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# Happiness & Mindfulness: A Light-Hearted Guide

**Dr. Melanie Harth**

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## Gratitude

This book is possible because of the many beloved clients who've taught me everything I know about how to live from happiness.

Each of you has been, and continues to be, a sweet blessing in my life.

Thank you so much.

I'm also very grateful for those times of deep misery in my own life ... the ones that forced me into my first meditation workshop, and opened the doorway into choosing to live from happiness.

Without you, I wouldn't be who I am today.

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in any way you choose.

With thanks to Leo Babauta of ZenHabits for inspiring  
this open-hearted sharing.

And, as Leo says,  
“Attribution is appreciated, but not required.”

## About the Author

Melanie Harth, PhD, MA, LMHC, RMT, is a psychologist-trained transformational coach, writer, and happiness expert.

She's on a life-long quest to share what she's learned about how to deal with tough challenges, and embrace living the biggest possible life.

In her work as a transformational coach, she uses the science of happiness, spirituality, and creativity.

Melanie writes about mindfulness for The Huffington Post, Tiny Buddha, and on her own website: [www.DrMelanieHarth.com](http://www.DrMelanieHarth.com).

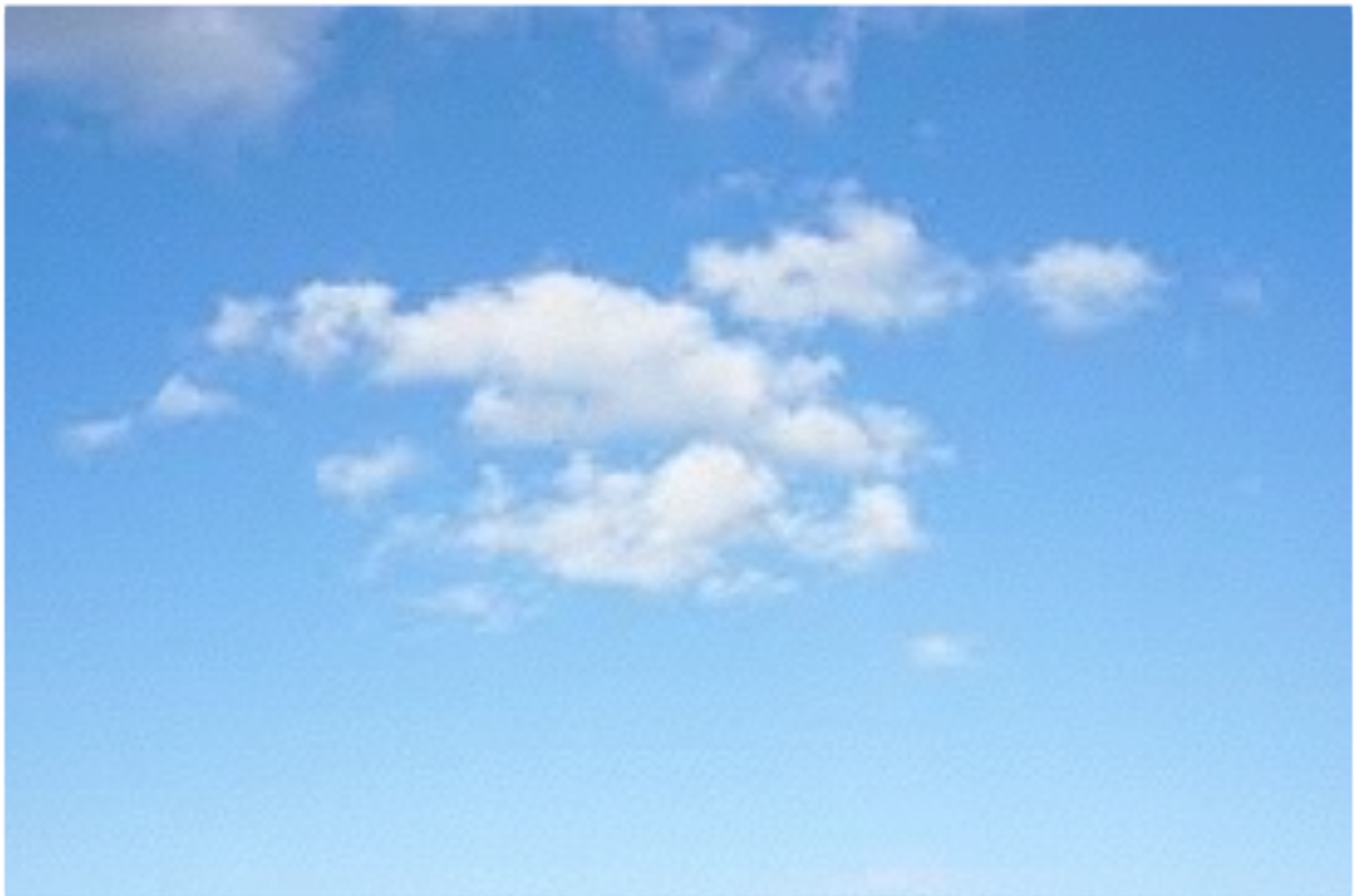
She's a long-time meditator. Teachers include Dr. Reginald Ray; Boulder CO: Tibetan Buddhism; Michelle DuVal, Albuquerque NM, 8-week on-site MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction); Amma, on-site retreats.

She's writing a book called "Living From Happiness." She lives in Santa Fe, loves the TV show *Nashville*, and is a dedicated beach bum wannabe.

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*Chapter 1*  
Mindfulness, Dorothy, and That  
Yellow Brick Road



## Can You Say “Miserable?”

I first learned how to cultivate a sitting meditation practice during a time in my personal and professional lives when I was in serious doubt that I’d be able to make it through another day of grinding misery.

Mindlessly having made decisions based on what others wanted me to do, I was left holding the bag. And it was a big bag of nasty stuff, can I just tell you?

I was so desperate that I signed up for a weekend beginning meditation workshop, with the Tibetan Buddhist scholar and teacher Dr. Reginald Ray, in Boulder, CO.

What to say? It changed my life.

Not to point fingers or anything, but Dorothy was pretty mindless in the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz*, too, wasn’t she?

Abandoned, lost, hanging out with a gang of losers lacking in heart, brains and courage, none of them had enough awareness to find what they thought they needed.

*Self-awareness, mindfulness — paying attention with nuance and finesse — was the true gift of the treasure hunt through the land of Oz.*

## It's a Treasure Hunt

Simply put, happiness begins with learning how to pay attention. It's a treasure hunt, first inward into ourselves and then back out, connecting with the world. It's about getting mindful about what we want.

Les Hixon, in his classic exploration, *Coming Home: The Experience of Enlightenment in Sacred Traditions*, speaks of how contemplative awareness -- mindfulness -- isn't achieved through any special trance or altered state of consciousness.

Rather, we all have a quiet, wise mind inside. We just need to get rid of some less-than-helpful thinking to hear it, as Dorothy and the guys needed to do in order to achieve their goals. Simple.

Grounded in a special, nuanced awareness, mindfulness teaches us how to be awake and aware of our right-this-minute reality.

Given that most of us spend tremendous amounts of ...

- time,
- energy, and
- money

... trying to be anywhere other than where we are, developing a sensitivity to the landscapes of our lives can seem just too hard.

