this hurtful action. This is difficult to do, but remember, you're not condoning any action. This exercise is just about trying to see that, as humans, we are deeply impacted by our own traumas and life experiences, which greatly inform how we show up and act in the world. If you are able to do this, compassion naturally tends to flow from this more understanding perspective.



## 50 Take action (start small)

Whether you are forgiving yourself or another person, taking action can help to facilitate healing and make you feel more empowered. It's best to start with smaller misdeeds to get into practice and feel what's possible. Writing a letter or having an uncomfortable conversation can be difficult and even scary, but often a sense of empowerment emerges from the self-compassionate action of listening to yourself and doing something that supports you.

## 51 You're not alone

When you've been hurt, it's common to feel like you're the only one who has ever been wronged in this way. In fact, it's likely that this transgression (or something similar to it) has been made many (maybe even millions of) times before throughout human history. Making mistakes is part of our shared human experience. Remembering you are not alone in experiencing this kind of pain can help to loosen your grip on your resentment.





# 52 Forgiveness is a process

Forgiveness isn't a quick-fix solution. It's a process, so be patient with yourself. With smaller transgressions, forgiveness can happen pretty quickly, but with the larger ones, it can take years. As you begin with the smaller misdeeds and then move on to the harder ones, be kind to yourself, take deep breaths, and continue on.

# 53 Stop blaming

We all know it can feel good now and again to complain to a friend—misery loves company, right? Well, not exactly. Researcher Brené Brown says, “Blaming is a way to discharge pain and discomfort.” It gives us a false sense of control but inevitably keeps the negativity kicking around in our minds, increasing our stress and eroding our relationships.

# 54 Practice mindfulness

A recent study surveyed 94 adults who had been cheated on by their partners and found a correlation between traits of mindfulness and forgiveness. In other words, it can be said that the more you practice mindfulness, the more you strengthen your capacity for forgiveness.

# 55 Find meaning through your pain

As you practice working with the pain that's there, you grow key strengths of self-compassion, courage, and empathy that inevitably make you stronger in every way. As psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning*, even in the most horrific and painful circumstances, we have the freedom to create meaning in life, which is a powerful healing agent.

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

## PRACTICE

# Let Go and Thrive

It can be difficult to forgive. But who gets hurt when we don't? This short practice offers a way forward.

## Sit

Find a comfortable seat, and gently close your eyes. Take a few deep, grounding breaths. Feel the breath move down through your body as your muscles relax.

## Think

Bring to mind someone who has caused you pain (to start, maybe not the person who has hurt you most) and you're holding a grudge against. Visualize the time you were hurt by this person and feel the pain you still carry. Hold tightly to your unwillingness to forgive.

## Observe


What emotion is present? Is it anger, resentment, sadness? Use your body as a barometer and notice physically what you feel. Are you tense, do you feel heavy? Next, bring awareness to the thoughts you have about this person. Are they hateful, spiteful, or something else? Allow yourself to really feel the burden that lives inside of you from holding on to this hurt.

## Ask

Who is suffering?  
Have I carried this burden long enough?  
Am I willing to forgive?

Some wounds need more time than others to heal. If you are ready to let it go now, silently repeat: “Breathing in, I acknowledge the pain. Breathing out, I am forgiving and releasing this burden from my heart and mind.”



A person with long dark hair, wearing a white lace top and patterned pants, is performing a handstand on a dirt path in a savanna landscape. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The background features dry grass, scattered trees, and distant hills.

\* The more you take  
note of the moments  
that bring you joy,  
the more joy you'll  
find in every day.

