

A woman with dark hair, wearing a pink cardigan and black pants, sits in a meditative lotus position on a yellow background. She has a concerned expression. Surrounding her are several playful monkey illustrations: a small brown monkey in a red airplane at the top left; a brown monkey on her head blowing a red horn; a grey monkey hanging upside down by its tail from a black lamp at the top right; a grey monkey on the left holding her hand; a brown monkey on the right holding a pink flower; a monkey in a red fez and yellow shirt at the bottom center holding a cymbal; and a brown monkey on the bottom right holding a banana. A shower of colorful confetti falls from the top center.

Serenity HOW?

Does the very idea of meditating drive you bananas? Relax! Our demystifying guide will show you what all the calm is about.

MEDITATION USED TO BE for mountaintop gurus, robed monks, and that wacky aunt who asked you to call her Prism. But now everybody from CEOs to the Seattle Seahawks is on the path to enlightenment. Scientists have studied the effects of meditation on both rheumatoid arthritis and racial bias. It could be the solution to all our problems! Except for *this* problem: Some of us aren't sure what it is. To meditate, do you actually have to *stop thinking*? What if you're a petty whiner, have a bad back, or ate a box of doughnuts for lunch? Well, here's the secret: Meditation is simply the regular practice of paying attention—to a word, or your breath, or the grass under your feet. You may never be able to stop the swirling tornado of your thoughts; that would be like trying to control the weather. But you can create a still point in the eye of the storm. Ready to increase your peace? Turn the page.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY C.J. Burton
ILLUSTRATIONS BY Patrik Svensson

Going Ape

How Martha Beck got a few monkeys off her back.

I CLEARLY—THOUGH unwillingly—recall my first-ever meditation. I was 23, headed for Japan, and I'd purchased a slim volume on Zen Buddhism. Back then I thought meditation seemed a little weird, but you know, when in Tokyo.... So I faced a wall, read and reread the instructions (basically, "just sit there"), and began. But as I tried to let go of all thought, I realized what my constant thinking had been doing for me—namely, holding at bay all the fatigue, anxiety, sadness, and physical stress I'd accrued in my 20-plus years on earth. Within five minutes I was feverish with panic. I decided my meditation career was over.

For the next decade or so, it was. In that time, I acquired second and third Harvard degrees and three children, became an assistant professor, and started my writing career. But I also withered into a bundle of maladies: insomnia, depression, panic attacks, the agony of fibromyalgia. Whenever I had to be still, waiting in a doctor's office or lying awake, I felt overwhelmed with fear and suffering. My solution was to stay in constant motion.

Eventually, though, I got too sick to keep moving. By my early 30s, I was spending almost all my time in bed. It was excruciating to sit, stand, walk, or even use my hands, which wasn't doing much for my depression. One day as I was whimpering, I found

myself thinking, *I might as well try meditating again. Can't be much worse than this.*

By that time, scientists were taking the whole meditation thing seriously, investigating claims that it could help treat all kinds of physical and emotional problems. I'd read the research, and I wanted a piece of that. So I began seeking out meditation guides, Asian philosophy, medical journals. With pain as my highly motivating guru, I hurtled myself into the business of doing nothing.

There's a Buddhist term for the mental chatter that ensues when we try to get still: *monkey mind*. Our primate brains bop and boing around, clutching ideas, arguments, and plans like chimps fighting to keep bananas. Well, I didn't have monkey mind. I had King Kong-on-crack mind. And the itching! The logjammed, brother-mucking *itching!* Oh, and did I mention I also have ADD?

Nevertheless, I'm a diligent student, especially when immobilized. I kept at it 20 minutes a day, first grimly, then with growing curiosity. Because despite the chaos, I could feel meditation turning into a haven. My thoughts were all over the place—but they were always all over the place. Meditation let me watch them zing around without doing anything about them. I could just relax into being the way nature made me.

A year later, I increased my daily practice to 30 minutes. I felt much more centered, and my health improved by leaps and bounds. These positive effects disappeared whenever I started backsliding: "Yeah, I meditate 20 or, uh, 10-ish... at least a couple of minutes a day. In the car. Listening to classic rock. That's a really zen place for me." This is like having a sandwich at the gym and calling it a workout. I came to realize that my King Kong mind responds only to the essential, ancient instructions: Sit, focus on breath or nothing, sustain, repeat.