We don't know how to do it. And it's still a bit weird, too, isn't it? A little New Age, crystal-mama, left-coast ... .

Now. Notice what you're thinking about the previous sentence. Are you agreeing? Chuckling? Ready to toss this book away?



Notice the thoughts. That's how mindful awareness starts.

Another one of the treasures of mindfulness is that we begin to learn that our thoughts are usually nothing more than thoughts. *It's too hard, or, I don't know how, or it/s/he is weird.*

Our thoughts most decidedly are not reality, most of the time.

With mindful awareness, you can begin to wonder about how hard it really is. "It" can be enjoying good relationships, having work that satisfies *and* pays the bills, experiencing peace while you're rested enough to enjoy it.

## 5 Hot Mindfulness Treasure-Hunting Tips

### 1. Use the Lusciousness of Your Desires

Your desires will help get you back home, to yourself. Because mindfulness is all about living large. Deep passion, felt sensuousness, true intimacy. Every minute.

Being alive — right here, right now — is the good stuff. *Everyone* in Oz wanted the good stuff, which begins with desire.

Cultivate awareness of the lusciousness of your own desires, and you're on your way.

## **2. Find Your Own Yellow Brick Road**

Mindfulness is usually easiest to learn through sitting meditation. But there are plenty of other ways to do it.

*Any* kind of meditation will begin unlocking more treasure, even if it's how much you think you hate it.

- Try a beginning meditation class at the gym.
- Listen to free, super-simple guided meditations from one of my favorites, Dr. Tara Brach, at [www.tarabrach.com](http://www.tarabrach.com).
- Download a free meditation app.
- Process journaling, making Zentangles, any form of process art/dancing/drumming ... all ways to meditate.

## **3. Come to Your Senses**

Use your five senses to teleport back into the actual present moment, no matter what you're doing.

What colors do you see? Is there a smell? What can you feel touching your skin? Is the air warm, scorching, or cool? Anything you're tasting? Sounds you're noticing?

Treasures lay all around you.

## 4. Shock Yourself Into Silence

Turn off your car radio or keep those ear buds tucked away. The initial shock of not having the radio or iPod on is, for many, quite surprising.

Watch how many times in the space of two minutes your hand involuntarily moves toward the On button.

Get more aware of unconscious, learned patterns of coping with life, and you start getting pretty dangd mindful.

## 5. That Over-the-Rainbow Thing

*“Someplace where there isn't any trouble ... do you suppose there is such a place, Toto? There must be.”*

Nope. I stay busy with clients who are still looking for the place without any trouble. No such place.

You take your power back as soon as you begin getting real, and settle into yourself, as Dorothy ultimately did. Which, paradoxically, brings you back home, to your inner self, with interior rooms brimming over with lustrous treasures.

### It's Simple

These simple tools can help you get started on the ultimate treasure hunt, where self-awareness and happiness reign, and conscious choices begin rocking your world. Rather than the more common suffering-is-all mindset.

When we've lost the connection with our happiness, we suffer.

My intense suffering back in Boulder, and my desperation to feel differently, brought me to meditation. Which led me back to the kingdom of happiness.

Dorothy's suffering was the tornado that landed her in the Wizard's inner chamber, and ultimately back to Kansas.

As Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the grand teachers of mindfulness in the US, said in a recent interview, "All the suffering, stress, and addiction comes from not realizing you already are what you are looking for."<sup>1</sup>

Dorothy and her gang had the guts to keep on keepin' on, through their fears and self-defeating ideas based on those fears.

Thereby attaining all they had ever wanted, forever and ever.

*Questions? Comments? Reactions? Send me a quick email, and let's chat.  
melanie@melanieharth.com.*

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/omega-institute-for-holistic-studies/jon-kabat-zinn\\_b\\_1936784.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/omega-institute-for-holistic-studies/jon-kabat-zinn_b_1936784.html)

*Chapter 2*  
Happiness and Mindfulness:  
*Just-Right Tips From Goldilocks*



## What Would You Like?

In order to talk about happiness, you need to spend a little time with yourself, thinking about:

- what you like and want,
- why it matters, and
- how often you're getting what you want.

Here's a good definition of happiness:

“Martin Seligman, one of the leading researchers in positive psychology and author of *Authentic Happiness*, describes happiness as having three parts: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. Pleasure is the “feel good” part of happiness. Engagement refers to living a “good life” of work, family, friends, and hobbies. Meaning refers to using our strengths to contribute to a larger purpose. Seligman says that all three are important, but that of the three, engagement and meaning make the most difference to living a happy life.”<sup>2</sup>

When you're “engaged,” you've got:

- good, supportive, friends instead of ones who bring you down;
- intimate relationships that are mutually nurturing and equally satisfying;
- decent work that's fulfilling most of the time;
- creative or physically fun stuff you do more than once a year.

Along with thinking about how engaged you are in your life, you can begin exploring whether or not there's meaning enough for you to want to get out of bed in the mornings (at least most of the time).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/happiness/what-happiness>

Honestly? A lot of people are missing this piece about being connected with something that matters to someone else.

And when *meaning* is missing, life really can be a big fat drag.

## The Stakes are High

The good news is that mindfulness — the nuanced, subtle quality of how you use your mind to pay attention — is the foundation upon which you can create a life of real happiness.

Because the truth is, you're way more in control of your life than you think you are. Don't have enough engagement? Start changing things, just a tiny bit, to get more.

Confused about how it feels when you're engaged with life as a full participant rather than standing on the sidelines wishing you were in the game? Start right there. That's easy.

Not enough meaning and purpose? Same thing.

So, really ... the first question is, what do you want? *You*.

Not what you were told to want when you were little. Not what your social set or peers or colleagues think you're *supposed* to want. Not what contemporary culture says you *should* be wanting.

I ask each of my beloved clients, *What is it that you want?* 98% of them cannot answer. No idea. Just yesterday, a wonderful young woman -- full of intelligence and talents and job success -- spent 30 minutes talking about struggling with a simple decision, and how

hard it is to be told by everyone how selfish she is to even consider not doing it *their* way.

Guess what? The only life you can live is yours. Not the one they think you should be living.

Christopher Edgar explains:

“[People] get uncomfortable talking or thinking about what they want. ... . They’ve learned it’s unsafe or shameful for them to even consider what they want. They’ve gotten used to being called ‘selfish,’ ‘stupid,’ ‘crazy,’ and other epithets by people around them if they come clean about their wishes.”<sup>3</sup>

I promise, it isn’t selfish to think, talk about, and go after what you want. Just the opposite.

The stakes are high because we’re really talking about your life. Your here-and-now life, not the one you’ll begin living some distant future date.

## Just Ask Goldilocks

Goldilocks ... now *there’s* someone who knew exactly what she wanted and needed. She never settled for anything other than *just right*.

Porridge that was *just right*; a *just-right* chair; a bed neither too hard nor too soft.

Never once did she stop to call herself selfish.

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<sup>3</sup> *Inner Productivity: A Mindful Path to Efficiency and Enjoyment in Your Work*



*A simple mindfulness practice is one of the most powerful tools for understanding how to implement a just-right happiness philosophy.*

Let's use your work as an example. More accurately — you, in relationship to your work life.

Do you know what your *just right* feels like? Did you settle for the first chair you saw, squirming around on it, trying to make it workable when it's really way too hard or ridiculously too soft?