JULIEN & BALMER/STOCKSY

Savor  
Your Life

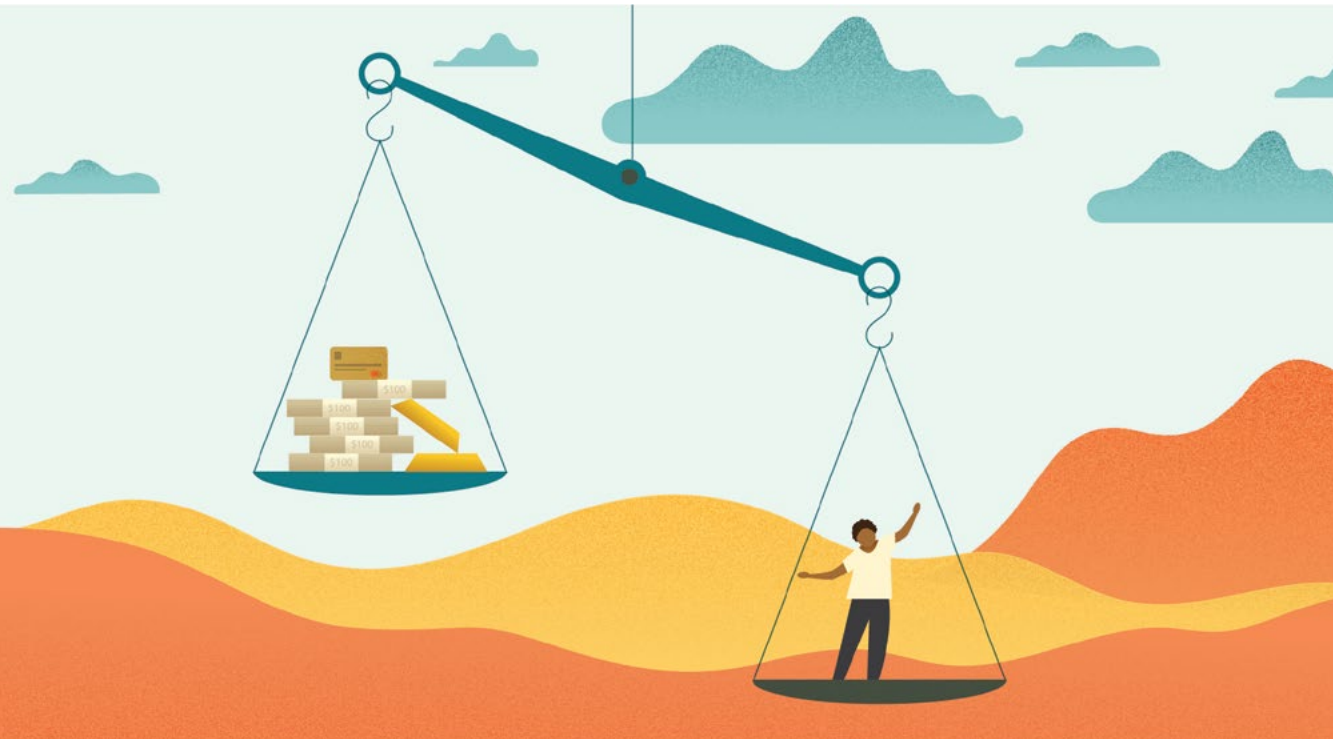


# Find Contentment

PAFF/STOCKSY

**H**appiness is a loaded concept: It's

loaded with expectations, hope, yearning, and confusion. Yet what makes happiness seem so elusive usually has more to do with how you relate to the *idea* of it than with how you really feel. For example, if you were to wake one day with an inexplicable sense of ease or well-being, no matter what else was going on in your life, would you know that as happiness? What if noticing these ordinary moments could, well, make you happier? Here are a few simple adjustments that can help you unleash and recognize the happiness already within you.



## 56 Be present

Awareness is the springboard from which we can appreciate the world around us. Set reminders in your phone throughout the day to pause and check in with yourself. By stepping into a space of curiosity, you will discover an increased ability to notice happiness in everyday life.

## 57 Harness difficulty

As long as you're alive, challenges will find you. Sometimes you even create the challenges—we all do. Instead of getting down on yourself, try thinking of difficult moments as opportunities to ask, *How can I be kinder to myself right now?*

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

## 58 Get connected

Connection is more than an experience; it's also a skill that we can strengthen with small gestures. Try smiling at a stranger, telling a friend you appreciate them, or letting a loved one know how much they mean to you. Creating connection in the small moments will strengthen connections throughout our lives.

## 59 Take stock

In our society, it's easy to get caught up in the story of lack. The media fans the adoration of the wealthy and beautiful, and advertising constantly reinforces the message that to be *truly* happy you need the car, the clothes, the lifestyle, etc. In our heart of hearts, we know that money and things don't equal happiness, but still... This is why taking stock of all that you do have in your life is so important. Not of material things—though the ability to buy clothing you love or to take a vacation very likely does contribute to your happiness. But, go deeper. Make it a daily practice to name the things that you're grateful for. The people, opportunities, and experiences that bring connection, laughter, awe, and growth to your life. We are all so rich—but often forget to count the gold we already possess.

## 60 Be generous

There is no experience more uplifting than giving. Practice being generous: Tip the server a bit more than usual, give more to charity this month, or offer more of your time to friends, family, and strangers.

## 61 Let the past pass

Lily Tomlin once said, "Forgiveness means letting go of the hope for a better past." Letting go is hard. It's also easy—we let go every single night when we go to bed. When we hold on to our mistakes or the mistakes of others, it only serves to stress us out, which has negative impacts on our minds, bodies, and relationships. Ask yourself, "Am I ready to let go of this burden?" If so, try breathing in and acknowledging the pain you feel, then breathing out and releasing the burden. Repeat often.

## 62 Overhaul your habits

We've all got habits we'd like to kick and that we know would make us feel a lot happier. The key is to focus on the *reward* you seek from any given habit. For instance, if you snack on junk food to soothe stress, consider other ways to get that same soothing. Getting a hug can feel soothing. So can placing your hand on your heart. Practice understanding the reward you seek from your habits, so over time you can develop healthier ones.



## 63 Opt for optimism

Some of us are naturally more optimistic than others, but optimism and a positive outlook can be developed. And it's worth the effort. Numerous studies have found that positivity is linked to lower stress levels and blood pressure, healthier body weight, and greater resilience, among other things. Mindfulness meditation is recognized as one of the best ways to develop it.

## 64 Make your body happy

If you look at a map of the nervous system, you'll see it goes from the brain throughout the entire body—there is no separation. A healthier body means a healthier brain. Listen to your body and notice how it needs to be treated, moved, and fed. Bringing more mindfulness to your body is a recipe for feeling good.

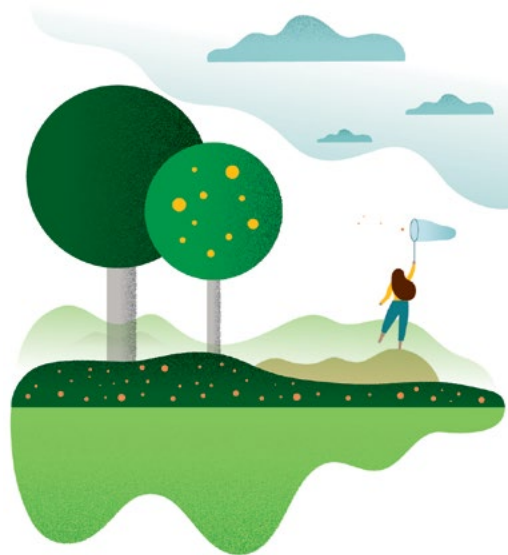
## 65 Get awestruck

When we're in the presence of something greater than ourselves—say in size, scope, ability, or beauty—we feel a humbling sense of awe. And although awe comes with recognition of own smallness and limits, it doesn't make us feel bad about ourselves. Quite the opposite: Awe evokes a sense of delighted wonder about the world and interconnectedness with life itself. These positive associations have

tremendous psychological benefit, including greater life satisfaction, a sense of time slowing, and a greater desire to help others.

## 66 Go outside

It might not come as a surprise, but being in nature actually makes us happier. Scientists have found that regular visits to the outdoors result in less stress, fatigue, and rumination, and greater creativity, generosity, and a sense of well-being. Brain-scan imaging shows that walking in nature decreases neural activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain whose activation is affiliated with depression and anxiety.