Twenty years in, I developed a craving for meditation, sitting for an



hour at a time. And then one day it happened: My mind slipped into a place of absolute stillness. Radiant, soothing, infinitely loving. It was as if I'd been dragging myself through a desert and stumbled into a pool of clear, cool, life-giving water. I sat for hours, drinking it, swimming in it. Healing. I'd found the doorway to a secret, infinite sanctuary located in my very center.

That didn't happen the next time I meditated, but sitting through so much dag-blasted itching had made me patient. I knew the door was there, always, and that it would open again. All I had to do was be still.

People say, "Don't just sit there—do something!" As if sitting there is easy. Gentle reader, it may be the hardest thing I've ever done. But I do it daily, because Blaise Pascal (everybody's favorite 17th-century mathematician) was right when he said, "The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." Nowadays I can uproot most misery as it sprouts. When pain arises, I see it, welcome it, and then watch it go. This process has turned King Kong into the mellow creature all big apes really are at heart.

I suspect you too could use a little more peace, better health, a haven no one can ever take from you. You may be in for the worst time you've ever had, but it'll also be the best. So come on, don't just do something! Sit there.

ENLIGHTEN ME

What is mindfulness?
Short answer: being in the moment. The term was popularized by Jon Kabat-Zinn, founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He adapted Buddhist meditation principles to create Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, an eight-week course secular enough for ordinary New Englanders with psoriasis. Mindfulness involves nonjudgy observation of your surroundings, sensations, and thoughts. (Irritated by your neighbor's breathing? Smell French fries? Accept whatever is happening, just as it is.) When people refer to meditation these days, they're usually talking about a version of this technique. And we can bring this kind of awareness to our entire lives, says Saki Santorelli, current director of the Stress Reduction Clinic. "When we stay in the present, we make wiser choices and take things less personally. It's compelling and emancipating."

PROPTYSTLIST OLIVER MARTIN. WARDROBE: KISHU CHAND. GROOMER: VERONICA SINCLAIRE. MANICURES: CHELSEA KING FOR CELESTINE.





SIT RIGHT DOWN AND START RIGHT HERE!

If you can follow these four steps, you're meditating, says **Andy Puddicombe**, creator of the popular app *Headspace*.

Forget heading to a monastery; you can meditate anytime, anywhere, for as little as ten minutes a day.

1. Sit comfortably upright on a chair, feet on the floor, hands resting on your thighs. (If you prefer, you can sit on the floor.) Take two or three deep breaths, then close your eyes.

2. Starting from the top of the head and moving down, mentally scan your body, noticing any tension in your muscles, places of comfort or discomfort, the feel of the floor beneath your feet. Begin to pay attention to the natural rhythm of your breath.

3. As you become more aware of your breath, follow the rising and falling sensation without changing it in any way, silently counting breaths.

Inevitably, your mind will wander. This is one of the first lessons of meditation. When you notice that a thought has distracted you, let go of it and gently return your attention to your breath. Over time, you'll learn to step back and just observe the thoughts. The same goes for sounds: Rather than trying to block them out, let them come and go.

4. Take a few seconds to allow your mind to do whatever it wants. (You may find your mind is very quiet.) Noticing the sounds around you and bringing your attention back to the body, gently open your eyes.

When to do it: Many people meditate first thing in the morning, to start the day with a clear head—but everybody's different, so find what works for you.

How often: The more you practice, the more quickly you'll see benefits—but quality matters more than quantity, so focus on "little and often," taking the time to build a strong foundation. If every day feels like too much at first, start with three to five times a week.

How long: For beginners, just ten minutes a day will suffice. (Use a timer or an app so you won't have to watch the clock.) For some people, that will always be enough, but eventually you may decide to sit for longer periods—especially once you begin to feel the awesomeness of your newfound headspace.

*For guided meditations from Puddicombe, check out *Headspace*, available on iTunes and Google Play.*



"I practice Transcendental Meditation twice a day, and in almost 43 years, I've never missed a session. It's such a tremendous feeling of freedom when that suffocating rubber clown suit of negativity begins to dissolve. I think of meditating as bringing in the gold and saying goodbye to garbage."