Do you like your job? Are you working in a career that's satisfying, and gratifying? Are you happy at work?

What about the people around you, your co-workers and colleagues? And bosses? Are they too hot, or too cold?

What do *you* want? Where is your *just right*? What makes you happy?

## **Conscious Choices Make all the Difference**

Perhaps right now you're telling yourself that I'm nuts. That there's no such thing as a *just-right* job or career. The very idea is for sissies, too stupid for manly men or 21st-century women to even consider.

Or that it doesn't matter, because you've got to pay the rent and buy the food and get the kids some clothes no matter what. Of course, those things matter!

Believe me, I understand they're everything when you don't have enough.

But it's so easy to forget that *how* you go about defining what's enough, paying the bills and getting basic needs met can be accomplished in a lot of different ways.

Don't sell yourself and your dreams out because you haven't been paying attention.

Don't be so caught up in other people's ideas about happiness and satisfaction that you never experience your own.

Here are seven just-right mindfulness ideas from Gretchen Rubin, author and happiness guru<sup>4</sup>, in a speech she gave at the 2013 World Domination Summit.

### **1. “Self-knowledge is the key to happiness.”**

Goldilocks sure knew herself, and she settled for nothing less than what worked for her.

Mindful awareness of who you are, and what you need, are the keys to the kingdom of happiness.

### **2. “When we acknowledge the truth of who we really are, we have to also acknowledge the truth of who we are not, and who we will never be.”**

This is a huge one. Our culture is based, in part, on the belief that you can do anything, if you just work hard enough. But Goldilocks knew she had a *just right*.

She didn't work hard, she worked smart.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gretchenrubin.com/>

The too-tall chair wasn't right. OK. No worries. *Next?*

Nothing wrong with a too-tall or too-small chair, it's just that neither was *her* thing.

And, very importantly for mindful awareness, she didn't judge herself because neither was her thing.

It's incredibly liberating to acknowledge who we are not. Because then we can mindfully pour all our efforts into who we *are*.

Thereby living happily ever after.

**3. “There’s no right or wrong. It’s only a matter of working with what you’ve got.”**

This is the mindful path toward happiness — in business, in relationships. In experiencing joy and pleasure and sorrow. In living your life now, as it is.

Mindful living is done by working with what you've got. Not by judging yourself as inadequate or wrong. Nor in selling yourself out.

Rather, start wherever you are, and work with what you've got.

**4. “It’s very easy to lose track of what’s true about ourselves.”**

What are you not yet willing to acknowledge to yourself about what's true? Are you desperate to be a writer? A fireman? A ballerina? Billionaire? Happy?

You can't go for it if you don't even know what your truth is.

Can I just tell you? I don't know a better way to hear my own truth than by cultivating a mindful awareness practice.

I've tried a few other things. And I've spent a *ridiculous* amount of my life being clueless; wasting time and energy; losing money; missing engagement. Not feeling the good stuff because I've lost track of my truth.

*Mindful awareness has been my yellow brick road,  
back home to myself.*

As the mindfulness teacher, Joseph Goldstein, said, "Mindfulness isn't a hobby. It's a way of life." It helps us remember who we are, what we want, how we're feeling, and what's needed to course-correct when necessary.

**5. "We can build a happy life *only* on the foundation of our own natures, our own values, our own interests."**

Cultivating the practice of mindful awareness is all we need to do in order to build the foundation. It's the wellspring of self-awareness.

Mindfulness doesn't ask us to change who we are, or what we love. Just the opposite — it very gently guides us into becoming who we have been all along.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> from *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*, Rick Hanson PhD

**6. “The thing is ... there’s no right or wrong answer. There’s no right or wrong approach.”**

All you need to do is to be aware of what works for you. That’s it. Easy, right?

**7. “To take the time to understand ourselves is really the biggest adventure of our whole life!”**

Build your life around what is true for you. Sit in your *just-right* chair, eat your *just-right* porridge, sleep in your *just-right* bed.

Truly, what bigger adventure could you possibly imagine for yourself?

## *Chapter 3*

# *How Mindfulness Helps With Self-Awareness: 7 Ways to Groove With Your Practice*



## Feeling the Rhythm

As the inimitable Goldie Hawn asked, “Why not just live in the moment, especially if it has a good beat?”

Cultivating a mindful awareness practice helps you feel the rhythm of each day. And when you begin dancing with the moments of your life as they’re happening, well then ... all sorts of magic can happen.

The magic of mindfulness helps you get up. Get movin’. Groovin’, as it were.

### 7 Sweet Tips for Mindful Groovin’

**1.** In the song *Newborn*, **Joss Stone** talks about treating the day as a newborn baby, treating this moment as one never before felt. It’s a perfect description of mindful awareness.

In fact, no one moment is ever like any we’ve ever felt before. It’s a little astonishing when you think about it. And very cool.

**2. Soul Queen Aretha** urges us to let our minds go and let ourselves be free, in *Think*. Freedom from the tyranny of our tiny ego-driven thinking mind -- that which we usually believe is all of reality -- is possible with a mindful awareness practice.

As we learn to observe our mind, in effect letting it go, we reclaim ourselves moment by moment. By moment.

In that reclamation lies the possibility of freedom.

**3.** Times inevitably get bad, and we inevitably need someone to lean on, or someplace to lean into, as **Sam and Dave** (and many others) sang in *Lean on Me*.

We need sanctuary. Refuge. What might happen if you develop a practice of leaning on yourself, into your own deeper wisdom, for relief during the rough patches?

What if you understood that refuge is always available? It's right here, right now. As **Tara Brach**, Ph.D., says in *True Refuge: Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart*: "You realize that you can start right where you are, in the midst of your life, and find peace in any circumstance."

**4.** What about the place where everything is all right? **The Drifters** assured us that there's just such a place. For them, it was up on the roof.

Indeed, your mindfulness practice can become that place up on the roof. Your happy place.

The place where you remember, over and over again, that everything is all right. Where you learn you don't have to run away, or repress, or pretend yourself away, as so many of us do. As *I* have done.

We can learn to hold all of what life brings us. And in that lies true happiness.

**5. Mary J. Blige** reminds us that it's all about the trying. Trying to be whole, remembering that life itself is a work in progress (*Work in Progress*).



A mindful meditation practice helps with that work-in-progress thing, the one that's about being fully in our lives, no matter what. And it greatly supports our efforts toward health and wholeness.

Helping us feel complete. Happy.

**6.** In *Life Has a Way*, **Anthony Hamilton** sings that there is always more room -- to grow, to deepen, to more fully inhabit our lives.

Mindfulness helps us create more space, for more living. More of the good stuff ... and who doesn't want that?

**7. Soul Brothers Six** sang about something pretty wonderful in the hit *Some Kind of Wonderful*. Life *can* be some kind'a wonderful, in small moments every day, as we dance with the rhythms of it all.

Mindful awareness helps get us into the dance, loving every minute of it. If we don't do that, we miss it all.

## You Can't Think Your Way Home

Mindfulness is such a deceptively simple practice. Gotta dance with it to understand how it's all pretty wonderful. Because it's experiential, not intellectual.

It can help you:

- feel what you need, and
- see what's what.

Once you see what's what, you can take action. Action that comes from a deeper place of knowing, a more true and authentic realization of what matters, rather than the typical knee-jerk *what-ever*.

