

# MindfulLiving™

Join us for the MindfulLiving™ program, led by Shery Clein, a certified personal coach dedicated to empowering individuals in their mindfulness endeavours. With thorough research and compassion, Shery has crafted this program to offer accessible and practical approaches to personal development and well-being.

Under Shery's guidance, participants will acquire pragmatic methods and skills to incorporate mindfulness into their daily routines. Shery's proficiency ensures that the content shared is customised for sustained progress beyond the program, fostering deep and enduring change.

As we commence this journey together, Shery expresses gratitude to each participant for their commitment to self-exploration and growth. Your involvement in the MindfulLiving™ program demonstrates your dedication to embracing a more mindful and enriching existence.

**We appreciate your presence as we embark  
on this voyage toward heightened  
awareness and happiness!**



# **MindfulLiving™ Module 1: Simple Awareness**

## **Chapter 10**

### **What Would It Take for You to Be Still?**

**By Catherine Price Adapted by Shery Clein**

How can one learn to elongate time, quiet the inner chatter, and relish the gentle winds of life? Enter MindfulLiving™, one snow-capped mountain meditation at a time.

Embarking on the meditation journey seemed deceptively simple: wearing yoga pants, contorting legs into a semblance of a lotus position", and chanting "om" to attain tranquillity and euphoria. Disregard that my hips rebelled against such contortions or that achieving genuine serenity last required pharmaceutical assistance. Nonetheless, the allure of slowing life's frenetic pace proved irresistible.

Recently, life has felt like a whirlwind, with weekends blending into months and months morphing into seasons. I devour meals hastily, converse rapidly, and stride with urgency—sleep even seems to elude me swiftly. The art of remaining stationary appears almost foreign. While research suggests that fidgeting aids in calorie burning, offering a silver lining, I realise I'm missing out on savouring life's finer moments.

MindfulLiving™, which emphasises present-moment awareness, holds promise in aiding my quest to decelerate. Eager to commence, I sought guidance from the originator, Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn pioneered an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course in 1979, the foremost and most enduring global meditation-based clinical program.

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There are numerous meditation techniques available, so why did I choose MindfulLiving™? Two reasons stood out. First, I appreciated its secular approach; while rooted in Buddhist principles, it doesn't necessitate prior knowledge of Buddhism. Second, as someone inclined to understand the rationale behind my actions, especially when they're challenging, I value the scientific evidence supporting their efficacy. MBSR boasts a consistent curriculum and stands as one of the world's most researched forms of meditation.

Kabat-Zinn recommended initiating my practice at home with one or two guided exercises lasting 20 to 45 minutes six days a week (even meditators need a day off). Emphasising the importance of clarifying one's motivation before starting, Kabat-Zinn warned that without clear intentions, one may be tempted to abandon the practice prematurely. He suggested I commence with what he deemed an accessible starting point: the mountain meditation visualisation. Loading my iPod with the 20-minute exercise, I settled into an upright position on the floor or a chair, closed my eyes, and focused on breathing while envisioning a mountain. Initially, I observed its minute details—the trees adorning its slopes, perhaps a dusting of snow atop its peak—and gradually endeavoured to embody the mountain, sensing its resilience and stability amidst the elements. (Metaphors are a favourite tool among meditation instructors.)

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The objective of the mountain meditation mirrors that of every other mindfulness technique—whether you're honing in on an image, your breath, or sensations in your body, the aim is to guide your mind into what Kabat-Zinn terms a state of non-doing. This doesn't equate to idleness. Instead, it entails abstaining from ruminating over your to-do list, dissecting last night's conversation with a friend, or fretting about the report awaiting completion on your desk at work. Nor does it involve attempting to blank out your mind or summon specific emotions. Instead, you focus on a single point, embracing each moment as it unfolds, striving to embody the ethos of being present—echoing the sentiments of Van Halen, to be "right here, right now."

How does envisioning yourself as a mountain relate to experiencing the present moment? Consider it akin to strength training. By mastering the art of quieting the constant chatter of your mind and fixating solely on your mental Rockies, you cultivate the concentration essential for remaining present beyond your meditation sessions. The essence lies in evading the autopilot mode of existence, where you're so enmeshed in the routine of daily life that you fail to appreciate the world around you. "Mindfulness is about living your life as if it mattered," asserts Kabat-Zinn. "If you're not mentally present in the small moments, you could miss half your life."

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If non-doing seems straightforward, I challenge you to allocate 20 minutes and attempt the mountain exercise firsthand. Soon enough, your mountain—perhaps more akin to a label on an Evian bottle than Mount Everest—will dissipate, giving way to a stream of free associations. A mountain triggers thoughts of skiing, which segues into memories of a family vacation, then onto plans for the weekend, prompting a realisation about an overdue email to a friend inviting you to dinner on Saturday. Suddenly, you're not on the floor embodying a mountain but on the bed, berating yourself for the wandering of your mind—a departure from the very essence of mindfulness. And just like that, you're disconnected from the present moment and guilty of one of mindfulness's cardinal sins: self-reproach for succumbing to distraction. (The moment judgment creeps in, mindfulness dissipates.) Though Kabat-Zinn didn't explicitly state this, it's safe to assume that mindfulness exercises should not involve expletives.



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After several days of attempting to embody a mountain (and, in another exercise, a lake), I realised I lacked a strong visual imagination. Unable to conjure up an image of a mountain, let alone sustain focus on it for 20 minutes, I improvised by visualising my breath ascending through my body and exiting through the crown of my head—a technique that proved effective until I inadvertently transformed my serene snowy peak into a bubbling volcano. With Kabat-Zinn's approval, I transitioned to a meditation practice that I hoped would align more with my natural inclinations: The Body Scan. Integral to the MBSR course, this exercise entails dedicating 45 minutes to meticulously directing attention up and down the body, striving to attune to each part's sensations. Commencing from the left big toe, unfortunately, in my case, it often concluded there—as Kabat-Zinn frequently emphasises, while mastering the art of "falling awake" (connecting with the present moment) proves challenging, succumbing to sleep during meditation is all too easy.