—**DAVID LYNCH**, film director and founder of the David Lynch Foundation, which teaches Transcendental Meditation to at-risk populations

Every Breath You Take

Consider this five-minute exercise nature's Valium.

FEEL LIKE you haven't taken a deep breath in eons? That's because you probably haven't, says Belisa Vranich, clinical psychologist and author of *Breathe: 14 Days to Oxygenating, Recharging, and Fueling Your Body & Brain*, who's taught everyone from Fortune 500 employees to SWAT teams how to breathe for stress relief and endurance.

"We tend to breathe from our chest, which gives us access to only the very top of our lungs," Vranich says. "We should be breathing from our belly. That's what animals and babies do in a calm state." Shallow breaths tell the body we're in fight-or-flight mode, ready to run from a predator; belly breaths tell us all is well, so we're free to rest and digest. That's why deep breathing is essential for real relaxation, says Vranich. "You can take as many supplements and do as much aromatherapy as you want, but if you're not breathing well, you're not getting to the solution."

Use this recovery breath—so called because it helps you recover your equilibrium—as a form of meditation in itself or as a way to calm the body before any other meditative practice. →

1. Lying on your back with nothing under your head, put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.

2. Inhale deeply through your mouth (which gets you more oxygen), watching your belly rise. Your bottom hand should be the only one that moves. Keep inhaling until your belly is extended and you feel you can't take in any more air—then take in just a little bit more to "top off" the breath. You'll sense the air coming from the upper part of your lungs. (It's okay if you feel a little light-headed.)

3. Exhale through your mouth, pushing out all the air in one breath and feeling your belly contract. The exhale should take about the same amount of time as the two inhales; find your own rhythm and stick to it. Do as many as you can (you may max out at 20, or find you can go much longer). The more you do it, the easier it gets.

4. When you're ready, let yourself return to a more natural rhythm of deep inhales and exhales, through your nose if you want. With each inhale, feel yourself floating a little higher, and with each exhale, sink a little deeper, letting your whole body relax.

5. Keep up that rhythm for five minutes or longer. This technique can serve as portable stress relief throughout the day—take a breath or two while sitting at a traffic light or during a tense phone call. "The breath is available at any time," Vranich says. "You own it. It's yours."



My Word

The power of a mantra.

LIKE WICKER FURNITURE and primal-scream therapy, having a mantra may seem like a '70s thing. But a special word or phrase, continuously repeated, can come in handy, whether you want to help focus the mind when you're meditating or just comfort yourself in a rough moment. Jill Bormann, PhD, a nurse and researcher at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, is bringing the mantra (a.k.a. mantram) to modern health care, helping veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, AIDS patients, caregivers, and burned-out hospital workers using a technique she calls mantram repetition. Just choose a word or a phrase with spiritual significance, she advises, and repeat it silently throughout the day—while you're waiting for the elevator, for instance. Once you get the hang of it, your mantram can serve as a portal to a calmer mind and body.

So what's the best one for you? Bormann recommends words and phrases handed down through Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Native American, or Christian traditions, such as *rama* ("joy within") or *shalom* ("peace"). "Mantrams usually call on the name of God or on one of the most exalted experiences a person can have, like joy, peace, love, goodness," she says. "They give you extra bang for your buck."

In a small study, one group repeated the 16-word Hare Krishna mantra, while another repeated a fake mantra with the same rhythm. The group with the spiritual mantra experienced a greater decrease in stress and depression. (Transcendental Meditation espouses a completely different philosophy on mantras—see Enlighten Me, right.)

If you want something sweet and simple, that's okay, too. Just try *Let* as you inhale and *go* as you exhale. But whatever you choose, it should make you feel groovy.

ENLIGHTEN ME

What's the deal with Transcendental Meditation, anyway?

It may be the one thing Ellen DeGeneres, Clint Eastwood, and Howard Stern have in common. Practicing TM, a celebrity favorite, is like joining a club: You pay a fee (the basic cost is \$960) and an instructor chooses a mantra for you, then teaches you the technique over the course of four days (plus follow-up sessions). TM mantras are derived from the Vedic tradition, and they're meaningless—which is the point, according to psychiatrist Norman Rosenthal, MD, author of *Transcendence*: "Since they don't have meaning, they're not going to trigger specific associations," he says. The repetition becomes automatic and the sounds are soothing: "'Tofu burger' wouldn't really trip off the tongue, would it?" Say your mantra for 20 minutes twice a day, and eventually your brain may produce the slow, synchronized waves of what TM practitioners call transcendental consciousness. Katy Perry says TM is "the cure for the common stress"—and who doesn't want *that*?