### Tip

#### Keep track of your joys

At the end of each day, we're usually aware of the long list of bad things that happened. What if instead you focused on the joys? Make a list of the *things that give you a happy boost each day*. It might be a smile a kind stranger gave you, the sweet smell of a rose bush you pass on your walk, or the presence of a trusted friend or pet. The more you take note of what brings you joy, the more joy you'll find in your everyday life.

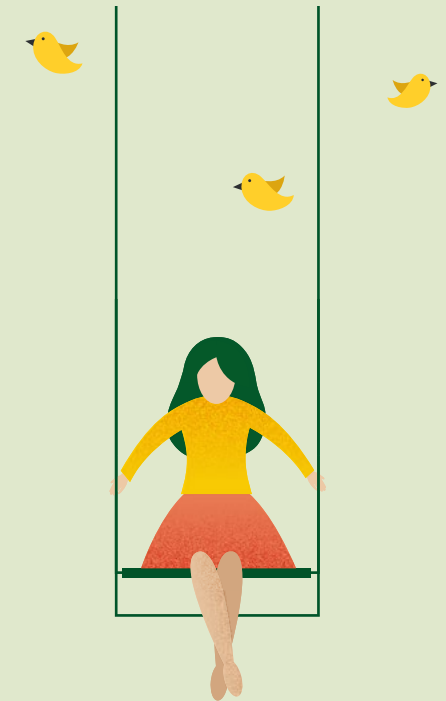
## \* Are You "Happy"?

### The real meaning of happiness isn't what you think.

Happiness is a strangely elusive concept. It means too many things to be a trustworthy marker for what matters in life. Likewise, if happiness is supposed to be based on an overall assessment of life circumstances, how reliable is that? Life is hard.

If happiness is to hold any real meaning as a goal, it needs to point to something deeper, broader, and more sustaining than just pleasant sensations or pain-free success in life.

The deeper brand of happiness doesn't depend on circumstances. It hits us when we're awestruck. It hits us when we loosen our attitude toward what we have and what's going on in our life, when we decide to be content. It doesn't mean we give up trying to improve upon a bad situation. It simply means we discover a kind of resilience that doesn't let a bad situation define who we are.



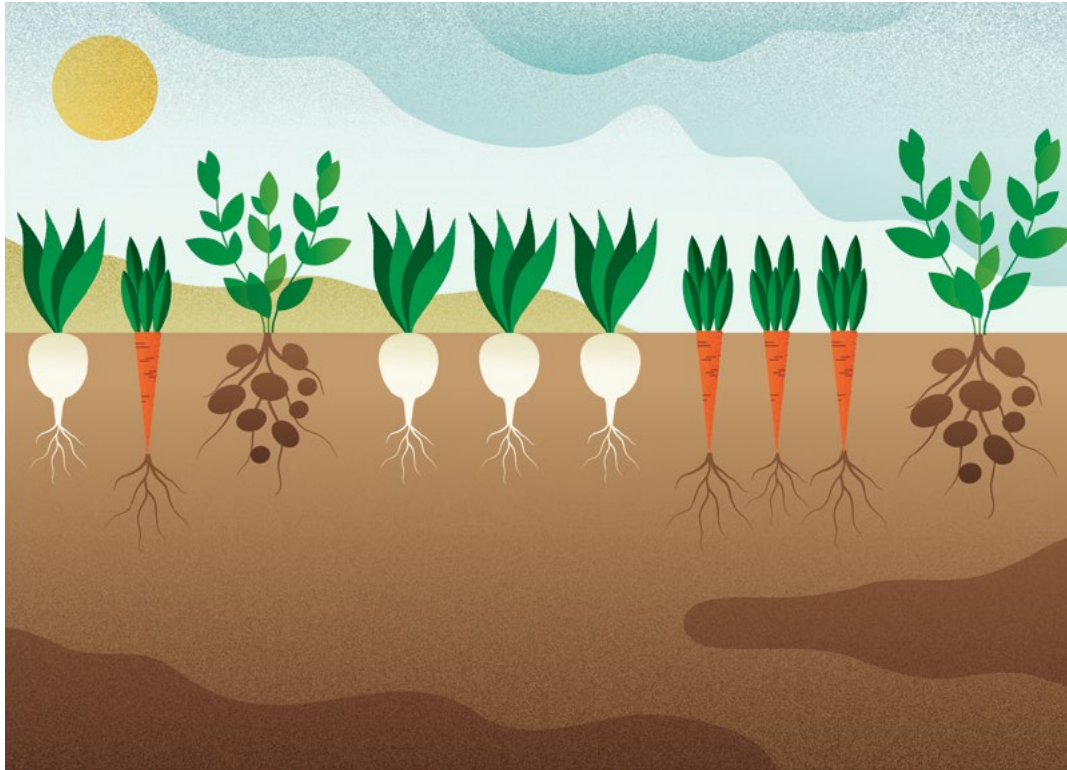
Mindfulness offers great opportunities to encounter well-being, to savor simplicity and awe, because in asking you to pay attention to the simplest things in life, to allow for gaps in your tape loop, it lets you—ever so briefly—still that voice that says something is fundamentally wrong with you. It leaves you a little bit of space to stop questioning whether you are happy or not.

# Enjoy Every Bite

**A**fter breathing, nothing is more essential than eating. In your lifetime, you'll probably have more than 70,000 meals. And each and every one of them is an opportunity to show up and participate fully in one of the real joys of life. Food is a sense extravaganza and should be celebrated! By applying a mindful attitude toward eating, you'll savor it even more and experience the deep satisfaction of nourishing your body and your heart.

STUDIO FIRMA/STOCKSY





## 67 Eat slightly slower

With the speed at which we do most things today, eating can easily become just another thing to cross off your to-do list. The next time you eat, try slowing down. You'll pull more enjoyment out of your food, feel more satisfied, and your digestive system will thank you.

## 68 Honor the elements

Every piece of food we eat has its own rich origin story, which we usually don't think about. When you sit down for a meal, take a moment to acknowledge everything that went into what's on your plate. Consider the people who made it, bought the ingredients, stocked the store shelves, delivered it, harvested it, and all the natural elements of sun, rain, soil, and wind that allowed it to grow.

