

# Chapter 4

## **Leisure, Flow, Mindfulness, and Peak Performance**

# Leisure

- Finding ways to amuse ourselves
- Leisure activities...what do you enjoy?
- Life satisfaction and well-being



# Leisure

## Leisure and Well-Being

- Having more time is more important than having more money...*time affluence*
- Variety of leisure activities and participation in active leisure activities...higher life satisfaction
  - Exercise, mindfulness meditation can decrease depression, anxiety
- Associated with greater indices of well-being
- Having leisure time does not automatically increase our well-being
  - Active
  - Meaningful
  - Life experiences (rather than making purchases)

# Leisure

What Turns an Activity into “Leisure?”

- Highest-ranked reasons
  - Fulfill needs for autonomy
  - Enjoyment of family life
  - Relaxation
  - Offers escape from routine
- Important for a sense of well-being and life satisfaction

# Leisure

What Turns an Activity into “Leisure?”

- Core Psychological Mechanisms
  - Detachment-recovery
    - Detach from responsibilities, recover from stress
  - Autonomy
  - Mastery
  - Meaning
  - Affiliation with others
- Summary: Leisure is important for a sense of well-being and life satisfaction

# Flow and Optimal Experience

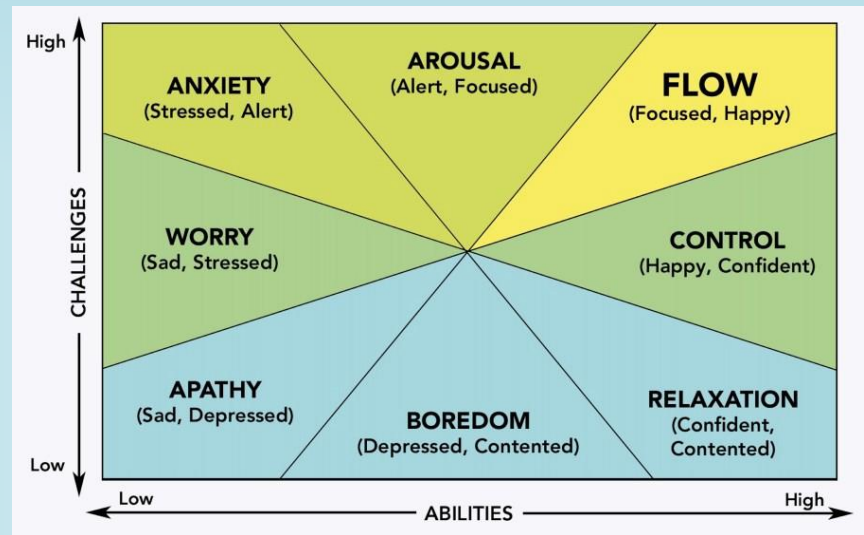
## Definition of Flow

- Flow: A state in which action follows upon action
  - aka *in the zone*
- The holistic sensation
- Percentage of people who have had very intense flow experiences is much smaller
- Link between flow and psychological well-being

# Flow and Optimal Experience

## Characteristics of Flow

- State of flow described using 8 parameters
- Flow accompanies a challenging activity that requires skill



# Flow and Optimal Experience

## Characteristics of Flow

1. Merging of action and awareness
2. Intense and focused concentration
3. Greater sense of control
4. A loss of self-consciousness



# Flow and Optimal Experience

## Characteristics of Flow

5. Distortion of temporal experience

6. Autotelic nature of the experience (process is intrinsically motivating)

## Conditions Under Which Flow is More Likely:

7. Challenge-skill

8. Activity provides clear goals and immediate feedback

# Flow and Optimal Experience

## Contexts and Situations of Flow

- Contexts: religious rituals, teaching, family interactions, cramming, online learning, psychotherapy, military combat, sports, exercise, reading, music
- Flow experiences may be the key to job satisfaction
  - Work engagement
    - Vigor
    - Dedication
    - Absorption
- Allows people to enjoy life, feel happier, and function better

# Flow and Optimal Experience

Contexts and Situations of Flow: Is Flow a State or a Trait?