## Get up Offa' Your Thing

Sometimes the best action is to sing along with Aretha. To get up and dance. Just because. Because that's the invitation in the moment.

The benefits of mindfulness aren't all ponderous and weighty and Buddhist monk-y feeling things. It sweetens our moments, our days, our lives.

Gosh, what if we lived more in soulful attunement to the exquisite preciousness of life, as it presents itself moment by moment?

What if we get up offa' our things and dance till we felt better, all the while in rhythm with whatever is alive in those precious moments?

*Ummm ... we might be happier.*

*Note: this chapter was inspired by the film *The Sapphires*.*

## *Chapter 4*

# How Mindfulness Helps You Hear Your Story: *What Dolly Parton and Pema Chodron Have in Common*



## Just.Notice

“Find out who you are and do it on purpose,” said Dolly Parton. It’s another perfect description of mindfulness. Seems so simple, no?

Why, then, can it seem so difficult to simply be who we are, on purpose? Well, lots of things get in the way, beginning with our own ignorance of things as they actually are.

We’re masters of fantastical thinking. Good for creativity, not so much so when we use it to sleepwalk through our lives. The great news with mindfulness is that all we have to do is notice what we’re thinking and what we’re doing.

We start to pay attention. That’s it. There is absolutely no doing anything about anything. Just. Notice.

Here’s what I notice as I’m writing this chapter ... a true *vignette* (I swear). I’m trying to do a mindful-awareness yoga session in the living room (while taking notes for work and sending emails), with breakfast simmering on the stove (which has to be stirred), making a 2<sup>nd</sup> cup of coffee to drink (as I do yoga), petting the cat (who has a UTI and is extra-anxious).

*Done.* I notice what I notice. Anti-mindful behaviors. But, I notice it.

## What’s Your Story?

Once you can slow down enough to see what’s happening, the next step in mindful awareness is to notice what you’re telling yourself about what is happening. In the *vignette* of my mindless yoga, I’m not blaming myself for being ridiculous.

Instead, I'm noticing that my stress increases as each activity is added into the mixture. I'm aware that this isn't how I want to be feeling. I remind myself that there are different choices.

I slow down long enough to pay attention to what's happening. And then I start listening to what story I'm telling myself about it.

That's all.

Our journey to freedom begins in the noticing, slowing down enough to pay attention, using the foundation of mindful awareness to make conscious choices.

## The Quicksand of Our Ignorance

See, every *minute* we get to choose to live from either ignorance or awareness. We are offered the invitation to find out who we are.

We have the option of giving ourselves permission to be richly alive, or to make reactive choices from the quicksand of our own ignorance. For make no mistake, our own ignorance is quicksand that sucks us into its deceptively beautiful surface.

As another international teacher and wise-woman elder, the Tibetan nun Pema Chodron, said,

“The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*

## 5 How-To's for Freedom

### 1. Slow Down to Move Faster

Just for fun, just for five minutes, try doing only one thing at a time when you've got some quiet time. One client, several years ago, shared her surprised reaction at the radical idea of slowing down to move ahead.

*No. No can do. That's ridiculous,* she insisted. Once she settled into its possibilities, however, she was able to begin unhooking from fanciful ideas about what her life was actually like, and connecting with what she truly wanted for herself.

*[Note: If it's a deep-flow creative activity such as painting or dancing, it doesn't count; has to be a simple chore such as washing the dishes or reading the paper. Or eating.]*

### 2. Notice What You Notice

When you try to slow down, how do you react? What are you thinking? How judgmental, restless, impatient, bored, tired, sad are you?

Are you kind to yourself if you "failed?" How many times a day do you tell yourself you're failing?

What surprises you? Curiosity is your best friend right now.

### 3. Satisfy Those Desires for Abundance and Prosperity

Another client recently explained how he deals with bingeing on way too much: "If I don't pay attention to how much I'm doing it, I can pretend it isn't happening."

*Ummm ... doesn't work that way.* Until we stop pretending our lives away, we continue to reach for what we don't want, for what does not satisfy. For poverty, really.

As we learn to develop the courage to be gentle with ourselves, as Pema Chodron said, it becomes so much easier to tell the truth about what we desire, how we define abundance, clearly see what may or may not be fulfilling those desires.

What's one thing you're pretending about right now? Just one. Just notice it. Then notice what you're telling yourself about it.

#### **4. Stand on the Ground**

Where's your (metaphorical) ground? Is it made of ideas from other people? Fear? Is it solid and long-lasting, based on real self-knowledge ... or more space-cadet pretense?

Without the ground of self-awareness, we are walking on clouds. Very tough to do without wings.

#### **5. Go Big by Starting Small**

Take five minutes in the morning with your first cup of coffee to do mini Morning Pages (from Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*).

Sit down. Start writing. Just go with whatever shows up. If nothing, then write "nothing" for five minutes. [*Note: if writing isn't your thing, download a voice recorder app, and talk your Morning Pages.*]

You're finding out who you are, so you can then do it on purpose. So you can be free.

You're gently learning to become honest with yourself, about yourself. Which is the entire practice of awareness.

*All you have to do is show up.*

So it goes in the Land of Getting Real. Remember, there's no such thing as perfection, only the path of gentle cultivation of self-knowledge.

Remember that mindless yoga *vignette* I shared a minute ago if you get lost in desire for perfection or self-blame for a minute ... no one is better than anyone else.

We use what we have. We begin right where we are.



## *Chapter 5*

# How Mindfulness Helps With Fear: *Jon Morrow and Saber-Toothed Tigers*



## OMG!

Fear! Fear! Fear! Jon Morrow just started Following me on Twitter! High alert! Where can I hide? What do I do now?!

Now, Jon Morrow is one my heroes, for many reasons. Hugely successful in overcoming ridiculously challenging circumstances.

Freely sharing hard-won wisdom on behalf of a better world. Mega-popular. Ginormous following.<sup>7</sup>

Why, then, is my first response not, *He's Following me. Oh, how fab am I?! How cool is that?!* But rather, *Oh crap, get me outta here. Now.*

## Under Attack

Why? Mostly because I experienced a fair amount of trauma as a young girl<sup>8</sup>. My brain can interpret things as threatening when those things are actually neutral or mundane.

Even fabulous stuff can be perceived as a threat. The emotional responses and thoughts are fear-based. Not *reality-right-now* based.

“The neural networks in the brain that are involved in rational, abstract cognition — essentially, the systems that mediate our most humane and creative thoughts — are very sensitive to emotional states, especially fear,” says Dr. Bruce Perry [Senior Fellow of the Child Trauma Academy]. ... .

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<sup>7</sup> [www.boostblogtraffic.com](http://www.boostblogtraffic.com)

<sup>8</sup> Trauma can be experienced through physical, sexual, emotional, and/or psychospiritual abuse.

“Every loud sound suddenly becomes a potential threat, for example, and even mundane circumstances such as a person who avoids eye contact can take on suspicious and ominous meaning and elicit an extreme, alert-ready response. Such informational triage can be essential to surviving traumatic experience, of course.”<sup>9</sup>

## My Life is Being Threatened

Jon Morrow is not a saber-toothed tiger. My increasing visibility and success are not life-threatening situations from which I need to flee.

But parts of my brain don't believe that truth — they're too fearful. And fear blocks success. Until you learn to use it.