ASIA PETRYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

## 69 Cook with love

Even if you're just making a sandwich, food tastes a lot better when we put a little love into it. Pay attention to the preparation of your food, think about who's going to eat it, and say in your mind, "May this food help you be strong, healthy, and happy."

## 70 Simply enjoy

There's so much advice on what to eat and how to eat it, it can be overwhelming and, ultimately, seriously diminish your experience of food. In this day and age, we should all know how to nourish ourselves (and also when our choices are less than healthy). But it's also important to learn how to trust yourself, let go of harsh judgments, and enjoy the food that properly fuels your body. You're the best judge of your experience. When you apply mindfulness to your eating, you'll quickly learn what your body wants, and what it doesn't really need.

## 71 Try something new

Novelty is the spice of life (and a source of healthy neuroplasticity), so be adventurous and reach outside of your comfort zone when you eat. Be bold. Push yourself to try something you never thought you'd like. You never know, you just might be pleasantly surprised!

## 72 Start from scratch

Most of us eat the same foods week to week for convenience and taste. And that's OK. See if you can approach even a familiar food with a sense of curiosity: Imagine it's the first time you've ever eaten it. Chew slowly, taking in every flavor sensation and texture. What do you notice?

## 73 Eat local, be respectful

You may buy your food at the grocery store, but that's its last stop before it comes into your home. When you get to know where your food comes from, you develop an entirely different relationship with it. Go visit a local farm (or at least a farmers' market) and learn about the foods that grow in your area and when — not only will you feel more connected to what you eat, but as a rule food tastes better when it's fresher.

## 74 Use your nose or other senses

Our sense of smell has a lot to do with how food tastes. Before eating, pause for a moment to take in the aroma of the food. What scents can you pick up? Does a memory emerge? Take a second look, what colors do you see? Then take a bite and see how much richer the experience can be.



## 75 Monotask

We often eat while doing something else at the same time (working, looking at your phone or tablet, talking with someone, reading), which takes away from tasting and fully enjoying the food. It can also lead to mindless eating (like finishing the bag of chips without meaning to!). See if you can, for at least one meal or snack this week, just...eat.

## 76 Surf your urges

We've all experienced the desire to eat or drink beyond what we know is good for us. (Sometimes it happens more often than we'd like to admit.) Try an experiment: The next time you have a craving that goes against your better judgment, hold off on indulging right away by setting a timer for 20 minutes. When the timer goes off, check back in to see if the desire is still strong. That space can invoke perspective that can help you make a more mindful decision.

## 77 Enjoy a communal meal

Since the dawn of time people have made it a point to "break bread" together. Sharing a meal is a powerful form of bonding, a deeply enjoyable way to celebrate community and acknowledge the bounty that so many of us enjoy. Invite people over for a special dinner, host a potluck where everyone contributes a favorite dish, or plan a group meal out at a restaurant. Feel the connection grow.

ASIA PETRYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

### PRACTICE

## Body Wise

The human form is an extraordinary sense tool. Let it ground and guide you.

**The body gives us a way to identify emotions**, so we can learn to savor the positive ones and practice self-compassion toward negative ones. In turn, we can activate our biological healing process and open the door for happiness.

**Soften** Wherever you are, take a deep, grounding breath. Consciously relax the muscles throughout your body, starting from your feet and moving all the way up to your face and head.

**Allow** Can you just be in your body in this present moment, without a need to fix anything? Breathe into your relaxed state.

**Feel** Note any place in your body where you feel emotion. Maybe there's excitement, lightness, or joy. Or worry, fear, or judgment. As you rest your awareness on that place, ask yourself what you need: *To feel safe, to accept yourself as you are, to find inner strength.*

**Expand** Continue to breathe gently into the emotion in your body, listening and nourishing. When you feel some expansion, send your positive intentions to all people everywhere. You might say, "May all people feel safe, be strong, be happy."

### Tip

#### Let it linger

Whether you're eating a tasty treat, focused on a crossword puzzle, or enjoying a walk with a friend, take in the moment—sense how it feels in your body and note what emotions are present.

As you linger in these good-feeling experiences, your brain is actually changing. It's literally stamping a memory that it will recall in other areas of your life, and strengthening your recognition of contentment.



Q+A with IRENE AU

# Nourishing Connection

Irene Au is a digital designer bringing empathy to the internet. With a background in human-computer interaction, Au believes mindfulness and yoga can help us reconnect to our senses, our hearts and emotions, and our bodies, filling a void left by constant immersion in digital technology. Introduced to yoga and meditation when she was a teenager, Au established a consistent practice in 2009, when a stressful executive role at Google, young children, and a struggling marriage fueled her search for greater well-being. The benefits for her body and emotional life have been palpable and profound.

BY VICTORIA DAWSON

## What prompted you to return to yoga?

In 2006, I joined Google. The task there was how to bring empathetic research processes to product development and elevate design quality into a coherent experience for users. At the time, Google was famously engineering-centric—very data-driven and masculine. Empathy and qualitative research and design were counter-cultural. In addition to an executive role at Google, I had two young daughters and a marriage that wasn't working. The breaking point came when I realized that I couldn't sit cross-legged on the floor and play with my children—my hips were too tight. There was so much suffering, and I needed to dig myself out of it. I sought solace in yoga. I was motivated by physical need, but I came out of it transformed.

## What changed?

My body and my mind changed, and I started to move through the world differently—with compassion for myself and an ability to be present and calm. I became able to respond, instead of react, to the people around me. During my first yoga teacher training, we were constantly practicing and meditating. I remember adjusting one of my classmates when a wave of love washed over me—a connection to the spirit or the soul—I don't know what it was. I grew up in a profoundly atheistic household. My father was a professor of physics, and I was a dedicated student of science and math. But I believe there is a deeper connection. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't there.

BLAKE FARRINGTON

How do you parent in the digital age?