- If flow is a state
  - A state of consciousness that can occur to anyone with the same amount of effort given the right circumstances
- If flow is a trait (dispositional flow)
  - There should be innate differences in how easily individuals can experience flow
    - Some twin research suggests flow proneness related to genetically linked personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience

# Flow and Optimal Experience

## Flow and Subjective Well-Being

- Research on flow began with asking people about moments of well-being
- Study relationships between being in frequent flow experiences and increased well-being
  - Flow is a significant component of leisure activities, so in this way flow is related to leisure and satisfaction
  - Flow related to intrinsically motivated activities...keep repeated activities that produce flow (even though they receive no recognition or money to do so)

# Flow and Optimal Experience

Flow and Subjective Well-Being: Measurement  
Assessment questionnaire is designed to  
measure flow as a state or as a trait

- Flow State Scale–2
- Dispositional Flow Scale–2
- Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

# Flow and Optimal Experience

## Comments on the Theory of Flow

- Not all studies have supported the predictions of the flow theory
- Flow experience is not always present in a specific activity
- If flow activity is present, it may not be present throughout the duration of the activity
- Flow is fostered by intrinsic interest in and curiosity about the task

# Mindfulness

- Conscious awareness
- Open, receptive attitude
- Impact telomerase activity and may thus optimize health and longevity
- A tool applied in numerous areas to enhance well-being

# Mindfulness

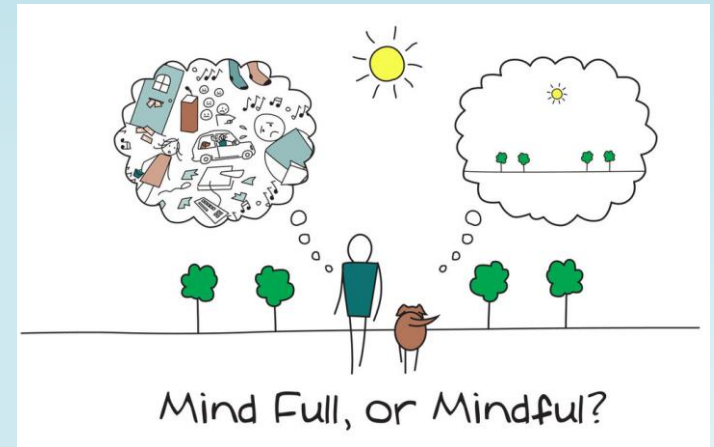
- Meta-Analysis: Benefits of Mindfulness
  - Improving mental health
  - Better work performance
  - Improved student performance
  - Better health
  - Increased creativity
  - Improved weight loss
  - Enhanced athletic performance
  - Better financial reasoning



# Mindfulness

# Ellen Langer's Approach to Mindfulness

- Mindlessness
  - Automatic pilot
  - Roots in habits, premature cognitive commitments to categories, and focus on goals rather than on immediate processes



# Mindfulness

## Ellen Langer's Approach to Mindfulness

- Represents a cognitive style that centers on:
  - Awareness
  - Quality of attention in everyday experiences
- Experience world with fresh eyes and ears

# Mindfulness

## Ellen Langer's Approach to Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is “a flexible state of mind—an openness to novelty, a process of actively drawing novel distinctions. When we are mindful, we are sensitive to context and perspective; we are situated in the present”

# Mindfulness

## Ellen Langer's Approach to Mindfulness

- Mindfulness comprises three core qualities
  - Create new categories of experience
  - Be open to new information
  - See more than one point of view