MEDITATION NATION
NIRVANA AT THE CAR DEALERSHIP

Dean Sluyter rings a pair of chimes from his perch on a high stool in front of a group of potted palms between a gleaming Mustang and a hulking white Explorer. Everybody opens their eyes, stretching and sighing, pulling themselves back from what Sluyter, a meditation teacher, calls "the sky of awareness." They take deep breaths of the scented air, a blend of diffused lavender oil and transcendent new-car smell.

On a sunny Tuesday, 30 employees of Beyer Ford in Morristown, New Jersey, have gathered in the light-flooded showroom to learn the basics of meditation. Underneath a canopy of balloons—bunches of them in Easter egg shades—are mechanics in head-to-toe black, cheerful customer service reps, assertively groomed salesmen. Everybody could use a little peace, according to owner Bridget Beyer, because an auto dealership is the polar opposite of nirvana: "You're busting your ass to meet your numbers every 30 days. It's like, 'Get it across the curb, get it done, get it done!'"

"You go from hero to zero just like that, and a lot of people can't ride the bull," says salesman Ralph Twam, who began practicing meditation two years ago with a YouTube video set to Australian didgeridoo music. Regina Krauza, assistant manager of the service department, says the business isn't much fun for mechanics, either: "Nobody's happy to see us when they're spending \$1,000 on tires."

Sluyter asks the crowd whether they found the meditation relaxing, and a forest of hands goes up. "Yay!" he says, beaming. (A former hippie, the sport-coated Sluyter—author of *Natural Meditation* and several other books that "bring meditation to Main Street"—puts a big picture of himself on his flier, so everyone can see he has a normal haircut and doesn't wear a white robe.) "Other impressions?" Manny Perez of facilities management, whose first name is stitched jauntily on his khaki shirt, volunteers that even though the practice required nothing more than breathing, "I imagined a samurai on a horse. It felt good."

Keep meditating, and you can find inner stillness even in the car business, says Sluyter. "When you're dealing with a customer—thinking, *Are you really gonna kick the tires again?*—just settle your awareness on the feel of the ground you're standing on. Take a breath. No one has to know." He also recommends his no-fail mantra: "Just say 'Whee!' You can't say it without smiling, and when you smile, you change what's happening in your brain." He prompts everyone to try it on the count of three, and they give him a tentative "Whee!"

Beyer takes the mic. "When someone is in your face and being really obnoxious," she says, "think of these as meditative speed bumps." She takes in some air and lets it out again in a whoosh, then smiles with her eyes narrowed just a little, like she's about to close the deal of the century. "And make it loud, so they hear it. Because maybe they'll take one, too."

Innards Peace

The science-backed benefits of meditation, from your brain to your bowels and beyond.

Makes You Nicer

When Buddhist monks practiced compassion meditation while having their brains scanned—we've all done that, right?—they showed increased neural activity related to empathy.

Reunites You with Your Car Keys

Memory-training exercises? Sure—or you could meditate/visualize/yoga your way to improved cognition, according to a small study of older adults.

Turns Your Frown Upside Down

Meditation curbs activity in the brain's amygdala, which helps govern anxiety, stress, and anger. Translation? You're less likely to wig the hell out.

Provides TLC for Your IBS

In one study, eight weeks of mindfulness-based stress reduction tempered tummy turbulence by a whopping 26.4 percent.

Slashes Your Dessert Budget

Mindfulness stokes self-control and—by helping you distance yourself from cravings—robs Boston cream pie of its dastardly allure.

Sweetens Your Slumber

After a six-week meditation workshop, insomniacs felt better rested and less depressed—probably because they were better rested and less depressed.

Douses the Flames Shooting out of Your Head

Multiple studies have shown that mindfulness, yoga, and deep breathing have a chilling effect on hot flashes.

Transports You to Margaritaville

Meditation turns on the body's parasympathetic nervous system, the flip side of fight-or-flight. Heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension decrease—and umbrella-drink mode kicks in.

