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HEAL YOUR BODY & MIND

THE POWER
of STILLNESS

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THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF STILLNESS

Words: Dr. Luke Sniewski



Can you remember when you were in the company of a calm, relaxed person whose inner peace seemed to settle your body? Oftentimes these special souls only pop up in our minds when we are feeling stressed, which is when we need that calming presence most. It's in moments like these that we wish there were a switch installed in our heads that we could flip on to stop our erratic rambling thoughts. If only it were that easy.

What most don't realise is that such a tool and capacity exist. It's actually available to us if we truly want it. When we practice and refine this quality within ourselves, not only do we radically shift the way we feel and respond to distressing thoughts and feelings, but we also become the person who has the power to positively impact the energy and space of those around us. The tool I'm referring to is stillness. The practice of stillness – aka meditation – is the first step on the path to freeing ourselves from the cyclical patterns many of us habitually find ourselves stuck within.



THE BODY MEDITATES. THE MIND FOLLOWS.

It is often taught that meditation is an activity of the mind. For many, it is a memory-strengthening exercise that improves concentration and our ability to focus, recall, and remember things. What if we considered meditation from a different perspective? What if we viewed the practice from the referential point of view of the body? Would it change our understanding of the practice and its associated benefits? Is meditation yet another phenomenon that could be better understood and appreciated if we stayed anchored to the body's experience during meditation? When we consider this possibility and reframing, it is easy to see why meditation might be better understood as a somatic experience rather than something purely cognitive. Let's examine meditation from the preferential viewpoint of the body to appreciate this stance fully.

Once the body has found a comfortable position on a cushion, chair, or bed, it closes its eyes to avoid distractions caused by visual stimulation. The body knows it must

give the mind something to get busy with so it can rest, process, and integrate without being distracted by the mind's perpetual stream of thoughts. Without some kind of mental distraction, the mind will attempt to interrupt the body's intention for silence and stillness. The very nature of the mind is to be constantly occupied.

The body understands the mind and knows the mind needs something to do while it settles into stillness. Like a stressed parent giving their child a device when they need a break from parenting, the body provides the mind something to observe for an extended period: its own breath. As a result, the body can initiate its innate healing processes, release its accumulated tension, and experience some much-needed restorative rest.

When the body genuinely feels good, the mind will follow. That's what happens when we meditate. We open our eyes after some time to find that the world looks different even though nothing actually changed. Subsequently, things in life tend to flow with more ease.

BENEFITS OF STILLNESS

The plethora of physiological and psychological benefits associated with meditation can be explained by changes that occur in the body. When the body is free of tension, not surprisingly, many measurable, palpable, and objective changes take place, including decreased metabolism, lowered blood pressure, and improved heart and breath rates. Meditation also reduces inflammation, meaning that the practice influences the development, expression, and intensity of chronic diseases such as cancer, digestive disorders, heart disease, diabetes, or Alzheimer's.

Apart from physical benefits, meditation impacts our everyday lived experience because we practice a different way of being in the world. Practicing stillness is what turns the mental concept of acceptance into experiential wisdom. It's not until

we experience what acceptance feels like in the body that we understand its true meaning. When we learn how to observe thoughts, emotions, and sensations in the body without reacting, judging, or identifying with them, we can say we truly understand what acceptance means. By acknowledging, observing, and

accepting our internal experiences, we invite responsiveness and enable responsibility (response-ability), thus, taking control of our life.

MEDITATION: HOW TO PRACTICE

If you are new to the practice of stillness, know that it takes time and patience to establish a consistent meditation practice. Also, it might be prudent to consider that sometimes meditation can make life more challenging, especially at first. When we start paying attention to the impulses, emotions, and all the different experiences within our body that were previously below our conscious awareness, we feel more of *everything*. The good and the bad. The present moment – and all the unwanted thoughts, negative emotions, and unpleasant body sensations that come with it – can be uncomfortable to experience when we acclimatise to being more present within our body.





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Meditation is not about expecting to experience something or to feel a certain way. It's about being present and feeling what *actually* is. When it comes to meditation, we never know what sensations we will experience when our eyes close down, focus on the breath, and tune into the experience of the body. Sensations come and go, sometimes flickering in and out of awareness and other times sticking around for what seems like forever. Some sensations may be pleasant;

others are uncomfortable, nagging, or even painful. Instead of reacting to impulses to scratch, fidget, adjust, or move in any way, notice these sensations as they arise and observe what happens when we allow our internal experience to unfold without intrusion. This is how we begin infusing our meditation practice with the transformational quality of stillness. As we practice being still and responsive during formal practice, that quality becomes accessible in everyday life.

MEDITATION: WHERE TO START?

When it comes to meditation, it might be helpful to remind yourself that you're developing a new skill. While some get frustrated or think that they can't meditate because their mind frequently wanders off, know that it truly doesn't matter how often the mind gets distracted. When you notice your mind elsewhere, calmly return your attention to the breath and keep going. Here are two

quick and easy ways to get started with a stillness practice:

Morning Conscious Breathing –

When you wake up in the morning, before you reach for your phone (or do anything for that matter), take ten slow, deep breaths. This could be the beginning of a consistent meditation practice if you choose to add more to your ten breaths.

Invite Moments of Stillness into

Everyday Life – Periodically during the day, take a moment to pause and check in with the body. Close your eyes. Focus your attention on the body. Take a few breaths. Notice what's it like to be in your body without trying to change your experience. See if you can label what sensations or emotions are present in the body and where you feel them.

Regardless of how deep of a dive you take with meditation and stillness, know that the practice helps create more possibilities in life for what matters most to you. The practice of stillness makes it possible to weed out what is unconscious, superficial, and the things that add little to no value in life. What's left is the space necessary for choosing what is alignment with your deepest expressions of authenticity.



Dr. Luke Sniewski (Ph.D. in psychology) is a New Zealand-based Wellbeing Coach and Somatic Therapist, as well as a Certified Practitioner, Mentor, and Facilitator of Compassionate Inquiry, a psychotherapeutic approach developed by Dr. Gabor Maté. In November 2022, he released his book, *'Somawise: Get out of your head, get into your body,'* which provides the practices that cultivate

and support the process of reconnecting with the body. Today, Luke works with clients worldwide, helping them to learn how to listen to their body and the wisdom it has to offer.