Nevertheless, I persisted. I relished the challenge of taming my wandering mind, buoyed by the intriguing findings indicating that MBSR yields benefits beyond mere mental focus. In a 2003 study by scientists from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, participants who had completed Kabat-Zinn's eight-week course exhibited heightened immune responses to flu shots, producing more antibodies in response to the vaccine than non-meditators. Similarly, a 1998 study at the University of Massachusetts revealed that psoriasis patients who meditated during ultraviolet treatments for their skin experienced fourfold faster healing than the control group, irrespective of their prior meditation experience.

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Researchers strive to understand the underlying mechanisms behind these observed changes comprehensively. However, one plausible explanation is that this form of meditation diminishes stress levels and fosters a more positive mindset, which is known to fortify the body's immune system.

Moreover, according to Norman Farb, a researcher specialising in meditation and experimental psychology at the University of Toronto, mindfulness-based meditation has the potential to reshape our brain's functioning. Farb posits that individuals (like your average non-meditating American) typically react to new stimuli and experiences reflexively, guided by preconceived notions of how these will impact them. For instance, a traffic jam isn't merely congestion of vehicles but a looming hindrance to punctuality, triggering stress upon encountering a sea of brake lights. Similarly, a pair of sneakers obstructing the doorway isn't merely discarded footwear but an inconvenience waiting to trip us up, potentially leading to frustration directed at our spouses upon stumbling over them. In essence, we don't merely perceive; we assess—and subsequently, react instinctively (traffic congestion = prolonged commute = discontent).

Take Care  
OF  
YOURSELF

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Typically, this narrative processing occurs in the medial prefrontal cortex, situated in the brain behind the centre of the forehead, governing intricate behaviours and thoughts. (It's also the region activated when your mind wanders.) Attempting to suppress this default mode of thinking is akin to coercing yourself into hitting the gym after years of sedentary living. Sure, you could push through a step aerobics class if necessary, but wouldn't lounge on the couch with a bag of Doritos be more appealing?

Farb's research reveals that individuals who have undergone the eight-week MBSR training can activate an entirely distinct brain region—the insula. Nestled deep within the grey matter, the insula provides a real-time awareness of present experiences devoid of emotional attachments. When operating in this mode, a traffic jam ceases to be a source of frustration; it's simply a collection of vehicles on the road.



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The essence of meditation lies not in eradicating emotional responses to life's events but in refraining from reacting solely out of ingrained habits. Each circumstance presents an invitation to respond in a particular manner, yet mindfulness allows deliberating on how to RSVP. Does encountering bumper-to-bumper traffic necessitate succumbing to stress, or could those extra 20 minutes serve as an opportunity to indulge in a favourite CD? (Even mentioning "bumper-to-bumper" incites a spike in my heart rate, signalling room for improvement.) Is it worth allowing frustration over misplaced sneakers to translate into anger toward my spouse, or might I express gratitude for his assistance with laundry folding instead? Conversely, when presented with a reason to celebrate—a new promotion, for instance—mindfulness enables one to savour the moment more profoundly. Whether an experience is positive or negative, mindfulness reinforces that one retains agency over one's reactions.

Nonetheless, Kabat-Zinn cautioned against anticipating miraculous transformations during meditation or expecting them to evoke feelings of enjoyment consistently—a caveat that resonated with me whenever irritation or discomfort arose during my daily practice. He also emphasised that meditation is not a quick-fix solution; cultivating and sustaining mindfulness is a lifelong endeavour.

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As I continued engaging with the guided exercises daily, I was gratified to observe their increasing accessibility. Along the way, I developed practical techniques for integrating mindfulness into my daily life—such as pausing to take a few deliberate breaths to anchor myself in the present moment or focusing on a specific sense. Moreover, I endeavoured to adopt a nonjudgmental stance towards my wandering mind, recognising, as Kabat-Zinn articulates, that halting the stream of thoughts is akin to stopping the ocean's waves. Instead, I learned to observe my thoughts without becoming entangled and tap into the tranquillity beneath the surface.

By honing my ability to sustain focus during these exercises, I've improved my capacity to remain present in moments beyond meditation. Consequently, I've come to realise that each day brims with rich experiences—the caress of a gentle breeze against my skin, the gentle illumination of sunlight on the grass, the infectious laughter of my husband—and that by simply acknowledging them, I can elongate the perception of time. Whenever my mind races ahead or the temptation to forgo my daily practice arises, I recall another insightful aphorism from Kabat-Zinn—one that reaffirms my commitment to this ongoing experiment: In both a literal and metaphorical sense, life consists of fleeting moments to cherish.

Catherine Price is a freelance journalist and the author of *101 Places Not to See Before You Die* (Harper Paperbacks).

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**Thank you for embarking on this journey with us!**

Your dedication and commitment to personal growth are truly commendable. Remember, challenges are opportunities in disguise, and you can overcome any obstacle with the proper support. I am here to guide you every step of the way.

As you delve into the MindfulLiving™ experience, savour each moment and embrace the journey. By nurturing a deeper connection with yourself and your surroundings, you'll discover newfound joy and fulfilment in every aspect of life.

Should you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me. You can reach me via WhatsApp at +27824588151 or email at [shery@sheryclein.com](mailto:shery@sheryclein.com).

**Wishing you abundant blessings,  
health, and safety on your path.**

