

# A DAY-BY-DAY JOURNEY TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

Mindfulness is the art of living in the present.

It is a way of finding happiness by paying attention to the world around us – and more importantly, to the world within us – at any given moment.

In an age of distraction, we are in danger of losing sight of what is truly meaningful to us. Mindfulness brings focus and awareness back into our lives.

Practising mindfulness for just a few minutes a day will help you to:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Boost productivity and creativity
- Manage chronic pain
- Improve personal relationships

This concise and powerful book is an ideal introduction to a practice whose effectiveness has been demonstrated in many research studies.

Make mindfulness a part of your life. Start your journey here.



Kathirasan K is an established mindfulness teacher with a background in organisational development, leadership and education. He is Director of the Centre for Mindfulness, which delivers tailored training programmes to individuals and organisations.

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KATHIRASAN K

MINDFULNESS IN 8 DAYS

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# MINDFULNESS IN 8 DAYS

HOW TO FIND INNER PEACE IN A WORLD  
OF STRESS AND ANXIETY

**KATHIRASAN K**

Foreword by Shamash Alidina (*Mindfulness for Dummies*)

For Review Only

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## FOREWORD

Mindfulness is about cultivating awareness of the present moment, so that we can meet ourselves and others with kindness and compassion.

Compassion is the key to a happier, more meaningful and peaceful life. Without being present, you can't hope to cultivate this quality.

In this book, Kathirasan guides you on a journey of mindfulness and compassion over eight transformative days. Eight days may seem like a short time, but ultimately you don't even need eight days. You just need this moment.

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Right now, and in every waking moment, you have the choice to be consciously aware of the outer world and your inner landscape, or to go back to thinking down those well-worn neural highways of your mind. Thoughts about what you have to do, or what you should have done. How good you are or how bad you are. And all the time, in front of your very eyes, a unique miracle is unfolding.

With well-chosen quotes, wise words of encouragement, and easy-to-do daily activities, this book will awaken your senses, calm your mind and open your heart to a more nourishing and sustainable way of living.

You're in for a treat!

Shamash Alidina

Author of *The Mindful Way Through Stress*  
and *Mindfulness for Dummies*

## INTRODUCTION

This book is probably one of the shortest manuals you will find on understanding and practising mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the art of living in the present moment without losing focus on the future. It allows us to be self-aware while we go about the affairs of our lives.

The rewards of mindfulness practices are twofold:

1. Research has shown that mindfulness can greatly reduce stress levels and help regulate negative emotions.

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2. By cultivating self-awareness, mindfulness practices can enhance our performance, both personal and professional.

I was first introduced to mindfulness and meditation in the late 1990s by a Himalayan teacher. It had a tremendous impact on me, transforming my worldview and my perceptions of success and failure, stress and joy.

I was at that time a very unhappy person. In trying to cope with life's challenges, I had ended up in a state of constantly wanting *more* in terms of everything I experienced.

I wanted people to love me, I wanted success and to be recognised for it, I wanted to be rich.

Pursuing these goals left me stressed and eventually depressed. I was demanding so much from myself and demanding so much from the world.

And all that time, I did not know who, or what, I was. Everything I knew of myself was defined through the eyes of others.

After learning mindfulness, all this changed. I became more self-aware, and with that came the ability to confront difficult situations with poise, and to treat myself and others with more compassion.

Where I once demanded so much of the world, I now discovered joy within. In fact, I started discovering aspects of myself which I never knew existed.

These changes positively influenced my career, my emotional health, and the relationships I had with other people.

I gained a new clarity of purpose and an understanding of the different roles I played in life. With mindfulness, I also found a renewed appreciation for everything the world had to offer.

These changes led me to start teaching mindfulness practices, long before they entered mainstream media.

Most of the people who came to my courses looked weary, dissatisfied, conflicted, or lost. By the time they were midway through the programme, almost everyone said that their life had taken a noticeable positive turn.

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Some started appreciating their spouse more. Some started to notice behaviours that were contrary to values they held close to their hearts. More than a few told me that they finally knew who they were.

And all that I taught them was not to change, but to just *notice the change*. By merely noticing and observing, change happened for them.

Hence, I decided to write this book as an offering to the world, to encourage you to experience mindfulness in your everyday life.