What to do?

Mindfulness saves my day. (As does creativity. But that's another conversation, for another time. For now, know that mindfulness really helps kick-start creativity.)

### 1. Awareness

You can't get where you want to go if you don't know where you are. Oftentimes, “where you are” means “what you're thinking and how you're feeling.”

It's called mindful awareness because ... well, the practice cultivates awareness. For instance ... *I'm being Followed. OH NO!*

Wait. That's a fear response. *OK. I am not under attack. OK. I'm feeling that fear. But I don't have to act on it.*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://healthland.time.com/2013/04/16/how-terror-hijacks-the-brain/>

*OK. Jon Morrow is not a saber-toothed tiger. This is positive.*

*OK. Next?*

## **2. Choice**

When I'm feeling good, rested and able to mindfully pay attention, I can stop myself from tearing across the savanna, fully freaking out because my reptilian brain believes I'm being chased.

It's harder when I'm tired. But I can still do it. I can still *choose* a course of action, using my mindful awareness chops.

## **3. Responsibility**

It's the 21st century. There are no literal slathering slobbering beasts chasing most of us.

My thoughts are very often not reality. I have a cerebrum. I can be responsible for my choices. You have one too. Be responsible; choose to use that cerebrum.

Those of us who have experienced trauma might have to work a little (or a lot) more mindfully to move through fear responses that seem to be completely rational to our hard-working reptilian brains.

That's OK.

## **Use it, Baby!**

Use that fear. I've found that desperation and terror can be used as rocket fuel for achieving success.

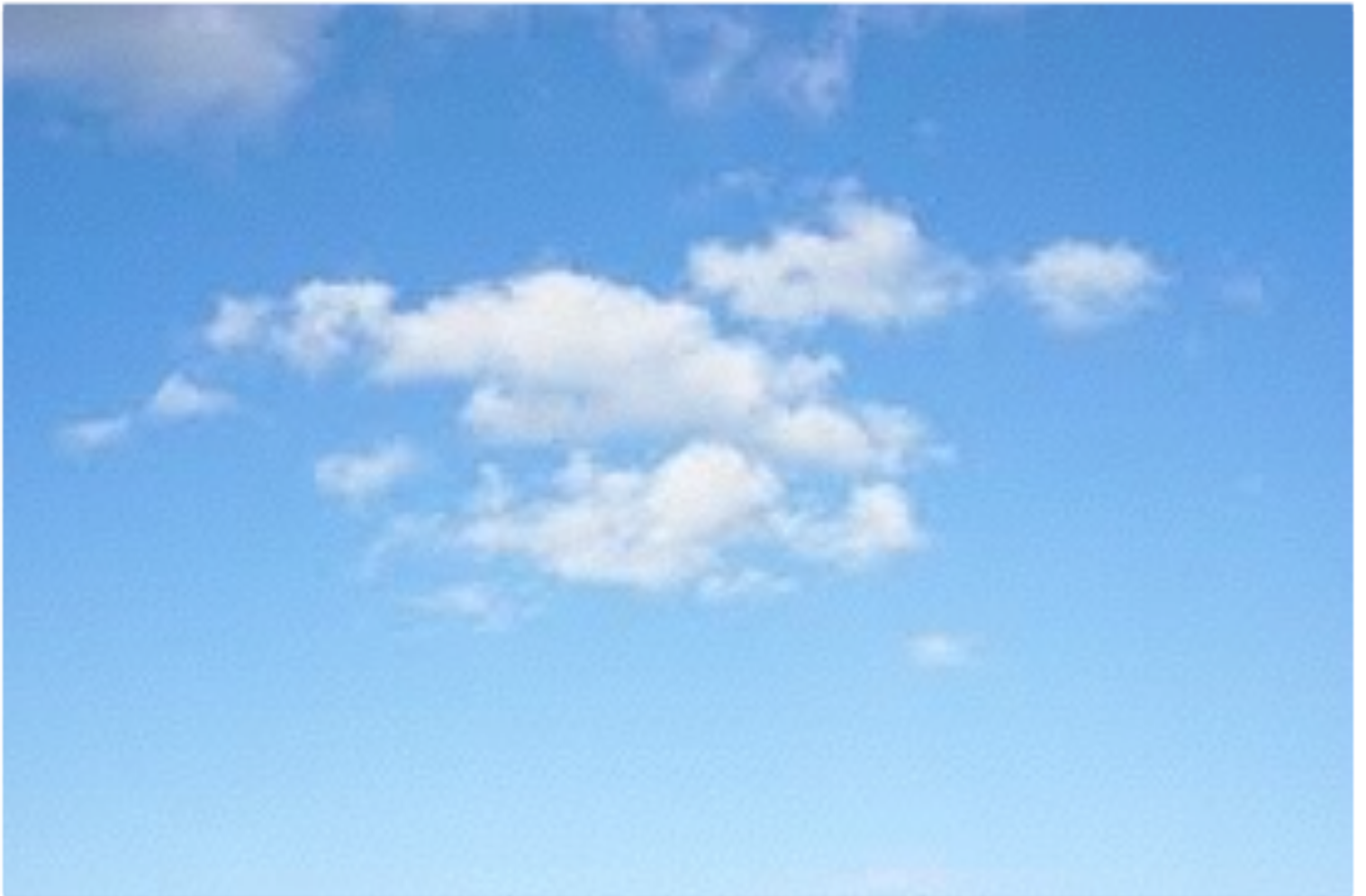
The great news is that yes, it is possible. No, you do not have to hide in the corner when someone or something that matters comes knocking on your door.

OK. *Next?*

*Questions? Comments? Reactions? Send me a quick email, and let's chat.  
melanie@melanieharth.com.*

## *Chapter 6*

# How Mindfulness Helps With Anxiety & Stress: *Secrets From Seinfeld*



## ”Honestly, Melanie!”

Here’s the interior scenario playing in the theater of my little mind:

*I want to work. Right now. All day, every day. I cannot miss this golden Opportunity Bus. Except that I feel like I’m desperately running behind it, diesel fumes already beginning to choke me. I’ve gotta keep up. This is it! The only bus ever in the entire universe meant to take me to the fulfillment of all my dreams and fantasies, including ...*

... well, you get the picture.

Here’s the reality: I’ve committed to celebrating a major holiday with friends, including cooking part of the meal.

The problem? Can’t settle into either the idea of celebrating, *or* getting some work done. (“*Can I work while I stir? Can I buy some cookies instead of bake them — from scratch — so I have more time for work?*”

*“Is it possible to get over myself?!”*)

The result: Stress. There’s nothing wrong with working when we need to, or baking cookies and hanging out with friends watching vampires on TV.

What’s not so good from a mindful awareness point of view? Working while feeling guilty about not doing other things, and/or worrying about how much time it’s taking to gather ingredients and actually bake the dangd cookies while thinking about work.

## Surrender NOW

The anxiety reduction solution? Surrender to the choices we make. Surrender to what needs doing, without whining, being the victim, getting pissed off .. whatever your fall-back position is.

Need to work? Then work. Watch vampires on television? Same.

Enjoy those freshly baked cookies, too.

Surrendering into acceptance of what's actually happening is one of the secrets of mindful awareness. And it's an enormous stress reliever.

Because when you're anxious, you are not in the present moment. You're in fear of the future, or fear of the past.

