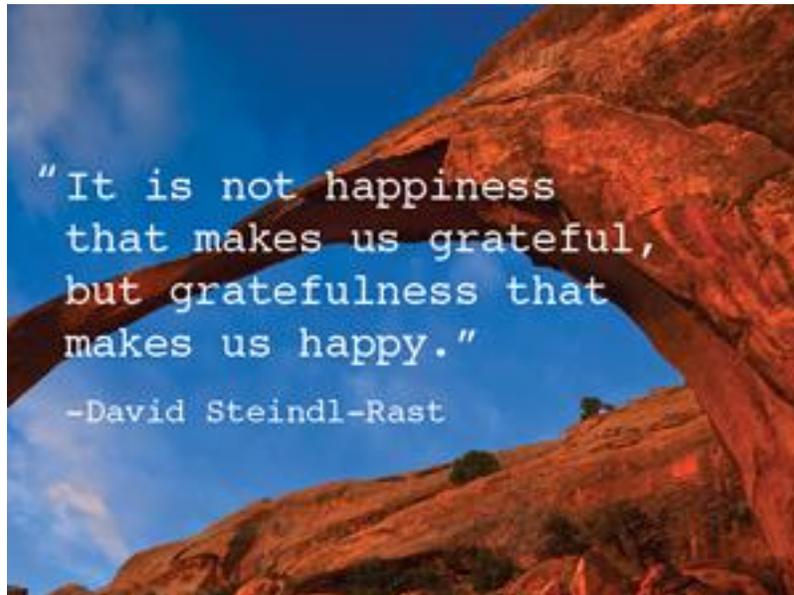


breath love nourish



Hi Ladies, I am Carla's sister in law, Kara (John's sister). Carla has graciously asked me to write a time or two while she is taking the summer to be with her family and enhance her life in other areas. I have been meditating on and off for a couple of years now, and I have noticed a shift in my ability to remain calm and or focused in the face of sadness, fear and other stressful feelings. I have wanted to step up my game a bit and try to really embrace meditation or mindfulness practices more often throughout the day and week as a way to be my happiest, healthiest best self. I've done a little research and reading on the subject and will share some of that with you now. There are many quick practices you can do that do not require more than a minute or two of your time and very little privacy, if the notion of 15 to 20 minutes of sitting and meditating every day sounds daunting to you.

MEDITATION

“When the body and mind are in sync, we are naturally relaxed, alert, open, and aware, and we experience ourselves and the world in a direct, unmediated way, without conceptual filters. It is this direct experience of the fullness, vitality, and splendor of life that is the gift of meditation.”

Eckhart Tolle

The word mindfulness has become quite popular the last 3 years, however it was translated from Buddhist sanskrit and is in reality a very old idea. My simple interpretation of mindfulness is to be aware of your thoughts and emotions without judging them, yourself, another or the circumstances.

Dan Harris, co - anchor of Nightline and the weekend edition of Good Morning America, as well as author of 10% Happier says that “according to the Buddha we have three habitual responses to everything we experience. We want it, we reject it or we zone out. Mindfulness is a fourth option.” You simply notice what you are thinking or feeling, my foot hurts, my nose itches, this position is uncomfortable, the noise outside is distracting, I’m not sure how I feel about what they just said; and then do not judge yourself or your thoughts, and when you do, just notice that. The discomfort doesn’t necessarily go away, you learn to be with it and go through it rather than busying yourself or your mind and trying to distract yourself from it. I do believe in some mindless TV or movie watching, or whatever media you enjoy to distract yourself. The idea is not to use social media, and the other daily input we experience in life to totally not listen to our own inner voice, even when our inner voice is not sounding too smart. Consider the activities below and breath while you are waiting in line or think of why you love someone so much, rather than checking your phone.

Simple mindful practices:

breathe

Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold it for a count of 10 and then let the breath out through your mouth. Do this 3 times (or more if you have time) making sure to fill your lungs as well as your abdomen full of air. You can try this anytime you are walking, feeling anxious, about to do a presentation, or waiting in line somewhere.

love

Metta meditation, also known as loving-kindness meditation is thinking of others and sending them your good wishes. You can do a full round of people or just one person to remind yourself you are grateful for the love(s) in your life. If you choose to do the whole practice start with yourself, then think about someone you love, then think about someone you feel neutral about, then think about someone who annoys or frustrates you a little (or a lot), then focus on your community and then focus on the whole World. Each time you focus you say: "May you be happy"; "May you be safe and secure"; "May you be healthy and strong"; "May you live with ease". You can do this seated with your eyes closed or more casually as you take a walk. You can change the sayings to your own taste and think about whoever suits you, maybe a beloved pet.

nourish

Focus on your current activity such as washing the dishes or taking a walk. I appreciate Oprah's poetic description of this mindful activity.