I don't think there's a great answer. My children aren't on Twitter or Facebook, and before the school year started, I forced them to delete Snapchat from their phones. At night, we dock our phones on the main floor so that we don't have devices next to our beds.

How has yoga informed your work as a designer?

With mindfulness, when I come to work, I show up with my best self. I see things more clearly and can better figure out what is most important to focus on. Practices like meditation and yoga can make designers better designers, or creators better creators. Mindfulness is about slowing down and noticing, and design is the art of noticing details. I keep coming back to this word "clear." That clarity is crucial for designers.

Do you use yoga or mindfulness at work?

When I've run hackathons or brainstorming sessions, I've opened with yoga and a few mindful moments. I actually coax people to get out of their chairs and move around. If they're sitting down, the ideas don't flow as freely. If we're more comfortable in and connected to our bodies we can let the ideas flow more, be more connected to each other, and have more compassion for each other and each other's ideas.

Why yoga and not, say, running or swimming or rowing, all of which might also enhance one's sense of well-being?

I don't think there's any form of physical activity that is as comprehensively balanced as yoga. An hour of yoga offers cardio, strength, flexibility, agility, and balance. A good practice will open up all parts of the body and that is critical for freedom of mobility and for getting your body to function optimally. Yoga explicitly teaches you how to connect with your breath in a way that other sports don't—it teaches you about getting to know yourself and how to have a deeper understanding of how to be yourself.



*My body and my mind changed, and I started to move through the world differently—with compassion for myself and an ability to be present and calm."* —Irene Au

Tell me a little more about this contrast between your work teaching yoga and your work designing digital experiences.

Digital products—experiences—primarily engage one of our five senses: sight. Yoga and mindfulness help to reconnect us to our senses, our hearts and emotions, and our bodies, filling a void left by constant immersion in digital tech. When we consume streams of information—through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram—everything is displayed equally. A post about someone's beloved passing away is presented in the same way that a silly cat video is posted. Our sense of emotional gravity, both the highs and the lows, is lost. With yoga, we return to a real sense of unity and connectedness—in contrast to the fragmented attention, numbness, and tribalism induced by social media.

That's a fascinating set of extremes to be negotiating.

I have spent much of my career bringing technology to people, but technology is a distraction from real, true human connection and love. Mindfulness practice opens our hearts so that we can be more meaningfully connected.

PRACTICE

## 4 Questions for Uncovering Happiness

From time to time, you might notice a nourishing thought arise, such as "I'm good enough," "Life is fine as it is," "I'm worthy of love," or "What a beautiful moment." Be on the lookout for these—positive thinking is one of the healthiest habits you can foster. It's been linked to lower levels of stress and depression, stronger immunity, and longevity. Plus, a positive outlook is one of the best defenses against the inevitable ups and downs we all encounter in life.

Here's a short practice from Elisha Goldstein that you can weave into your day to strengthen your recognition of positive thoughts and to steep in their healing powers.

1 Pick a positive thought that you *might* believe, such as, "I'm skilled at what I do," and ask yourself, *Is it true?*

Because our brains are hardwired to notice negative feelings over positive ones, your first instinct might be to dismiss this kind of thought with a quick, "No, no, it's not true. I'm not really *that* skilled [smart, worthy of love, good enough, and so on]."

2 Now ask yourself, *Is it possible that it's true?*

Here is where we open the door to *possibility*, no matter how small our minds may say it is. Your answer is likely something like, "Yeah, I guess there's a *possibility* I'm skilled at what I do."

3 When you step into that *possibility*, even for just a moment, how does it feel?

You may find that fear arises, like a fear of the unknown—literally not recognizing the self that you are sensing into. If so, this is a huge opportunity for self-compassion. Get curious: *What would life be like if I stepped into this light?* Remember, it doesn't serve you—or the world—to be the smallest version of yourself.

4 Enjoy any good feelings that arise.

Alternatively, you may experience a hit of positive emotion, such as joy, contentment, or confidence. Allow yourself to linger here for a bit. When we savor positive feelings, it triggers activity in the reward pathways in the brain and strengthens our ability to recognize them in the future.



# Live Your Purpose



Making our values real is how we live the adage: “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”



# Tap Your Inner Wisdom

**O**ur bodies are powerful and highly accurate meters for gauging how we feel in any situation. Learning to tune in and recognize your body's cues, and trusting them, will provide you with an ever-present ally in knowing what's right for you. In any situation, start to pay attention to what's going on inside—where in your body you feel tension or fear, lightness or ease. Over time you'll learn how to use these body clues to help steer you in the direction of what makes you feel best.

MICKY WISWEDEL/STOCKSY



## 78 Know your body

A simple body scan is a great way to tune in to your body. Lie down, close your eyes, and get curious about the sensations you feel—tingling, warmth, coolness, tension—and become intimate with them as they shift and change from your feet to your head.

## 79 Check in with yourself

Throughout the day our bodies tend to accumulate stress. Do hourly check-ins, taking a deep breath and noticing where tension arises—maybe in the brow, jaw, shoulders, or abdomen. Allow the tense places to soften as you breathe, then stretch and adjust your posture.

## 80 Savor the good

We often feel our emotions, both positive and negative, in our bodies. The next time you feel good, notice how this manifests physically. Does your body feel relaxed? Is there warmth in your chest, or a slight smile across your face? Becoming aware of positive emotions allows us to broaden our momentary perspective and spark positive reactions, like the urge to enjoy beautiful scenery or the impulse to play. Inevitably this builds greater personal resources. This process is what researcher Barbara Fredrickson has coined “The Broaden and Build Theory.”

## 81 Get clued in

Listen to the moment-to-moment clues your body gives you about how you’re feeling—things like lightness, energy, and excitement, or heaviness, jumpiness, or dread. By simply noticing these sensations, you’ll gradually increase your emotional intelligence and add to your life-navigation toolbox.

## 82 Be like Superwoman!

Social psychologist Amy Cuddy’s research suggests that certain poses can actually increase confidence and reduce stress. Try standing like Superwoman, with your back straight, chest upright, heart open, and hands at your waist—then hold for two minutes.