In one of the great Seinfeld episodes, George's father, Frank, starts saying, then screaming *Serenity NOW!* whenever his blood pressure starts rising (*The Serenity Now* episode).

But Frank never even comes close to the first secret of managing chaos. He can't stop long enough to feel or see what's happening in his life, beginning with his own body, let alone how he's being affected by and affecting everyone around him.

He's oblivious to the reality that he's got ...

- a) other emotions lurking somewhere inside of him, and
- b) health problems based, at least in part, on his lack of self-awareness.

He doesn't know how to settle into himself. Frank's a great comedic character, but he's not much good at meditation (or happiness).



And it's a fabulously funny 23 minutes of classic television that helped me reduce my *angst* over choosing to cook for friends rather than working for The Man. Because I ended up belly laughing in the kitchen.

So fun, so life-affirming, so stress reducing. Helped me get over myself, and into enjoying my day. Stopped fighting myself and my choices, and fell into acceptance, through laughter.

## Get Up Offa' Your Thing, Part II

In Chapter 3, we talked about gettin' up offa' your thing (which is from a James Brown song, *btw*). What makes you get up offa' yours and start dancing, literally or metaphorically?

That's where to begin in the Land of Coping With Stress. One of the first action steps for dealing with stress is to get out of your little worried mind by:

- getting up,
- dancing (just try dancing without smiling),
- connecting with the Big Picture thing.

For there is more than one path to serenity. Mindful meditation is one of those paths, learned through a specific kind of meditation practice. There are lots of other forms of creative meditation practices, too.

*Anything* can be a meditation practice if we are fully present, right here, right now.

The thing is, meditation doesn't have to be stuffy and/or elitist. We get to be who we are -- that's the whole (terrifying) point.

We are so richly overflowing with treasure, each of us. Once we get up offa' our things and begin experiencing that, we begin re-claiming our treasure.

## Acceptance Opens the Door

The door to making changes, taking action. We begin with tiny, little steps, though. We're not talking about climbing Mt. Everest here. We're talking about slowing down, breathing just a little more consciously, and watching what shows up.

Tara Brach, Ph.D., mentioned earlier, has another wonderful book called *Radical Acceptance: Embracing your Life With the Heart of a Buddha* that speaks of these matters.

Embracing what is is a form of acceptance. It's a sort-of anti-Frank Costanza way of being that many find deeply satisfying.

Here's to mindful serenity, now.

*Chapter 7*  
How Mindfulness Helps With  
Decision-Making:  
*Tips (Stolen) From Warren Buffet*



## Keen Observations From No Less Than Warren Buffet

Ready to begin living, right now, the way you dream about doing one day, in a far-off, distant future?

As that keen observer of human nature, Warren Buffet, says:

“There comes a time when you ought to start doing what you want. Take a job that you love. You will jump out of bed in the morning. I think you are out of your mind if you keep taking jobs that you don't like because you think it will look good on your resume. Isn't that a little like saving up sex for your old age?”

Mindfulness is a path that can show us what we actually want for ourselves, and help us find the courage to start joyfully jumping out of bed in the mornings.

### 1. The Perversity of Being Human

Part of what holds us back is mindless confusion. As Buffet says, “There seems to be some perverse human characteristic that likes to make easy things difficult.”

A lot of my clients are people who've gotten so tangled up in disorienting webs of self-doubt and drama that they can't seem to get started living life on their own terms. Things have gotten very difficult.

We can spend a lot of our time weaving storyline upon storyline. *He/she/they done me wrong. If I only had [blank], then this [incredible thing] would happen. If I hadn't made that decision 20 years ago, I wouldn't be doing this today.*

Mindfulness can help us begin deconstructing our self-woven webs. It helps us begin to hear what we're saying, to see what we're doing.

Mindful awareness teaches us to be more *self-aware*.

*Self-awareness is self-power.*

Therein lies part of the riches of a mindfulness practice. When we recognize how difficult we're making things, we can then begin making different choices. Easing up.

## **2. Stop Digging That Hole**

Another way we keep things difficult is by digging those big ol' holes for ourselves. Buffet teaches that, "The most important thing to do if you find yourself in a hole is to stop digging."

Ultimately, of course, it'd be terrific to notice when we start digging another hole to begin with, no? It's possible, with mindful awareness of direct experience in the moments of our lives.

## **3. Change Boats**

When we're paying good attention to what's occurring right in front of us, it's much easier to make wise choices.

Buffet's mindful advice when you notice a problem?

"Should you find yourself in a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is likely to be more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks."

In other words, change boats when necessary.

A lot of us have the idea that we're supposed to stick it out, for whatever reasons, sometimes forever. But that might not be true, at least not for you, today, in this or that situation.

Can you tell the difference?

#### **4. Superpower Sight**

Among other things, Buffet knows how to use discernment in order to spot nuances. As he says, "I don't look to jump over 7-foot bars: I look around for 1-foot bars that I can step over."

You don't have to vault over 7-foot bars. You can use discernment, a sort-of superpower way of perceiving things, to look for a 1-foot bar.

The point is to start looking. Paying enough attention to what you want, and mindfully choose a 1-foot bar. Then *step* over it.

Little bits at a time really add up. It's all mindfulness in action. It's paying attention, observing what is present, making choices with clarity and purpose.

Anyone can learn how to do it.

#### **5. Drinking Tea**

Beloved Buddhist mindful meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hahn encourages us to live in each, real moment. He says,

"Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the whole earth revolves -- slowly, evenly, without rushing toward the future. Live the actual moment. Only this moment is life."

For it is when we are paying mindful attention to the present that we can recognize opportunities when they come knocking on our doors.

The final tip from Warren Buffet? “You do things when the opportunities come along.” Drink tea while you’re holding the cup in your hand. *There’s* the opportunity in that moment.

Mindful awareness of the opportunities is another one of the power secrets of this profound practice.

## Are You Saving it Up for Old Age?

Who wants to be on his/her death bed, looking back with mindful awareness of how much of one’s life has been missed?

Who wants to save up sex just for old age, anyway?

*I'd love to gift you with a complimentary Heart-Centered Coaching session. No weird gimmicks, nothing to buy ... it's free. Just send me an email: [melanie@melanieharth.com](mailto:melanie@melanieharth.com).*

## *Chapter 8*

# How Mindfulness Helps You Not be an Angry Idiot: *Ideas From Grasshopper, Master Po and Master Kan*





## Target, Anyone?

Who are you using for target practice? And what are your weapons?

You know, when you're:

- having a diva moment;
- righteously pissed off;
- not feeling well?

Often, our targets are people with whom we feel safe. They're safe because they (probably) won't leave us forever just because we go off on them once in a while.

The people we work with, or for, or manage, also make great targets. Especially if the work place is one that has aggression and bullying woven into the fabric of its culture, as many do.

A Harvard Business Review article<sup>10</sup> describes the price of incivility at work. It's an enormous issue that goes largely unacknowledged.

And, of course, a stranger is a perfect target ... the one you'll never see again, so it doesn't matter. Right? Except for the part about how crummy it makes you feel when some idiot uses you for target practice.

Or *vice-versa*.