I have met people who are skeptical about mindfulness, assuming it to be another New Age fad. I resonate strongly with them, as it is better to approach any practice with skepticism until it is proven to be valuable to you.

Mindfulness has been one of the most researched contemplative sciences of the last two decades. With increasing evidence of its effectiveness, you may be more inclined to try out some mindfulness practices.

Or perhaps you wish to know what mindfulness is before embarking on a full-fledged intensive programme.

I have written this book for those of you who seek:

- a glimpse into the world of mindfulness before taking the journey
- a structured and self-paced mindfulness experience
- a private journey in mindfulness

This book takes the form of eight experiments with yourself over eight days.

Just as there is no one solution that can solve all of the world's problems, there is no one path for everyone to take. You have to find your own path. This book will help you along the way.

Here is an opportunity for you to enter into the world of mindfulness in the privacy of your own home, your office or even on your daily commute.

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You can take things at your own pace – you don't have to do all eight days in a row.

## DAY 1

The only thing I ask is that you approach these practices with an attitude of open-mindedness and a willingness to experiment. Be like a toddler that ventures to experience everything in its path with genuine curiosity.

## THE AUTOPILOT

I wish you wellness and joy on this journey.

You are on a flight to your holiday destination. The pilot has welcomed everyone onboard, introduced his co-pilot and crew, and announced the estimated arrival time.

You sit back and relax.

Little do you realise, apart from the pilot and co-pilot, there is another pilot in the cockpit with them – a non-human one, the 'autopilot'.

This pilot has no heart, and neither does he have a brain like yours.



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'HE WHO KNOWS OTHERS IS WISE;  
HE WHO KNOWS HIMSELF  
IS ENLIGHTENED'

- LAO TZU

And yet he knows your destination like the back of his hand and needs no control from the human pilots.

The moment the pilots get into the cockpit, the autopilot is just a switch away. All the pilots need to do is to switch him on, and the autopilot works his magic.

We, too, have an autopilot in the pit of our brain.

Our autopilot manifests when we do things in a mechanical manner without mindful awareness.

Do you brush your teeth feeling the bristles of the toothbrush on your gums and teeth?

Do you shower feeling the contact of water on your skin and feeling the touch of your hands as you soap yourself?

Or do you cruise through these daily activities with your mind on other thoughts?

Your autopilot, although it steers you through these activities safely, prevents you from being fully in the moment.

You could be reading the newspapers and upon finishing you realise you finished a whole cup of tea without any recollection of tasting it at all.

When you are on autopilot, you deprive yourself of the opportunity to fully experience and enjoy the journey called life.

Worse still, without being aware of it, your thoughts and actions may be hijacked by this autopilot.

Recall a situation when someone said 'no' to an idea or suggestion of yours. Your mind may have assumed that the 'no' was a

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sign of rejection in spite of knowing it was actually just a simple 'no' to your idea and not you as a person.

This is again your autopilot in action. It can prevent you from seeing what is there and replace it with what is not there.

The autopilot has taken over our lives, and we cannot seem to take back possession.

Now, I must qualify that the autopilot is not a bad guy all the time. In times of emergency and danger, he does help by making quick decisions to save us.

But when we have our autopilot in the 'on' position all the time, we lose our attentiveness to our daily affairs, such that we do not remember the journey anymore. All we are interested in is the destination.



One of the key purposes of mindfulness is to allow you to reclaim the driver's seat and start being fully there in every moment and every experience.

The simplest way to do this is not to fight your autopilot but to gently start with practices that focus your attention on the present moment.

You can pay attention to almost anything in your life. All you need is an intentional mind wanting to pay attention to any experience or activity.

The simplest of things can be magnified into something profound just by paying attention to them. Imagine the experience

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

- JON KABAT-ZINN

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of scientists when they first looked into the microscope to study the pollen in plants.

By paying attention to your own body, thoughts and emotions, you come to a better understanding of yourself and your relationships with other people in your life.

Mindfulness helps us to recognise the value of the present moment, which we often miss while going about 'living' our lives.

But are we really 'living' our lives at all?

So busy are we moving from one task to another, we forget to value each moment. I could be so wrapped up in answering an office email at home that I ignored my child right next to me yearning for my attention.

