

# Notice More, Struggle Less



Based on mindfulness approaches developed by Shinzen Young.



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*Notice more.  
Struggle less.*

*"We're wrong if we think we're the only ones struggling with resistance. Everyone who has a body experiences resistance."*

~ Steven Pressfield, from *The War of Art*

## Developing Skills for Paying Closer Attention

**Mindfulness** refers to a set of attentional skills that gradually increase the baseline level of contentment.

The aim of mindfulness training is not to achieve temporary states of focus and relaxation which are present when you meditate and then vanish during the rest of the day, but to increase the skills of concentration, sensory clarity and equanimity which allow you to notice more of what is actually happening throughout the day.

◇ **Concentration** is the ability to pay attention to what is considered relevant and to let go of what is determined to be irrelevant, any time you want, for as long as you want. Concentration power is the single most universally applicable and most deeply empowering skill that a human being can cultivate.

◇ **Sensory clarity** is the ability to distinguish and keep track of the components of sensory experience as they arise in various combinations, moment-by-moment.

The basic building blocks of sensory experience include physical-type sensations in your body, emotional-type sensations in your body, external visual stimuli, mental images, external sounds, and internal conversations.

◇ **Equanimity** refers to a balanced state of non-interference. It can be thought of as an attitude of gentle matter-of-factness with regard to your sensory experience. Equanimity comes from the Latin words *aequus* meaning balanced, and *animus* meaning spirit or internal state.

We say we have lost



our balance if we fall to one side or the other. In a similar same way, we can lose our internal balance if we fall into one or the other of these contrasting reactions:

- **Suppression** A thought or feeling arises and we attempt to cope with it by stuffing it down, denying it, or tightening around it.
- **Identification** A thought or feeling arises and we fixate it, hold onto it inappropriately, not letting it arise, spread and pass with its natural rhythm.

Between suppression and identification lies a third possibility, a balanced state of non-self-interference.

## How We Increase Our Suffering

A person's subjective sense of suffering is directly proportional to the intensity of discomfort present and the degree to which the natural flow of that discomfort is impeded. Conversely, a person's subjective sense of suffering is inversely proportional to the degree to which one is able to monitor that discomfort with specificity.

$$\text{Suffering} = \text{Discomfort} \times \text{Resistance}$$

- When resistance goes up, suffering tends to increase.
- When mindfulness goes up, suffering tends to decrease.



## How We Diminish Our Satisfaction

An opposite type of interference, wanting pleasant things to last longer than they do, also has an impact on the flow of our lives. A person's subjective sense of satisfaction is inversely proportional to the degree to which the pleasure is subject to grasping. Conversely, a person's subjective sense of satisfaction is directly proportional to the intensity of pleasure present and the degree to which one can monitor that pleasure with specificity.

$$\text{Satisfaction} = \text{Pleasure} \div \text{Grasping}$$

- When grasping goes up, satisfaction tends to decrease.
- When mindfulness goes up, satisfaction tends to increase.

## Noticing Rest Helps Erode Resistance and Grasping

Most of us have trained ourselves to notice discomfort and unpleasant feelings by default. These problems give our minds something to chew on. They also reward us with entertaining stories to share from our day. *You'll never guess what happened to me today...*

Learning to find and create restful states can help us struggle less and enjoy life more. Physical relaxation is a restful state in the body.

Breaks between scenes on the mental image screen and pauses between internal conversations are restful states in the mind.

These states occur frequently, but most of us don't know how to detect them or get the most from them. Strategies for noticing rest can train us to look for and create rest in the midst of our regular lives: at home, at work, at the gym, and on the road.

When we notice rest, it

makes us feel better. This in turn motivates us to focus on it more. We begin looking for opportunities to cultivate concentration in this way.

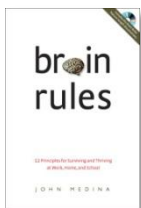
Restful states also strengthen equanimity. As equanimity grows over time, our resistance to unpleasant feelings and physical discomfort decreases, allowing them to come and go with less identification.

Having some ability to notice, create, and savor rest in the body and mind

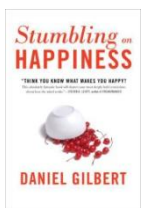
allows us to experience greater fulfillment from the activities we enjoy when we can let them unfold, flow, and end naturally.

What would happen if you were better able to notice relaxation in your jaw at red lights, the restfulness of each exhale during boring meetings, shivers along the skin in the wake of ringtone jolts at the store? You might have to rely more on news and entertainment sources for dramatic stories.

## Recommended Reading



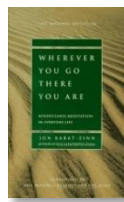
Let's hope that every teacher is reading **Brain Rules** by John Medina. How exercise boosts brain power. Why we don't pay attention to boring things. How sleep helps us think. Why stressed brains don't learn as effectively. And the importance of stimulating more of the senses.



The theme of **Stumbling on Happiness** by Daniel Gilbert is how our uniquely human capacity to vividly imagine the future has been both a key to our survival and a significant obstacle to our happiness. He uses humor to explore why we aren't very good at predicting what will really make us happy—or miserable.



**Real Meditation in Minutes a Day** by Joseph Arpaia and Lobsang Raggay demystifies meditation and contains plenty of practical strategies with real life applications. There's a great chapter on common myths and assumptions which I summarized on my blog (go to <http://daronlarson.blogspot.com> and search on **meditation myths**).



**Wherever You Go, There You Are** by Jon Kabat-Zinn continues to be the one that I most frequently share with people who have a fresh interest in exploring meditation. The wisdom is immediately recognizable. The chapters are short and accessible. The insights are directly applicable to regular, modern life.