# Mindfulness

- Buddhist-Inspired Mindfulness



**Do not dwell in the past, do not  
dream of the future, concentrate  
the mind on the present moment.**

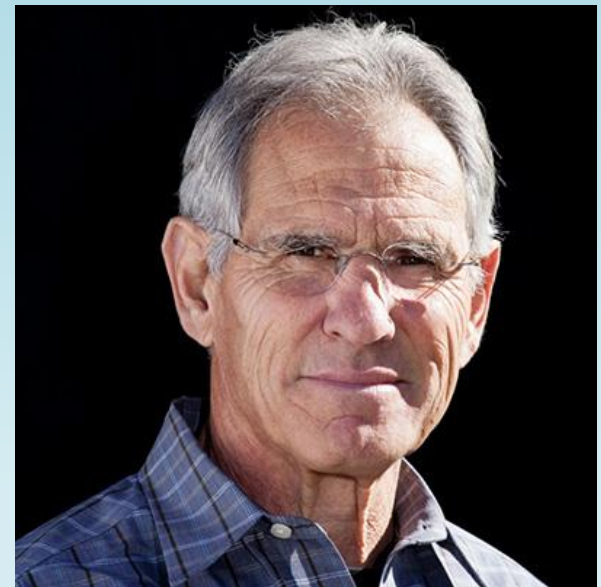
Buddha



# Mindfulness

## Jon Kabat-Zin

- Professor Emeritus and creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School
- The practice has moved from a largely obscure Buddhist concept founded about 2,600 years ago to a mainstream psychotherapy construct today ([apa.org](http://apa.org))



*Mindfulness*

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MEANS PAYING  
ATTENTION IN A  
PARTICULAR WAY,  
ON PURPOSE, IN THE  
PRESENT MOMENT  
NON-JUDGMENTALLY.

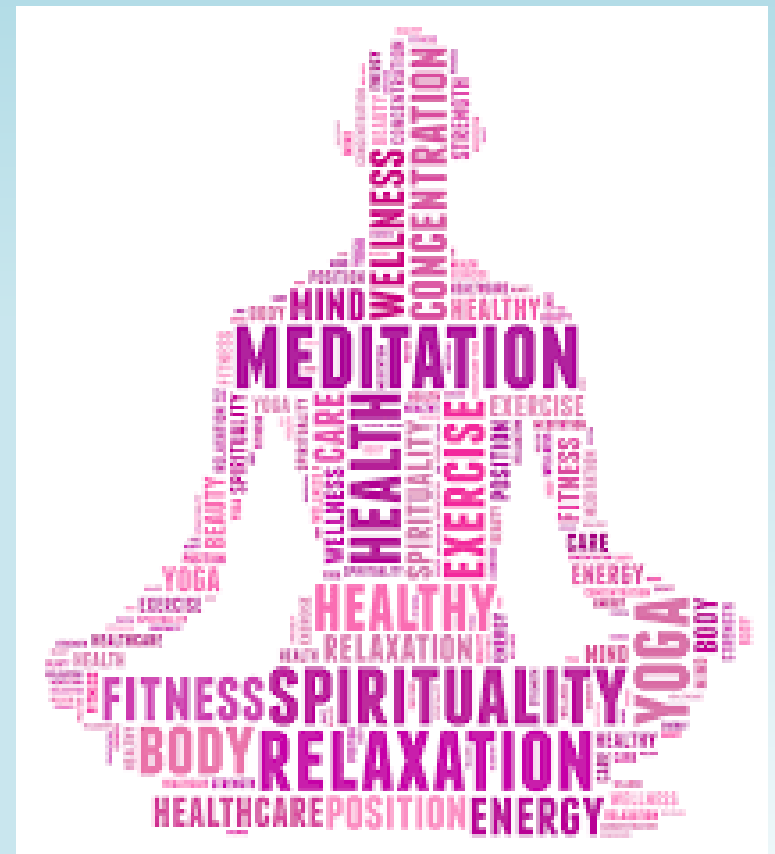
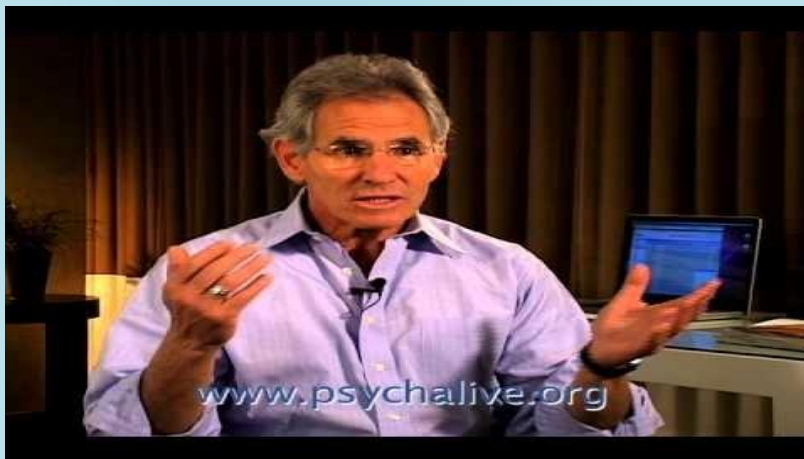
WWW.VERYBESTQUOTES.COM

