

**Question 1:**

Dr. Kabat-Zinn writes, “*Mindfulness is the process by which we go about deepening our attention and awareness, refining them, and putting them to greater practical use in our lives*” (pg. xvii). Throughout the book he writes that “*this is it.*” I do not believe this to be interpreted as some endemic statement of demise, but one of hope and peace. By realizing that “*this is it,*” we simplify things and save ourselves from questioning the why and how of things that really aren’t that complex. Dr. Kabat-Zinn writes about mindfulness as wakefulness, alertness, and, more simply, paying attention on purpose. One of the ways he mentions that one can achieve such purposeful attentiveness is to focus on the breath—the literal intake and expulsion of *this* breath and *that*. In Sanskrit this is called “*Samadhi,*” coming back to focus on the breath. Many times, Dr. Kabat-Zinn expresses the need to incorporate good breathing into practice because it calms the mind and allows for the reduction of stress in the body.

Dr. Kabat-Zinn constantly mentions the necessity to simplify and enjoy the current moment—without judging it. He suggests practicing moments of non-doing. This doesn’t mean blatant laziness, but deliberate focus on no particular task or accomplishment, save being present and experiencing *now*. He mentions patience and that by cultivating it, one can almost not help cultivating mindfulness. He writes, “*We don’t have to let our anxieties and our desire of certain results dominate the quality of the moment, even when things are painful*” (pg. 50).

I have come to understand mindfulness as actually focusing on what I’m doing instead of being a robot and doing things without thought. It goes deeper; mindfulness is a deliberate choice to experience what the current moment has to offer and to obtain as much from it as I

can. I have experienced this mindfulness. I have chosen to practice meditation on a regular basis and have noticed that I pay attention a lot more than I otherwise would.

When I began to meditate (formally) about a month ago, I thought that I had to sit down and just become a pretzel while humming incantations. My knowledge in this area has expanded immensely since. I have come to appreciate each moment as a beautiful opportunity for learning and experiencing, as opposed to labeling each as either “good” or “bad.”

I have recently had terrible dealings with the Toyota dealership by my home. They have sold me a car, taken it back, sold me another, taken *it* back, and finally told me that I wouldn't be able to be financed through them. Previously, I might have responded very angrily and offensively toward the company. Instead, being mindful in the situation, I saw this as an opportunity to grow and allowed myself to listen to the dealer. I still wasn't happy, but I was able to maintain a professional conversation with him without punching his lights out. By being mindful I was able to see the bigger picture and not over-react to this very upsetting situation.

**Question 2:**

Mountain Meditation:

To practice mountain meditation, I actually went to the mountains. I drove up Big Cottonwood Canyon about half way and then stopped off on the side of the road. I found a small sandy area beside the river, rolled out my mat, and took my seat. My posture was one of dignity and respect for my surroundings without being boastful. I first kept my eyes open and took in the beauty of the rolling river, the sound of distant birds chirping, noticing the sway of the trees, and all the while being especially focused on the majesty of the mountain that stood before me. With these images in mind, I closed my eyes and focused-in on my breath. I sat for

nearly an hour, intermittently switching from having my eyes open to having them closed. I noticed that the breath entering my body was very cool and extremely soothing to my lungs. I had a sudden urge to pray; I did, and thanked God for creating such beauty that I might enjoy the grandeur of nature that enveloped me. I ended my meditation with a song of my own composure which is without a title. I sang it to the mountain, thanked it for its time, gathered up my mat, and coasted down the mountainside again.

#### Lake Meditation:

I decided to use one of Dr. Kabat-Zinn's suggestions for the lake meditation—I lay down. I thought that by resembling a lake, (flat and parallel to the earth), I might be better able to picture myself as a lake. I drove to a park by my house, tilted back the seat of my car and just lay there for a brief moment allowing myself to soak in the moment and to focus on my breath. I then closed my eyes and imagined my body (more specifically my torso) as a lake. I saw with my mind's eye undulations, ebbs and flows upon my stomach and fishes swimming just below the surface. I felt that the peace of just existing and not having to necessarily accomplish anything. I felt submissive to whatever might occur and utterly inviting of the same. I imagined my chest cavity open and that I were receiving powerful, positive energy from the universe. I came out of my meditation by coming back to my breath, wiggling my phalanges, and slowly opening my eyes.

Comparing the two meditations, I can certainly report that I more thoroughly enjoyed my meditation in the mountains. I am a very visual person and was better able to imagine myself as a mountain while having one directly in front of me to stare at. I was very moved by the sound of the river as it gently caressed the earth beneath it, rolled over the rocks in its path,

and made its way down the canyon. I could feel the cool breeze paint the autumn colors on my face. I was “in the mode” in the mountains better than I might have been elsewhere.

**Question 3:**

Karma is the belief that, “what goes around comes around.” If I do “good” things that benefit others and serve the needs of those who cannot provide for themselves, I’ll probably have this reciprocated to me at some point in the future. Simply put, karma is the belief that honesty and love will be rewarded and that dishonesty and hatred will be punished in some way or another.

Dr. Kabat-Zinn defines karma as, “...*this happens because that happened. B is connected in some way to A, every effect has an antecedent cause, and every cause an effect that is its measure and its consequence*” (pg. 220). He speaks of Karma almost as if it were an aura or energy that surrounds a person, causing them to experience different feelings, thoughts and desires.

I define karma as the energy that makes entries in a bank ledger located in the universe upon which are written the deeds, thoughts, and inclinations that I have every day. The idea behind this is that the more “good” I am, my balance sheet should reflect that with a larger portion of my deeds, thoughts, and inclinations being deposited to my account of “good” reciprocity, while my negative ones will be deposited in my account of “bad” reciprocity. Inherent in this concept of karma is the notion that there is real energy in the universe that keeps track of how I treat others, whether I’m impatient, greedy, unkind, and selfish. If I should occupy my time in the service of others and care for them, the energy will likewise take note. As I deal with all of my relations, this

energy will cause me to be more benefited from my dealings, and conversely taxed depending upon whether I have done more “good” or more “bad.”

Every day I am influenced and affected by my karma. When I choose to cut off some jerk who wouldn't get out of my way, my ability to sleep soundly that night is made more difficult. When I stop to give a friend a ride home instead of passing them by on my way to my next errand, the energy of the universe rewards me by having me find a \$10 bill on the ground outside my house. These causes and effects are never linear or directly related to one another by any means, but I still maintain that when I emit positive energy toward the universe, I get it back, with the opposite also being true.

Dr. Kabat-Zinn admits that mindfulness does change karma. He explains that, “*When you sit, you are not allowing your impulses to translate into action*” (pg. 221). By sitting, one simply watches his or her impulses without acting upon them other than to notice that they exist. Mindfulness changes the causes and effects—actions and consequences—and evens out our universal balance sheet. Dr. Kabat-Zinn exerts that, “*Mindfulness can...refashion the links in the chain of actions and consequences, and in doing so it unchains us, frees us, and opens up new directions for us through the moments we call life*” (pg. 221). He states that mindfulness—defined as paying attention on purpose—allows us to think of the consequences before we act and to take ownership of our actions so that we might have more positive energy reciprocated to us. By being more mindful about our actions, we can see how we affect others and the energy of the universe and thereby alter how we are affected by each.