

A Mindful Nation

Tim Ryan—2012.

Foreword.

- Who can argue, as he himself emphasizes, with training our children in how of paying attention so they can excel at learning, rather than just yelling at them to pay attention, which often happens in our schools.

Introduction.

- Put simply, mindfulness is about finding ways to slow down and pay attention to the present moment—which improves performance and reduces stress. But having the time and space to attend to what’s right in front of us even though many other forces are trying to keep us stuck.
- As every president in the past few years has emphasize, our problems are interconnected. Seeing him as a whole leads to better, more sustainable solutions.
- The kind of practice I’ve been doing is a classic mindfulness meditation, which relies on sitting in an upright yet relaxed posture for a period of time and paying attention to your breathing, your body sensations and your environment. This practice has been demonstrated to provide measurable benefits and health and well-being. It’s helped many people with anxiety, depression and stress—both every day levels of stress and the crippling levels of stress that some people to the hospital.

Chapter 1: you can get there from here.

- When I first practiced yoga, I was drawn to the periods of silence, motionless practice at the end of class, but those sessions are very brief. My first in-depth experience was on the five day silent retreat.

Chapter 2: discovery mindfulness.

- Fortunately, after days of practice and instruction at a Power of Mindfulness retreat led by John Kabat-Zinn at the Menla Mountain Retreat Center in upstate New York in November 2008, the training had taken root.
- I start to think about my new nephew and how I would never treat him this way. Toward everyone else I was the town nice guy, myself I was the town asked whole. It turns out that over the years, I unknowingly created a big story in my head. I shared it with no one, not even my own conscious mind. I needed to have a highly successful political career, by the perfect woman, be worth \$1 million, and write a few books and movies. And if I didn’t do all this, my family and friends would see me as an underachiever. How tiring! I cannot believe I spent so much time and energy trying to uphold the story I created in my own head.
- How many times have we worried like Cal about something and later found out that there really was nothing to worry about? This type of worrying waste of time and also has a negative psychological effect on our bodies. It increases our stress levels, which in turn releases hormones to deal with the stress. Long and protracted levels of stress and the subsequent hormone release

damage our bodies and literally take years off our lives. Days, months and sometimes years of disease in our minds result in many forms of disease in our body.

Chapter 3: what scientists say mindfulness can do for you?

- Paying attention can help us counteract impulsive food buying and eating, and it can help us notice when we need to move around and exercise.
- While discipline is often thought of as joy lists, if we consider for a moment all the deep satisfaction often expressed by people who have engaged in the discipline for a long period of time, we can see discipline as an essential component of a meaningful life.

Chapter 4: how mindfulness can increase our children's attention and kindness.

- I'd learn that children benefit from getting a handle on what's happening in their brains, as a precursor to doing short practices that can help calm their emotions and increase their attention.
- So, after he stopped crying I asked him if he knew what had just happened to him. "No," he said as he intently watched my face waiting for a possible answer. "Well, there is this little part of your brain right here behind your four head." I tapped the right side of his four head with my finger like I was tapping my finger to the beat of some music. "You feel that?" Right behind that bone is a part of your brain that helps you read." He paid even closer attention. "And further back there is a part of your brain that helps you control your emotions." His eyes squinted as he looked at me. "I bet you started off reading a little bad, but the more you got upset, the more you couldn't read. And then you got so upset that you couldn't read it all?" He sheepishly nodded his head. Then I started crowding a little and using my hands to demonstrate. One hand played the role of the part of the brain that helps in reading, and the other playing the role of the brain governing emotions. I explain that when he got all revved up, the emotional part of his brain interfered with the part that helps them read. I made some weird noises and had one hand take over the other. Again and again, I made a silly noise and let the emotional hand dominate the reading hand. He started to smile, and I smiled back.
- Mason had already been following his breath for short periods, almost as a kind of game. He even has a cushion to sit on to practice. So, I reminded him how when he follows his breath he can calm his body and mind. He took a deep breath, then just sat quietly and filed his breath for a few moments. He decided to give the reading another try. It was not perfect, but he attacked the words, brought them down and sending them out. After just a sentence or two he got so excited he started to shout, "mommy, mommy. I'm reading." He finished the story I got better and better as he read. Before I left, I again reminded him how he can calm his brain down whenever he wants.
- Aaron child who can regulate his emotions is a child who can do better in school.
- If we teach children to follow their breath— and return to it when they get distracted— you are teaching them how to concentrate. Over time it will increase their ability to mobilize their attention.
- Several organizations around the country have developed a curricula for teaching mindfulness and what is called Social and Emotional Learning.
- Book on mindful parenting called: *Every day Blessings*.
- Daniel Goleman: *Building Emotional Intelligence, Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength*.