DICTIONARY: PHOTOSTOCK-ISRAEL/ALAMY

1500s: Word *meditate*, from Latin *meditari* ("reflect, consider"), enters English vernacular. "So *that's* what I have been doing!" practitioners exclaimeth.



Ask the Gurus

Confused? Leery?
Foot falling asleep?
You've got issues,
they've got answers....



Seriously—I can't turn off my brain.

"Seriously, that's okay. Your brain is designed to think, the way your lungs are built to breathe and your stomach to digest. Meditation is not about ceasing thought. It's about becoming aware of the mind's activity. We don't realize how much of our day we spend on autopilot, how rarely we're present in our own life, until we start to pay attention. Once we do, we discover that we don't have to be yanked around by our thoughts—we can watch them arise and dissipate."

—SARAH RUDELL BEACH

I'm too shallow and materialistic to meditate. Plus, I'm cranky and judgmental!

"Shallowness fades with meditation. Having done it for so long, I can no longer sit through conversations that are meaningless or mean. And I was a total shopaholic before I started practicing, but now I don't go into overdrive like I used to; meditation helps you pause before the purchase."

Angry, cranky, judgmental, and toxic people all undergo a shift with meditation. You can't sit still with yourself that intently and not be changed by the experience."

—SUZE YALOF SCHWARTZ

But what's meditation going to do about my snide sister-in-law and underperforming mutual funds?

"Meditation teaches you how to accept things as they are. It's an amazing skill to be able to do that instead of constantly thinking that everything is wrong and you have to change it. And your awareness of the world increases so much. It's like your senses are suddenly in HD."

—MICHAEL W. TAFT

Well, I tried to meditate, but I stink at it.

"We have a tendency to want to get the gold star and nail this whole meditation thing. That's not how it works. The good news is, you can't do it wrong. Next time you feel like you're failing, just notice the thought: *I'm thinking I'm doing it wrong.* Then see what happens next—because the truth is, you have no idea what's going to happen next."

—S.R.B.

Is it meditation if I'm crying?

"When we sit to practice, we relax, and when we relax, often what we've been holding at arm's length comes rushing in. For some it's fatigue; they get drowsy. For some it's just pain. That's okay. This is a breath awareness practice. Crying is a kind of breathing."

—SUSAN PIVER

Can we back up a minute? I don't just get drowsy—I actually fall asleep.

"That's the number one thing I hear from beginners, and I think it's really telling. We get so much stimulation during the day from our devices and interactions that when we let it all go and reconnect with our bodies, we realize just how exhausted and depleted we are. It's okay if you fall asleep—you probably needed a nap more than you needed meditation just then."

—S.R.B.

Then why can't I just sleep instead of meditating?

"Sleep is healing for the mind and body—but, assuming you're getting enough sleep, it's also good to experience that

relaxation consciously. Say I gave you a vacation to the Bahamas, and you went there and just slept for a week. You'd feel rested, sure. Now say you slept but were also awake for the ocean and sky and sun and people and music—that's even better, because you were aware."

—M.T.

I see the difference meditation makes in my life, but sometimes (okay, often) I don't want to do it.

"I feel you on that, sister. The truth is, it can be boring. Some days I just hate it. But it's a very Western notion to think that means you're a loser who lacks commitment. That's almost certainly not true. Just accept the feeling without judging."

—S.P.

Discipline is important, though, right?

"Well, in Buddhist thought, discipline is synonymous with joy, not with grind. But, yeah, you'll have to get your butt on the chair."

—S.P.

Funny you should mention my butt. Because it's sore. And my foot is totally numb.

"The idea is not to move reflexively. Feel the pins and needles. You have an itch? Make it the object of your attention. Then feel what it feels like to scratch that itch or stretch your tingly leg. It becomes a piece of your practice."

—S.P.

People seem to think meditation is a magical cure-all. What can't it do?

"It won't allow you to fly. So there's that."

—M.T.