And sadly, we also routinely use ourselves for target practice, a subtle and insidious habit. The weapons we use include:

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<sup>10</sup> [http://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility/ar/1?goback=%2Egde\\_2042793\\_member\\_203316244](http://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility/ar/1?goback=%2Egde_2042793_member_203316244)

negative self-talk,  
self-blame,  
self-shame,  
guilt.

## Acts of Violence

The list of self-directed acts of violence is infinite. *Almost anything* can be used as a weapon against ourselves.

And many are culturally sanctioned, making it even more challenging to get off that merry-go-round and say, *That's enough*.

In addition to the four things mentioned at the top of the page, here are more ways you can violate yourself:

- shopping,
- gaming,
- pornography,
- sexting,
- self-cutting,
- scratching,
- gouging,
- head-banging,
- burning with cigarettes,
- disordered eating behaviors,
- drinking and drugging and masturbating a little or way too much,
- vicious cycles of depression and/or anxiety,
- staying in toxic relationships,
- working toxic jobs,
- ignoring your personal finances,
- under-earning,
- making life decisions aimed at keeping yourself very small.

See? Infinite.

I stay busy as a coach helping people loosen their death grip on themselves. Believe me, I'm good at working with others because I spent decades earning a black belt in Self-Target Practice.

And I can still shoot a very mean arrow when I forget to remember all I've learned in the meantime.

The questions of the day: who are you using for target practice? And what are your weapons?

## Who's the Idiot?

All of us are the idiots. Why? Because we're human. Nothing to do about it except take what feels like an enormous risk, and learn to become mindfully aware of when we're doing it.

Over and over and over again.

Awareness of our foibles truly does open the door to change.

*Aha!* Here's one of the problems ... we don't want to change. Change is hard. Change ... gosh, it changes things. We are so often so much more comfortable being idiots than with the very idea of making a change.

And truly, when we are surrounded by other idiots, when everyone in our world is acting as we are -- or worse -- how are we to see that what we're doing may be inappropriate? Harmful, even. Wearing away a little bit at our self-esteem and integrity every day.

There are lots of ways anger is woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. Oftentimes we don't even notice it.

Bummer for everyone.

## 10 Timely Tips from Grasshopper, Master Po and Master Kan

What to do about such pervasive behaviors? Begin making small, simple changes from a place of empowered mindfulness.

How? Work with someone who gets it. Be Grasshopper from *Kung Fu*, the popular 70s TV series, and find a good teacher.

### 1. What Are You Stepping On?

“Can you hear the grasshopper which is at your feet?” Besides that grasshopper, what else might you be missing?

Use mindful awareness to begin hearing how many times a day you step on yourself, or someone else. Just notice for now.

Remember Warren Buffet in chapter 7? Are you stepping on the next job opportunity? Or a subtle, and very important message from a child or a lover?

Listen. Look. See. Start living from happiness.

### 2. Tell the Whole Truth

“Grasshopper, a man may tell himself many things, but is a man's universe made up only of himself?”

You can use your mindful awareness practice to observe how you're interpreting what's going on. Is your point of view the *only* right one? What else might be true? Open up your awareness to a bigger universe.

### **3. Stop It**

“Grasshopper, what troubles you?” “I am ashamed,” the boy replied. Master Po responds, “To feel shame for no cause is a waste. To feel shame for a cause is also a waste.”

Observe, without judging, especially yourself. For if you keep shaming and condemning yourself, you'll need to engage in even more self- or other-directed acts of violence so you can pretend you don't feel crummy about yourself.

The only way to stop it is first, to see it.

Observation, without judging, is an important step in cultivating a mindfulness practice. Which helps you live from happiness.

### **4. Danger Alert**

“When you cease to strive to understand ... then you will know ... without understanding.”

The danger? Trying to know everything, to control everything. Just not possible.

Using mindful awareness, you can learn to be more comfortable with simply holding your not-knowing. It's OK to not know, really.

Just keep practicing self-observation with no judgment. And when you notice you're judging (which everyone does, all the time), notice that.

## **5. Strength Training**

“To suppress a truth is to give it force beyond endurance.”

Right now, you’re working on hearing your truth, and developing the strength to hold it without pretending or controlling, or judging yourself for being what-*ever* about it.

Trying to force your truth into the background only causes it to grow and grow and grow.

Trying to force your anger into the background isn’t the answer, either. We must learn to a) feel our anger, b) honor it without acting on it, and only then c) mindfully re-direct it.

Mindfulness is like strength training, helping you get strong enough to hear your truth, and then, go for what you want. Happiness in action.

## **6. Who’s the Enemy?**

“Fear is the enemy. Trust is the armor.” Wrestling with your internal enemies -- your fear -- is where it all begins.

Mindfulness is how you learn to put down your weapons, and live your life with whole-hearted vulnerability — the strongest energy there is.

Humans act as some dogs do ... fear turns into aggression. Remember, though ... it starts with fear.

## **7. Where’s the Power?**

“To be one with yourself is a power within you.”

Power is the name of the game, whether that involves wanting it, pretending you don't want it, searching for it, wielding it.

How you define power, and the ways in which you use/abuse/ignore your power can determine the trajectory of your life.

And yes, mindfulness helps you move into your power, and use it wisely.

## **8. Yes, You Do**

*“We taught you, young man, because you already knew.”*

Mindful awareness is a profound teacher. As you begin to accept that you have your own answers — that you already know — angry reactivity balances out, stress and anxiety decrease, happiness and rich living increase.

Having a teacher who can guide you into yourself and what you already know (and who you already are) can be of great help.

## **9. What's Growin' in Your Garden?**

*“If you plant rice, rice will grow. If you plant fear, fear will grow.”*

What seeds are you planting, and carefully tending, in the garden of your target practice? Why are you cultivating a target practice at all?