JON KABAT-ZINN



# What is Mindfulness

## Jon Kabat Zinn



# Mindfulness

## Buddhist-Inspired Mindfulness

- Meditative practices have included a practice called mindfulness
- Buddhist-inspired style of mindfulness consists of three core elements:
  - Intention (commitment and dedication to meditation practice)
  - Attention (observing the contents of one's experience)
  - Attitude (how a person pays attention to experience)

# The Practice of Meditation

- A way to come to experience more fully moment-by-moment existence by encountering the mind directly
- Involves increasing awareness of the body (sensations), emotions, thoughts, the mind, and mental qualities

West, M.A. (2016). The practice of meditation. In *The Psychology of Meditation: Research and Practice*, Oxford University Press.

# Mindfulness

- Mindfulness Meditation
- Daily Mindfulness



# Aims of Meditation

- To increase non-reactive awareness, though more acute to events and experiences
  - Meditation offers a means of opening to or connecting with all experience, whether positive, negative, or neutral in a (relatively) unfiltered, unprocessed way
- To reduce suffering as a consequence of this greater openness, through reduced reactivity to experience and increasing well-being

West, M.A. (2016). The practice of meditation. In *The Psychology of Meditation: Research and Practice*, Oxford University Press.

# John Kabat-Zinn

## Elements of Mindfulness Practice

- Awareness
  - All possible experiences: sensations, thoughts, emotions, sights, sounds
- Sustained Attention
  - Involves gently but firmly bringing attention back to the current moment
- Focus on the Present Moment
- Non-Judgmental Acceptance
  - Not labeling or reacting to experience as good/bad, desirable/undesirable

West, M.A. (2016). The practice of meditation. In *The Psychology of Meditation: Research and Practice*, Oxford University Press.

# Mindfulness Meditation Basics

- Take a good seat
  - Pay attention to the breath
  - When your attention wanders, return to your breath
- (Simple, but not necessarily easy)





# Breath Concentration Metaphor

- We are trying to rest our attention on an object, such as our breath, and use it like an anchor of a boat
- The anchor is there to ensure that the boat does not drift away but the boat is not motionless
- So, we are not trying to stop thinking, feeling, or sensing
- Trying to develop a different relationship to them by using the breath as an anchor to ensure that our thoughts do not carry us too far away from the present moment

Batchlor, M. (2016). Meditation: Practice and experience.  
In *The Psychology of Meditation: Research and Practice*.  
In West, M.A. (editor). Oxford University Press.