- He said, and this is seared into my memory, “I’m worried that my older brother didn’t come home last night.” That hit me like a ton of bricks, and I tried desperately to keep my composure. No kid his age should have to worry that his brother might be killed. How on earth would this child be able to concentrate in school? What state was his amygdala in? How could he focus on the task at hand? How was he going to be able to draw from his memory? What would lead his response be if someone pushed him on the playground? How many detentions and suspensions will this kid get?
- I was not surprised to discover that the program Tish directs is based on the same understanding of neuroscience I encountered in the Lidia Lantieri’s and Goldie Hawn’s programs— Care for Teachers.
- Susan Greenland, author of *The Mindful Child*, has a program that began in Los Angeles called Inner Kids. It’s for children pre-K through grade 12 and teaches what Susan calls the new ABCs: attention, balance and compassion. Susan trains teachers all of the world. Her largest focus is in the United States, and in 2011 she trained teachers and eight American cities. A study of inner kid’s work that showed increases in children’s executive function was published in the *Journal of applied school psychology* in 2010.
- Mindfulness can have great benefit for our children, but it can also help us be better parents. If you bring a touch of mindfulness to parenting, you may notice that you are less inclined to immediately react negatively to something your child has done. If your stress level is decreased a bit, you may be less likely to cause an emotionally charged situation to spin out of control. If you can slow down a bit, you may find yourself appreciating the free spiritedness and curious nature of your child more often. If you are paying closer attention and listening deeply, you may notice your kids being more willing to open up to you. You may find yourself being more affectionate to them, and this may make them more affectionate towards you. Practicing mindfulness for a few weeks won’t turn someone into who will a perfect parent. But if we slow down and reduce our own stress, and may make home life noticeably calmer and more harmonious.
- No one ever showed us how to pay attention!
- If you’re interested in getting mindfulness and SEL into your child’s school, get information about these programs from the resources section at the end of this book and send it to the member of the school board and principal.
- Bring information to your parent-teacher meeting and show your child’s teacher what is happening in the classroom around the country.

Chapter 5: how mindfulness can improve our health and our healthcare system.

- At the center of many eating problems, for example, a lack of noticing what you are doing in the moment. At Dr. David Ludwig’s obesity clinic at Children’s Hospital in Boston—called Ultimate Weight for Life OWL— he coaxes children to mindfully taste a variety of foods to counteract unconscious gobbling. Indiana state and Duke University conducted a joint study on binge eating, and the binge eaters who participated in mindfulness eating programs reduce their binging frequency by 75%.
- A study of diabetes published in the *Journal of internal medicine* showed that lifestyle change programs achieved the same beneficial result as charge treatment at a cost of \$8000 versus \$29,000--a 70% reduction. How often do you get something 70% off?

- The stress reduction clinic is where mindfulness-based stress reduction began. MBSR.

Chapter 6: how mindfulness can improve performance and build resiliency for our military and first responders.

- Chade-Meng Tan, who has written: *search inside yourself: Google's guide to enhancing productivity, creativity and happiness*, a book that describes how the course benefits Google engineers and can benefit people in any workplace.

Chapter 7: how mindfulness can help us rediscover our values and reshape our economy.

- Weaving mindfulness into our work gives us the best possibility of weaving it into our lives. We have gyms at or near our work to promote physical exercise he says. In the same way, workplace facilities and programs for training the mind may someday become just as common.
- Janice Martunarno, recently founded the Institute for Mindful Leadership.
- Pamela Weiss of Appropriate Response to create an innovative mindfulness program for his department.
- Since several studies show how children who eat healthy foods during the course of a day are better behaved, able to pay more attention, and less likely to become obese.

Chapter 8: how mindfulness can help us help ourselves and our country.

- Nancy Bardacke, a longtime midwife and grandmother, as the founder of the Mindfulness Based Childbirth and Parenting Program.
- John wooden, the legendary basketball coach at UCLA, used to shock his players with his opening lesson. He gathered them in the locker room before the first practice, not for a pep talk, not for a presentation on defensive strategy or ball handling skills. He taught them how to put on their socks. If you don't put on your socks properly, he explained, you get a wrinkle, and when you have a wrinkle, it causes a blister, and when you have a blister, you can't run and jump properly and so on. Paying attention to the simple act of putting your socks on, is mindfulness. If we take our time with the small things, the big things will come along.

Afterword: mindfulness and kindness practices.

- We often live on autopilot, doing without experiencing.

Resources for mindfulness training, applied mindfulness and mindfulness social action.

- Duke Integrative Medicine
 - The mindful way to reduce stress: a distance learning program.
 - Info@dukeintegrativemedicine.org
- The Penn Program for Mindfulness.
 - To join mailing list: Stress.Management@uphs.upenn.edu
- Goldie Hawn
 - The Hawn Foundation: MindUP program
 - www.thehawnfoundation.org/mindup