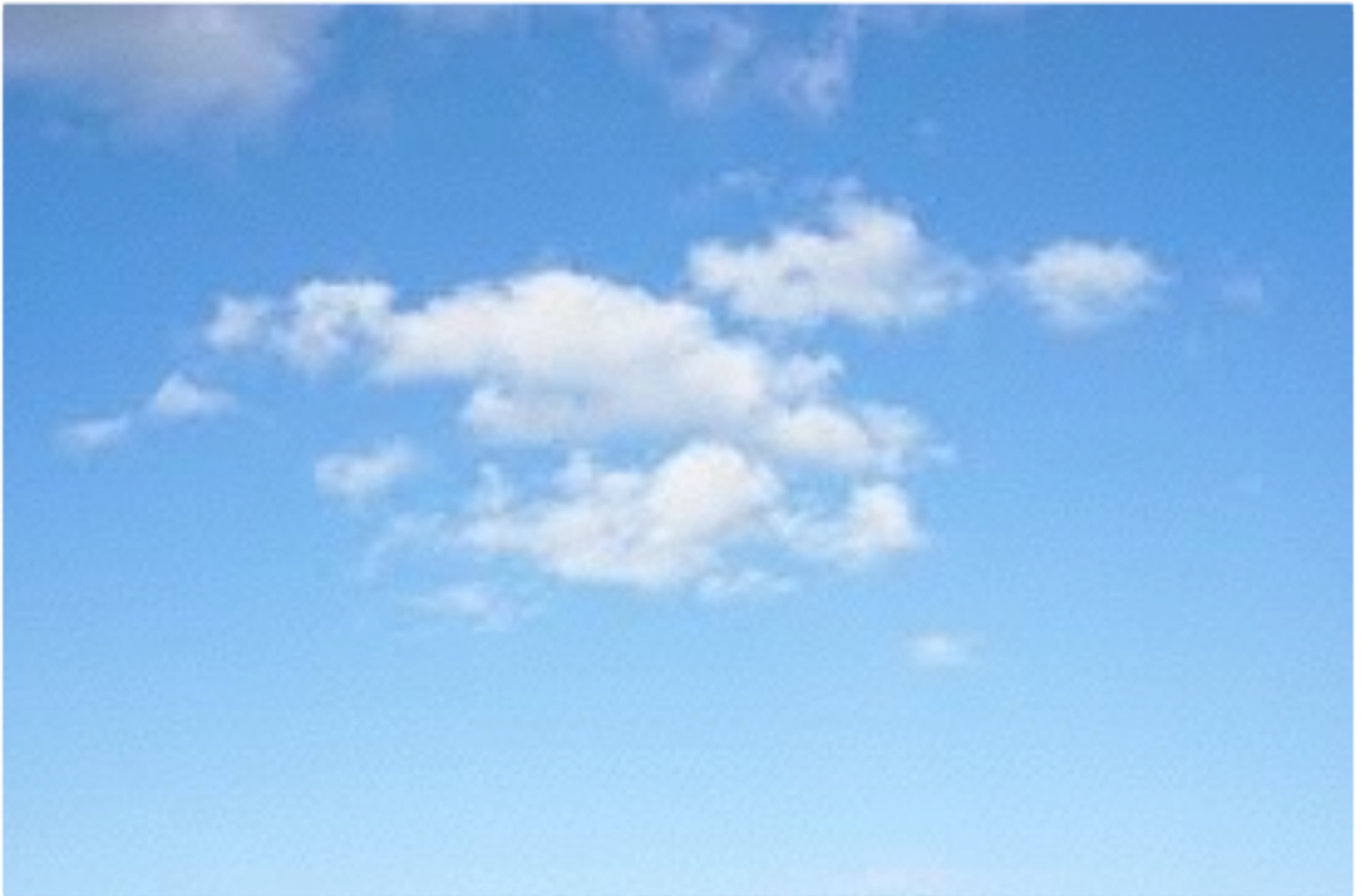
## **10. Chill!**

*“Arise calmly, Grasshopper, and wipe the indignity off your trousers.”*

Lighten up, just a little bit. The internal perfectionist causes only suffering. You’re human, after all. Might as well embrace it.



*Chapter 9*  
How Mindfulness Helps You Get  
What You Want



## Money, Money, Money, Money

Money and work are hot topics with a lot of my clients these days. We talk about:

- how to have satisfying work that also pays the bills;
- how to manage being an entrepreneur, or work for an insane boss;
- the ginormous internal psychological blocks getting in the way.

Let's take Joe. He's a smart, fully capable, well-trained guy with terrific marketable job skills. So why is he so unsatisfied with his work life? Why does he keep landing horrible jobs? What's holding him back?

As we sit together exploring solutions to his career dilemma, he uses mindful awareness to observe his own stories about what's going on.

In the stillness of experiencing his own breathing, Joe begins hearing the whispers. *Why me?! What's wrong with me? I can't. I'm not good enough. Rich/powerful/successful/happy people are [fill in the blank with something bad].*

## Pay Attention, Please

Learning to pay attention to your own stories is the very first step in getting more of what you want. What's the best way to start hearing your own stories?

Get still, and listen.

Settle yourself in for a quiet couple of minutes. Give your mind a job to do that's actually helpful, rather than replaying the same old *I Can't* movie.

- Find, and stay with your breath.
- *Be* with the sensations of breathing in and out.
- Begin listening to your own stories.
- Gently challenge their truth.
- Ask what else might also be true.
- Ask what's true for you, not your family or friends or anyone else on the planet.

Honestly? The single biggest obstacle for Joe, and everyone else with whom I've worked in my entire life, is his own thinking. The stories he was taught as a kid, and has been repeating his entire life.

The obstacles to what you want for yourself and your family — those learned thoughts, beliefs, and ideas — are often hiding in plain sight.

## Oh Yes, You Can

Those obstacles, the fear-based blocks, can feel like impassable granite mountains. Until you're able to see them for what they are ...

*...made-up stories that have nothing to do with right-now reality.*

We all make choices all the time, all day long. Choices that range from *Ummm ... another cup of coffee?*, to *How can I get through one more second of this job I hate?!*

Your choices are based on the stories you're telling yourself. The stories you absorbed as truth when you were a child.

Here's the thing ...

- you *can* begin writing new stories for yourself;
- you *can* learn to choose healthier, happier endings, based on having a truer sense of who you really are, and what *you* want.

Which stories are you buying into? Which internal mind-movies are you watching? What's true for you, now? About a cup of coffee, about your job. Your life.

Internationally renowned mindfulness teacher and best-selling author, Sharon Salzberg, offers much wisdom about these matters in her latest book *Real Happiness at Work: Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement, and Peace*.

She says, "If I understand the problem, I don't add to it."

## Back to Joe

Once Joe understood his biggest problem to be the fear-based stories he was telling himself, he was able to take focused action to get what he wanted.

The results began changing almost immediately. New entrepreneur opportunities started showing up.

And he was able to show up for himself and his new clients in brand-new ways. He set better boundaries, did less work for losers, started working smarter rather than harder ... just like Goldilocks.

Once he had learned to use mindfulness to create more internal space for what was happening, "... bringing awareness to the painful emotions that arise due to our self-judgment or difficult circumstances," as Salzberg writes (*ibid*), Joe's life began changing.



## Thanks

Thanks for being on this part of the journey with me. Companions are everything!

Let's keep the conversation alive — I'd love to hear from you.

What's your favorite happiness technique? What's sitting well for you after reading this book? Or not so well?

Questions? Challenges? Please let me know what's going on ... we're in this thing together.

*I'm right here: [melanie@melanieharth.com](mailto:melanie@melanieharth.com).*

You can also subscribe to my private email list for free updates and goodies: [www.melanieharth.com](http://www.melanieharth.com).



## Resources

*Here are a few free resources to help you get closer to understanding what matters to you.*

Courtesy of Chris Guillebeau and the World Domination Summit team, here's the link to Gretchen Rubin's #WDS2013 presentation: <http://vimeo.com/70277456>.

This is great! A 13-minute video, with a downloadable worksheet. It helped me a lot. I still use my answers as a touchstone when I forget what's important: <http://www.mindvalley.com/goal-setting-redefined#sthash.01Xr8UZb.dpbs>.

Scott Dinsmore and Live Your Legend have more free resources than anyone I know — it's crazy! I especially liked the values worksheets included in the toolkit. Have a blast: <http://liveyourlegend.net/>.

Free audio meditations and talks by the wonderful mindfulness teacher and psychologist Tara Brach, PhD: [www.tarabrach.com](http://www.tarabrach.com).

Bonus — My personal Happiness Playlist ... 'cause sometimes all you can do is get up and dance: <http://www.drmelanieharth.com/2014/06/13/happiness/>.

*I'd love to gift you with a complimentary Insight-to-Action coaching session. No weird gimmicks, nothing to buy ... it's free. Just send me an email: [melanie@melanieharth.com](mailto:melanie@melanieharth.com).*