## 83 Revel in daily tasks

Our brains are wired to make daily tasks into routine actions so we can focus on novel activities. But when we bring curiosity and awareness to simple tasks, like washing dishes or taking a shower, the mundane comes alive again. Next time you shower, for example, notice how the water feels on your skin, the scent of the shampoo, the sound of water falling. Take in these subtleties with all of your senses, and your experiences will begin to awaken—in technicolor.



## 84 Tune your heart

An essential component of well-being is nurturing a loving heart, and we can use the body to do this. Take one or two hands and place them on your heart, think of someone who makes you smile, and in your mind wish them well.

## 85 Feel your center

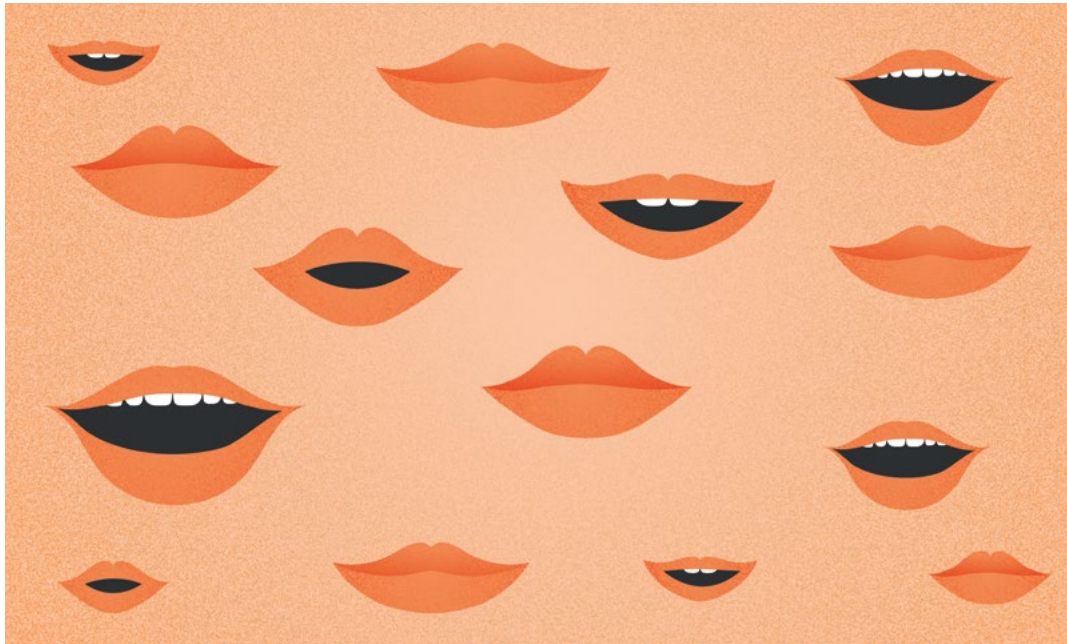
The abdomen is often called “the core” of the body, and we can use it for strength and grounding. If you’re feeling stressed or anxious, take one or two hands and place them on your belly. Then take a few slow deep breaths, noticing how they ground you.

### Tip

## Turn values into verbs

Ask people what they value, and they’ll say things like “peace” or “connection.” But in order to make a value real, you have to make it specific and practical. List your top three values, leaving room between each. Next, note any actions, small to big, that you can start doing immediately that represent this value. Then, start to do them.

Making values real is how you live the adage: “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”



## 86 Move your body

Most of us spend too much of the day sitting, so naturally our bodies get stiff. This encourages tension, stress, and stuckness. By moving your body—changing your posture, opening up your chest, doing gentle twists or sun salutations—you become more present.

## 87 Laugh it out

Research shows that laughing for even short periods of time can reduce stress and increase short-term memory. Another study revealed that laughter can protect against heart disease. It makes sense, then, that you should spend more time with people who crack you up and doing things that

bring you big, goofy fun. Plus, laughter is contagious, so when you let loose and laugh, you're sending those good vibes out into the world.

## 88 Smile wide

Like laughter, a smile sends a signal to the brain that something good is happening. Try it for yourself. Experiment with smiling throughout the day and see how it feels.

ASIA PETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM

### PRACTICE

## Foster a Sense of Purpose Every Day

Getting involved in something outside yourself infuses life with meaning.

**I**n a 2014 study, researchers found that having a sense of purpose was an important factor in determining longevity among people over 60. But purpose wasn't only important to older adults, who were beyond raising children or pursuing a career. It mattered as much to young people by helping provide direction and focus in life that translate into greater health and well-being in the middle years.

Indeed, happiness derived from a sense of meaning in life (what researchers call *eudaimonic* happiness as opposed to *hedonic* happiness) has been linked to less stress, lowered risk of insulin resistance, stronger immune function, and better sleep, among other benefits. Similarly, altruism, such as volunteering, or even making a donation, has been found to increase activity in the brain's reward center, and even to decrease pain. And numerous studies have linked volunteering with lowered situational depression.

We know that getting involved in something outside of us infuses life with meaning. But “meaning” isn't always about big commitments and noble causes. It can be as small as you want or as big as you dare.

Giving to others, feeling part of a community, and self-expression are some common ways that people find meaning in life, according to the Greater Good Science Center.

Mindfulness may also help to foster this sense, argues Victor Strecher, author of *Life on Purpose* and a behavioral scientist at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. He points to research showing that meditation practitioners have longer telomeres, the chromosome endings that begin to shorten and fray with aging, a process that's exacerbated by stress. But the researchers concluded that it wasn't meditation that increased the length of the telomeres, but the sense of purpose people felt, which was *inspired* by meditation.

**Uncover your purpose by asking yourself daily:**

*What do I care about beyond myself?*

*What action, large or small, can I take today that aligns with this?*

*In the long run, how will my actions affect the world?*

Practice and repeat this over time and watch your sense of purpose grow.