"When you're in the shower or tub, simply *be* with the water. Appreciate the fragrance of the soap. The other day, I had a moment of transcendence just fully taking in the scent of my shower gel. The pleasure of the warm water and the privilege of cleanliness filled me to the point of tears." "I wake up to the sound of birds now (what I've taken to calling real twitter). Before getting out of bed, I pause for a moment to acknowledge and appreciate the sound. And even in New York City, waking to the grinding of garbage trucks, I note and appreciate that the city's coming alive, that another day has dawned and, choice by choice, we get to live it." Oprah Winfrey

My yoga teacher goes to India a few times a year to create a new season of clothing, she is surrounded by people and noises wherever she goes. When she meditates in the ashram there are many outside noises. One of her favorite times to meditate is while she is being driven around in a rickshaw. She says the noise and chaos all around her as she closes her eyes becomes the background white noise to her mindfulness practice. I had a massage not too long ago, and although I enjoyed the music in the room I found myself really taken with the noises from the sidewalk and the street right below me. Humanity was outside and I had a sense of being a part of the World around me while my body was enjoying some relaxation.

Another activity you can try instead of sitting with your eyes closed to meditate, is to write down some affirmations that you like, and then say them to yourself daily as a practice, (first thing when you wake up maybe) when you need a boost or when you are a little bored. Say them when you feel neutral or happy, not when you are really upset, or they may make you feel worse. Some possibilities: I am healthy, I am productive, I am successful, I am a leader, everything is always working out alright for me, life is good.

If you haven't tried meditation before and want to start there are many ways to do this. You can simply sit quietly and focus on quiet wordless music, a ticking clock or some other background noise in your surroundings for a minute or more. If it suits you maybe try 15 - 20 minutes a day; perhaps even twice a day. You can say a mantra to yourself over and over. You can use the mantra: ohm, or an English word or phrase that feels right, or do some research yourself to find an Indian mantra of your choosing. The point is to distract the noise in your head and quiet your mind for a few seconds or even minutes. If your mind constantly chatters for 9 minutes of a 10 minute meditation and you get even 30 seconds of focus, that reduces stress and is beneficial to your health, well-being and your grey matter (scientists have researched this). One person, I've listened to who has been publicly recommending meditation for decades, says that when she first began meditating she would always try to ignore her inner dialog and focus on her breathing. She realized that sometimes the voice she was trying to ignore had a creative message and she should pay attention to it. Your inner voice or your more creative self may be chiming in when you meditate. If you find yourself rearranging your furniture or creating a to do list for a project you've been pondering but not moving forward on - take heed - these thoughts may well be some of your best ideas. Her humorous comment was why am I thinking about rearranging furniture instead of creating the solution to World peace; her answer was that it gives her great pleasure to plan and rearrange. When we listen to our intuition and make ourselves happy, everyone we come into contact with benefits from our joy.

Here is a site with some free-guided meditations:

<http://www.chopra.com/articles/guided-meditations#sm.0001wo4e6l1cexduwqgrn5r6k1twy>

There are also some free meditation apps you can get for your phone or computer. The app I usually use is Oprah and Depak's 21 Day Meditation Experience. From time to time, they launch a new meditation and you can listen to it daily for at least 21 days for free. It costs about \$40 to buy the 21 day meditations which you can download and use forever.

Right now I manage about 15 - 20 minutes of meditation 5 days a week. This week I have tried to add daily some of the shorter activities mentioned above to my repertoire. I think for me more is better. Gotham Chopra, Depak's son says that basically Dad's answer is always to meditate, you are feeling a little off, meditate; looking for some clarity, meditate; ate too much for dinner, meditate. I love the humor, but am starting to see the wisdom too. I'm not sure that I believe the saying life is short, but I have come to know that it is to be cherished, and mindfulness helps me do that. I have incorporated focusing on my breath throughout the day and focusing on my core muscles and my breath during part of every walk I take. I can't give up mindlessly listening to silly podcasts and novels on my phone entirely. When it is a little less hot, my plan is to do a daytime meditation a couple of times a week, probably out in nature (I usually meditate first thing in the morning or occasionally before bed).

My goal here was to share something I've found useful in my care of self; whatever you choose to do, already do, or just contemplate doing, treat yourself kindly and compassionately.

Peace, Love and Save the Whales!

Kara Sakrison