Sarah Rudell Beach, creator of the blog Left Brain Buddha

Susan Piver, author of *Start Here Now: An Open-Hearted Guide to the Path and Practice of Meditation*

Suze Yalof Schwartz, founder of the Unplug Meditation studio in Los Angeles and author of the forthcoming book *Unplug: A Simple Guide to Meditation for Busy Skeptics and Modern Soul Seekers*

Michael W. Taft, author of *The Mindful Geek*



<< ROAD TEST >> The Fitbit for Meditation

If you can't survive a minute without tracking your progress, consider the cyborgesque brain-sensing headband known as Muse, which measures brain-wave activity and gives feedback as you meditate. You fit the plastic band around your forehead, then follow the recorded sessions on the app (which range from three to 45 minutes), focusing on your breath to the accompaniment of ambient sounds. I chose the beach track: When I was distracted, I heard a crashing tsunami; when I was calm, lapping waves. And when I was really calm, tweeting birds. It gave me a Jedi thrill to try controlling the atmosphere with my mind, but getting into the bird zone was like hitting a groove while hula-hooping—the second I thought, *Hey, I'm there*, I lost it. My score: 10 birds, 54 percent calm. Muse meditation doesn't feel as contemplative as the old-fashioned kind, and the gadget isn't cheap (\$249; chooseemuse.com), but playing it—I mean, meditating with it—is addictive.

—AMY MACLIN



1560s: St. Teresa of Ávila espouses "mental prayer," e.g., silent supplication/contemplative prayer...which is to say, Christian meditation.



Team Spirit

We couldn't write about meditation without trying it ourselves, so we asked **Jen Kluczkowski**—cofounder of the company Mindfresh, which offers on-site classes to stressed-out offices—to come into the O conference room and open our minds over the course of three weekly sessions. Read on to learn who zenned out and who zoned out.

JOSEPH: At first I wasn't concentrating on our warm-up stretches—I was concentrating on getting Beyoncé tickets. But when I focused, I could feel my shoulders relaxing.

ELYSE: I was worried about taking off my heels in case my feet were stinky.

DEIRDRE: I enjoyed it. When I wasn't sweating over how much I was sweating.

KINDRA: I thought the energy in the room was amazing. Strength in numbers! I tried meditating by myself on a plane once, but failed. I still think the most effective treatment for fear of flying is Pinot Grigio.

MOLLY: Jen makes it seem easy, but she probably has a big, beautiful place full of yoni-shaped reflecting ponds. I have a railroad apartment with one working door.

CHRISTINA: When she asked us to visualize our lower body surrounded by red, I kept coming back to cobalt blue around my neck and head. Later she told me blue is the color of the energy center associated with communication, which is in the neck area.

TOVA: I saw blue, too!

ELYSE: Is that because you guys are in the art department? I just kept opening my eyes. But now I know what all of you look like when you're asleep.

MOLLY: I liked the part where we picked our mantra based on what we wanted to channel. I chose *calm*. But a few times I actually found myself saying *clam*. Maybe I'm going to manifest shellfish?

GILLIAN: I picked *pay attention*—then fell asleep. And my husband's a meditation instructor!

TOVA: You know, I've found that when I'm talking to someone, I now notice when my mind wanders, and I bring myself back to the moment.

CHRISTINA: I thought you had to *learn* to meditate, but you don't learn, you just jump in. Anybody else want to keep up the group sessions?

TOVA: Let's do it!

MOLLY: I'm just glad to know this stuff's not only for people who can spell *bodhisattva*.

BOREDOM BUSTERS

Want to mix things up a little? Try these alternatives to the classic sit-and-breathe.

IF YOU'RE GOAL-ORIENTED, TRY... Guided Imagery

WHAT IT IS: You follow a script that helps you home in on a specific intention—getting to sleep, conquering fear, boosting self-esteem. **WHAT YOU'LL DO:** For fear, you might progressively relax various parts of the body, starting with your toes, moving up to your ankles, and so on. For inner strength, you might imagine being a tall mountain. **GIVE IT A WHIRL:** chopra.com, tarabrach.com, Jon Kabat-Zinn on YouTube.

IF WOO-WOO IS A NO-NO, TRY... Open Focus

WHAT IT IS: Developed by psychologist Les Fehmi, PhD, based on his EEG biofeedback research, Open Focus directs your attention not to a breath or a mantra, but to empty spaces; in turn, your brain produces slow, calming alpha waves. Less complicated than it sounds. **WHAT YOU'LL DO:** Imagine the space between your eyes or inside your ears. **GIVE IT A WHIRL:** openfocus.com.