FREEKZONDERLAND/STOCKSY

# Play More

**C**hildren play. Nobody has to tell them to make time for it. But as adults, we can forget what play is, how vital it is, and how fun it is! It's also essential for reminding you of all the things that naturally nourish you and can point you along the path of your greatest gifts. Of course, acting like a child and invoking a sense of childlike wonder and curiosity are different things. But allowing a natural curiosity and playfulness into our adult lives can infuse it with greater richness, far more joy, and help us to see things that we may have overlooked.



## 89 Take a play history

Drum up those old playful feelings you've lost over years of adulthood by taking a moment to reflect on how you played as a kid: Did you play mostly by yourself, or with friends (or furry friends)? What made you feel free, so you'd lose track of time and truly engage in the moment? Maybe you created imaginary worlds or had invisible friends or built sandcastles on the beach. As you think about this, notice if the feeling of play arises. If you notice a smile, let it linger.

## 90 Be a play-maker

Having a playful life means choosing right here, right now to actively engage in play on a regular basis. What we choose to do makes a big impact on our

health and happiness. Do you explore, learn, look for new experiences, travel, or spend time with people who nourish you? If you choose to be an active playmaker, you'll not only have a lot more fun — science shows you may be tapping into the fountain of youth.

## 91 Collect your toys

Playing the game Trouble may not feel as playful now as it did when you were a kid (then again, it might). So it's important to think about what things bring you joy now. Consider activities that take very little effort, and some that take more. Maybe it's cooking new foods, doing yoga, riding horses, visiting a trendy neighborhood, kissing, hiking, playing a musical instrument, putting on sexy clothes, or looking through art books. Collect a list of your "toys" and then plan to use them!

ASIA PIETRZYK/MARLENA AGENCY.COM

## 92 Make a playdate

Why should kids get to have all the fun?! Play isn't a habit for most adults, so it's important to intentionally make time for it in our lives — and that means scheduling playdates for ourselves, whether solo or with a friend. Just like you schedule your days with responsibilities, workouts, meditations, and to-do lists, playdates equally deserve a recurring space on your calendar.

## 93 Find a playmate

For many of us life is more fun when we have someone to do things with. Who can you recruit to be your partner in your mission to bring play back?

## 94 Bring some attitude

Steve Gross' title at the Life is Good Kids Foundation is "Chief Playmaker" — how cool is that? His entire job revolves around play because research has found it to be one of the greatest resiliency factors. "Play is not reserved for the sandbox, it's not reserved for flip flops, beer pong, or Frisbee golf," Gross says. "We can bring it into everything we do." Bring a playful mindset to whatever you're doing and you can make even the hardest work or menial tasks feel fun.

## 95 Don't sweat the small stuff

Being playful can be difficult when faced with all of the very real responsibilities we deal with every day. Without minimizing the weight of these issues, we can begin relating to them differently. We spend so much of our sacred time worrying and stressing about what happened or what might happen, and we become so tightly wound that even in quiet moments it can feel nearly impossible to settle and relax into them. See if you can keep coming back to your present-moment experience — returning to what you know is true right now.

## 96 Be a kid again

Studies show that when you put yourself in youthful environments it impacts your mind and body. Swing on swings, play tag, throw the ball around. It may seem silly (and even uncomfortable at first), but if you surrender to the experience you might just find yourself feeling a bit like a kid again.

## 97 Soak in some self-love

Sometimes it's not so easy to play, especially when we're out of practice. We have to learn to take it easy and find small ways to love ourselves. When things get tough, try a self-compassion break: Take a deep breath, place your hand on your stomach or heart, take a walk, or soak for a while in the tub (and remember to bring the rubber duckies).





## 98 Take time for yourself

Many of us put ourselves last on our priority list, and setting aside time to do things you enjoy can feel indulgent. But taking time each week to do something pleasurable—that's just living a happy, mindful life.

## 99 Laugh even more

No, seriously. Laugh! More! Not only does it actually feel good, it also releases the good-feeling vibes of our old friend dopamine. Some say it even helps strengthen your abdominal muscles. Watch a comedy; search "Funniest dog videos" on YouTube; tell someone your favorite joke. If you can't seem to find anything to laugh about, think of something that made you laugh in the past and let yourself relive it. Or you can just smile—but be careful: Smiling has been known to lead to laughter.

ASIA PETRZYK/MARLENAAGENCY.COM



## Clear Out the Clutter

**What's three times the size of Manhattan? The 2.3 billion square feet of rentable self-storage space in the United States.**

Having lots and lots of stuff, it turns out, is more than a physical space problem. It clutters our mental space as well. Being in a messy, cluttered environment makes it difficult to feel at ease—and difficult to hear your own inner wisdom.

Getting rid of your stuff isn't always easy, but when you do, "within minutes, you can breathe more easily," writes Don Aslett, author of *Clutter's Last Stand*.

**1** Pam Holland, who runs Mindful Decluttering and Organizing in Maryland, says when she goes into her clients' homes or offices, she always starts off with a modest mental workout to get their heads in the game. "First I invite them to let go of judgment or guilt about the state of their home or office. Then I ask them to replace it with gratitude for the home or office they do have." In other words, no judgment about how the situation came to be, just a mindful intention to make a healthy change.

**2** The most common excuse Holland hears when she engages a client is, "I just don't know where to start." It helps to tell someone you trust about your decluttering plan, to give you a hand or just to be there. "Sometimes you just need a guide, or even just a compassionate presence," says Holland. And by letting someone know your intention, you'll be more likely to follow through.

**3** Clutter can be about holding on to things from the past; letting go can be a relief. Holland worked with a client who struggled to get rid of a wedding dress from a marriage that had ended. Once she did, she felt a real sense of freedom. "The important thing to recognize is that we don't lose any part of who we are if we let go of mere objects."

*Tip*

### Create breathing room

One of the best results of getting rid of your clutter? More space! See if you can clear an area—a corner, a special shelf, an entire room—and designate it for, well, nothing. Having even just one clear spot in your home will create a visual refuge from the busyness of everyday life, a peaceful place where you can always go to take a deep, clearing breath.