We are more often mere passersby of our own lives rather than people who are truly living.



On my own mindfulness journey, I have stopped looking for a purpose for living my life.

Instead, I find that the purpose is 'in the living' rather than in 'seeking' an answer. When I dropped that search, I suddenly started living my life more purposefully and meaningfully.

Mindfulness is the beginning of living and the end to searching.



How is it that such a simple thing as paying attention has become so difficult?

Have you seen how infants crawl and pick up objects to observe as if they have never seen these objects before?

In fact, that's exactly what it is, they have never seen those things before. That innocent, childlike curiosity is what we have lost.

The child cries only when it is hungry; it doesn't cry because of, say, a lack of food in storage for tomorrow. The child is only

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'YESTERDAY'S THE PAST,  
TOMORROW'S THE FUTURE, BUT  
TODAY IS A GIFT. THAT'S WHY  
IT'S CALLED THE PRESENT.'

- BIL KEANE

interested in the present, exploring and experiencing whatever life presents.

Imagine how it would be if this childlike curiosity that is grounded in the present moment could be coupled with the maturity of our adult life experiences. This is definitely a recipe for a great mindful life.

And yet, we often neglect the present moment, obsessed as we are with the future and the past.

We fail to realise that the present moment is what creates the past in the form of memories. The same present moment forms the reference plane for our thinking about the future.

The present moment is free from both anxiety and regrets, as all the regrets and sorrows we carry are centred in the past, while all our anxieties and worries are centred in the future.

The present moment is also without time because you cannot measure it. Try picking up a stopwatch and measuring how long it takes to be 'present'. The moment the clock starts ticking it has become the past.

You cannot hold on to the present moment either.

All that we can do is just *be* in the present moment.

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## HOW TO BE MINDFUL

The first step towards being mindful is to bring three principles into your life:

1. Have the **intention** to be mindful
2. Pay **attention** to things and experiences
3. Cultivate a healthy **attitude** towards life experiences

These are the three core principles of mindfulness. They are the *foundations* for consistent and rewarding practice, as well as the *fruits* of practice.

Mindfulness is an ongoing process, not a finite goal. So don't approach mindfulness as another item in your checklist to be accomplished. Rather, make it a way of living.

See mindfulness like the way you breathe.

Do you have to make a petition every day for your lungs to breathe for your well-being or does it just happen?

Do you have to consciously make your breathing heavy when you go for a run or does it happen naturally?

Many things in nature just happen, like the sun rising and setting. Natural phenomena do not have an agenda like us humans. They are not motivated by rewards and successes.

Mindfulness is best appreciated when you have no real agenda other than being mindful. It is indeed a way of living and being yourself, with yourself.

### 1. THE INTENTION TO BE MINDFUL

Finding your intention behind the desire to learn and practise mindfulness is an important discovery. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do I understand by mindfulness?
2. Why do I want to be mindful?
3. What benefits do I hope to get by practising mindfulness?

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## PRACTICE 5

### WALKING MEDITATION

I would suggest that you practise this for the first time in the privacy of your home.

1. Stand up straight, bare-footed, without straining any part of your body.
2. Feel your feet touching the ground.
3. Distribute the weight of your body on both feet evenly.
4. Have your gaze on the floor without straining your neck.
5. Step out with your left foot. Feel it move, feel the heel touching the ground, now the ball of your foot, now the toes.
6. Feel the same as the right foot comes forward.

7. Walk at a steady pace, slightly slower than your usual. When your attention wanders, bring it back to the sensation of your feet touching the ground.
8. Do this for about three minutes.

#### *Post-practice questions*

- How was this different from how you normally walk?
- Was it easy to stay balanced while walking mindfully? Were you able to notice the sensations on each foot as you rolled it forward?
- How could you make this an occasional practice in your life?

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kathirasan K is an established mindfulness teacher with a background in organisational development, leadership and education. He has over a decade of experience in teaching contemplative practices, and training teachers in meditation and philosophy.

A certified yoga instructor, he is currently doing doctoral research in the subjects of yoga philosophy and meditation.

Kathir is Director of the Centre for Mindfulness, which conducts courses, talks and workshops on mindfulness, and delivers tailored training programmes to MNCs, government agencies and educational institutions.