IF YOU'RE FEELING WARM AND FUZZY— OR JUST THE OPPOSITE—TRY... Lovingkindness

WHAT IT IS: Sending compassionate thoughts to yourself and others; practiced by Buddhist monks. **WHAT YOU'LL DO:** First, wish yourself well with the phrases “May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I be at ease.” Then repeat the process, thinking first of someone you respect. Then someone you love. Then a stranger. Then someone who's hurt you. **GIVE IT A WHIRL:** When you're feeling really grateful, when you've had a fight with your teenager.

IF YOU HAVE ANTS IN YOUR PANTS, TRY... Walking Meditation

WHAT IT IS: Mindfulness...while you walk. **WHAT YOU'LL DO:** Embrace the sensation of each foot as you lift it and put it down again, the pressure of your soles, the feel of your shoes. Notice your surroundings—what you see, hear, smell. When you stop, feel what it's like to be still. **GIVE IT A WHIRL:** On your lunch hour, in a lush forest, in the parking lot at Target.

PHONE OM

Mobile mindfulness apps for absolute beginners.



Meditation for Skeptics

WHY WE LIKE IT: ABC anchor Dan Harris, author of *10% Happier*, and veteran meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein give you the basics “without using the word *namaste*.” Includes video lessons, guided audio meditations, and access to a coach who can answer your questions. *Free seven-day trial, then \$10 per month; 10percenthappier.com*



LovePioneer

WHY WE LIKE IT: Includes a deck of virtual “meditation cards,” each with a pretty watercolor and a message (“Be unapologetically you”); tap the card for a related meditation intention. Equally good for days when you want to meditate...or just think about meditating. *\$5; jenniferkass.com*



Insight Timer

WHY WE LIKE IT: Something for everybody—more than 1,300 guided meditations by hundreds of experts, from Eckhart Tolle to Thich Nhat Hanh. If you'd rather meditate on your own, just set the timer, and when your session ends, you'll hear a chime. *Free for basic version and \$3 for upgrade; insighttimer.com*

*PHONE OM: FROM LEFT: SUPERSTOCK/GETTY IMAGES, CHRIS WILLSON/ALAMY, DEBORAH ERNEST/ALAMY.