# How Do I Begin?

## **Mindful.org Suggestions**

- Koru app or [korumindfulness.org](http://korumindfulness.org)
- Insight Timer
- Aura
- Omvana
- Stop, Breathe, Think
- Calm

## **Web Suggestions**

- The Mindfulness App
- Headspace
- MINDBODY
- Buddhify
- Smiling Mind
- Meditation Timer Pro

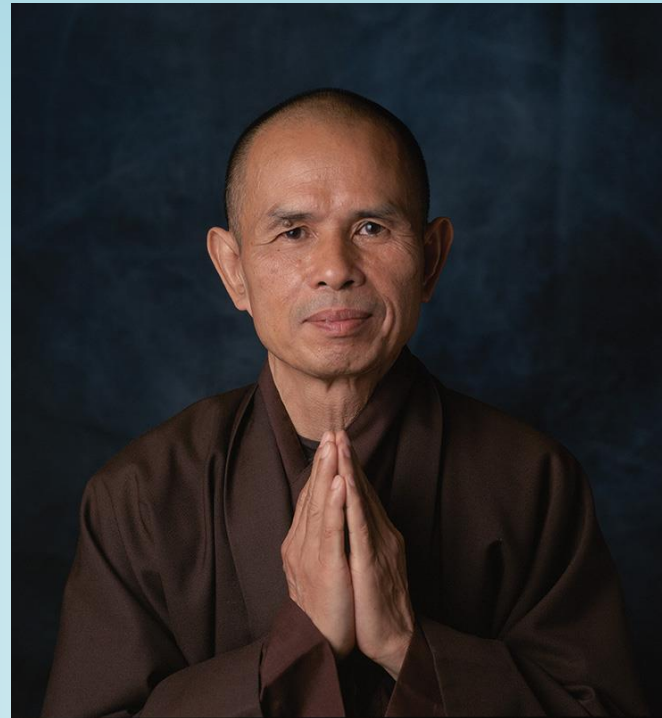
# Links

- <https://korumindfulness.org/>
- <https://www.mindful.org/>

# Koru Guided Meditations

- Breath Awareness
- Belly Breathing
- Body Scan
- Gatha
- Walking  
Meditation
- Guided Imagery
- Labeling Thoughts
- Labeling Feelings

# Thich Nhat Hanh



# Mindfulness

## Buddhist-Inspired Mindfulness: Why Does Mindfulness Increase Well-Being?

- Increases a metacognitive perspective
- Mindfulness allows decentering
  - Evaluate consciousness with less reactivity
- Reduce intense reactivity to highly arousing and emotional stimuli
- Processing of emotional material

# Mindfulness

## Langer Style

- New knowledge gained from being more mindful is used to create new ways of thinking about one's life
- Increase happiness and life satisfaction by fostering a more stable and positive sense of self-identity

## Buddhist Style

- Awareness of ongoing experience while creating an attitude of calm detachment from the experience
- Places greater emphasis on equanimity, peace of mind, contentment, and compassion (mainly by decreasing focus on self-identity)

# Savoring

- Awareness of pleasure and focus attention on the sensation and delight in it



# Savoring

- Four basic types of savoring:
  - Basking
    - Receiving praise and congratulations
  - Marveling
    - Getting lost in the wonder of a moment
  - Luxuriating
    - Indulging in a sensation
  - Thanksgiving
    - Expressing gratitude



# Savoring

- Five Ways to Enhance/Promote Savoring
  - Absorption
  - Sharpening the senses
  - Memory building
    - Take pictures, buy souvenirs
  - Sharing with others
  - Self-congratulation

# Peak Performance

- Performing in flow does not always translate into better performance
- Peak performance: Performing beyond our normal level of functioning

# Peak Performance

- Peak performance can be described by four parameters
  - Clear focus on self, object, and relationship.
  - Intense involvement in the experience.
  - A strong intention to complete a task.
  - A spontaneous expression of power.

# Peak Performance

## Peak Performance in Sports

- Being in flow does not necessarily have a peak performance
- Key to peak performance
  - Is to maintain a clear focus on both self and object and maintain a strong sense of self in relationship with the object. Peak performance is most often found in activities that a person is deeply involved, committed, absorbed, or emotionally connected with.

# Peak Performance

Peak Performance in Sports:

Peak Performance in Elite Athletes

- Garfield and Bennet found eight conditions when actual performance was at its best
- 90% of athletic success may be due to psychological factors