Q+A WITH RHONDA MAGEE

# Journey Inward

Rhonda V. Magee is a Professor of Law at the University of San Francisco and an internationally-recognized thought and practice leader focused on integrating mindfulness into higher education, law, and social change work. She has dedicated her life to healing and teaching in ways that support others in a journey to wholeness and justice. Her book *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness* is published by Penguin Random House.

BY STEPHANIE DOMET

**In your book, you detail the steps you took to help one of your students process his attitudes and biases. What kind of energy does that work require?**

It requires a certain kind of commitment, a willingness to turn toward that which we could so easily deflect, turn away from, deny, minimize, avoid. For me it's really important that when these opportunities present themselves for us to look into what's arising around this, we turn in *to* that opportunity as opposed to *away* from it. I think it takes a grounding in a certain kind of love—loving-kindness. It takes some feeling of the value, of the possibility of connecting across lots of difference and the value of trying to do it, again and again, even when it's difficult.

**Why is it worth it to you to do this work?**

In my view, absolutely everything is connected, and that means all of us are connected, and so when we have these opportunities to expand the sense of our common ground, and we don't take advantage of them and we don't do what we can to heal and repair and transform the world, then we are contributing to barriers to deep well-being. And so it's worth it because it's about practice. It arises out of the deep ethical ground of my practice.

**Who does that work serve? Is it for yourself, for the other person, the greater good of society?**

It serves life. The gift of literally being alive. To be alive is a great gift, and therefore the only real response to such a gift is gratitude. And a way to show gratitude is to try to minimize harm wherever it arises, as best we can.

BLAKE FARRINGTON



“*There’s a planet’s worth of wisdom about how to get through difficult times and about the holistic nature of what that takes.*” —Rhonda Magee

**For a racialized woman, there are micro-aggressions everywhere. How do you take care of yourself to ensure you can do this work you feel called to do?**

Taking care of myself feels like the first approximation of whatever it is I’m trying to offer in the world. There’s a reason I live in San Francisco as opposed to North Carolina or Virginia where I was born and raised. The environment in San Francisco seems a bit more conducive to this way of accepting people, working across cultures, multiculturally, working with people who have different ways of expressing themselves, whether it be about race, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status. We tend to think that from the practices we can overcome just about everything, but I don’t want to miss this opportunity to name the relevance of our embeddedness in the world, and what’s possible is in some measure, aided and abetted and shaped by the circumstances, the environments, the structures and systems that we find ourselves bathing in all the time. I live in a community that provides a certain amount of buffer against some of the worst kinds of disrespect that a person like me might find out in the world. From this place of relative protectedness, then I actually am able to give even more. We have to keep fighting for opportunities for people who today are suffering from a new set of oppressive systems.

**Do you ever lose your cool?**

I often lose my cool intentionally, as a tool for my own healing. If I’m feeling agitation and despair or some sudden rage at something I hear that seems completely nuts, my own practice journey at the moment is allowing those feelings to be expressed and as much as possible doing that regularly enough that they’re not creating a boiler that is going to explode out there. So if I’m here, at home, where it’s safe, it’s part of my practice to let the anger and the rage that I feel about injustice come right out. I sometimes forget just how many generations of human beings before recorded human history—for hundreds of thousands of years we don’t know the numbers of battles, rages, the despair, the inhumanity to each other, and yet we survived, and yet we didn’t burn down the planet, and yet we figured out how to keep getting up every day and feeding the children. There’s a planet’s worth of wisdom about how to get through difficult times and about the holistic nature of what that takes, so that’s what I’m about these days.

Break your heart wide open.  
 Passion isn’t just about feeling good. It’s about feeling everything that makes you **human**.  
 Passion delights in the riotous display of textures, colors, emotions: good, bad, happy, and sad.  
 It’s sparked by the world around you.  
 If you feel dull and gray, go outside. **Feel the earth beneath your feet.**  
 Feel the cool, tingly air sweep across your skin. **Look up at the sky.**  
**Listen to the silence.** It’s always full of life.  
 If you feel worn down by your daily routine, shake things up.  
 Wake up at the break of dawn. **Watch the sun rise.** Cherish the precious, fleeting nature of life.  
 Let your mind roam free.  
 Daydream. **Revel in childlike wonder.** Passion is ageless.  
 It pierces through your layers of time-toughened armor and renews your  
 This is your journey, no one else’s. **brilliant, vital heart.**  
 Be human. Let go. **Be alive.**

# Contributors



**ELISHA GOLDSTEIN**, PhD, is cofounder of The Center for Mindful Living in West Los Angeles and creator of the program “A Course in Mindful Living” and the “Mindfulness at Work” program for eMindful.com. He is a

psychologist, speaker, and author of *Uncovering Happiness: Overcoming Depression with Mindfulness and Self-Compassion*, *The Now Effect: How This Moment Can Change the Rest of Your Life* and coauthor of *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook* and *MBSR Every Day*. He synthesizes the pearls of traditional psychotherapy with a progressive integration of mindfulness to achieve mental and emotional healing.

*“If we practice presence and awareness, imagine the world we can help create.”*



*Mindfulness is needed more than ever to help us to connect to what really matters.”*



**STEFANIE GOLDSTEIN**, PhD, is a psychologist, educator, and parent to three boys. She is the director and cofounder of the Center for Mindful Living and is the cocreator of two programs: “CALM: Connecting Adolescents

to Learning Mindfulness” and “Becoming a Mindful Therapist: A Professional Certification in Mindfulness in Psychotherapy.” Stefanie is a frequent contributor to Mindful.org, and her passion is working with people struggling with daily life, helping to support them on their path toward healing and growth.

FROM LEFT: ADAM BROWN, PAULA STOEKE

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The time will come  
when, with elation,  
you will greet yourself  
arriving at your own  
door, in your own mirror,  
and each will smile at  
the other's welcome.

—“Love After Love” by Derek Walcott

MICKY WISWEDEL/STOCKSY

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\* Findings are based on an 8-week randomized controlled trial conducted by scientists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for Healthy Minds (Goldberg et al., in preparation). Results are based on group averages and will vary from person to person. Healthy Minds Program is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease or medical condition.

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