MEDITATION NATION

BODHI BEHIND BARS

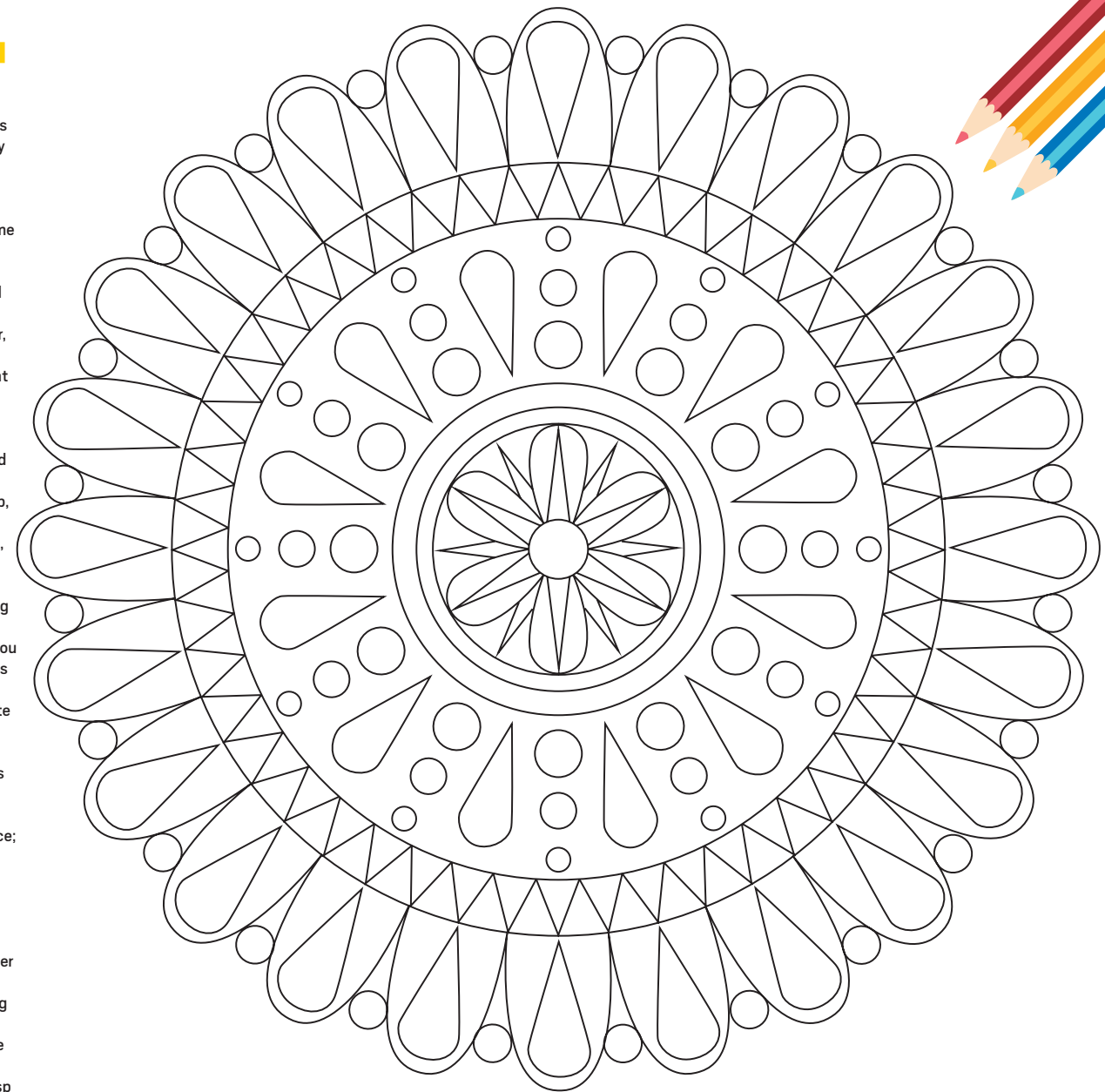
When Melissa* discovered meditation in 2007, about halfway through her 14 years in prison, she was profoundly comforted by the idea of accepting her circumstances without judgment. “No counseling could have given me what I've learned from this practice—to stop thinking about everything that should be, could be, would be,” says the former gang member, who was incarcerated at age 16 after committing a violent crime. “And it's helped me have compassion for the misguided girl I was.”

Many inmates have landed in prison after an act of pure impulse, says Kate Crisp, executive director of the Prison Mindfulness Institute, and a practice of attentive awareness can help them widen the gap between feeling and behavior. “When you're aware of what's happening, you can say, ‘Wait a minute, things could move a little slower here,’” she says. The Institute offers a 12-week course for inmates called Path of Freedom, as well as programs for the newly released, corrections staff, probation and parole officers, and police; the curriculum focuses on meditation and mindfulness as tools for communicating, resolving conflict, and becoming less reactive.

Managing anxiety is another benefit, says Crisp. “A lot of women prisoners are suffering trauma after abuse, and most are mothers, so they're worried about their children.” In a study coauthored by Crisp last year, 18 female inmates who took meditation classes experienced less stress, anxiety, and depression afterward.

For Melissa, who was released last year, freedom has brought a new set of challenges. At 30, she'd never had a job, and her father had to teach her how to drive. “My life is not at all the way I wanted it to be, but I've learned to love myself so I can move forward. We all have that gift. We're all survivors.”

*Name has been changed.



COLOR YOUR WORLD

Tranquility by design.

I F YOU HAVEN'T been swept up in the adult-coloring craze yet, find a few pencils or markers and try it with the mandala (*above*), a Buddhist symbol of the universe. Feel relaxed? It's probably not just because you're getting back into kindergarten brain. Coloring, especially with complex, geometric patterns, can be its own

meditative practice because it involves repetitive motion and enough structure to let you detach from stressful thoughts. In one small study published in the journal *Art Therapy*, the subjects who colored mandalas or plaid patterns experienced greater anxiety reduction than those who did free-form coloring. We recommend the mandala, which puts the whole universe at your fingertips.

For downloadable PDFs of ready-to-color images, go to printmandala.com.



1922: Hermann Hesse finishes writing bildungsroman *Siddhartha*, in which titular seeker traverses ancient India, owning nothing, eating nothing, meditating lots. Hesse later gets Nobel; Western world gets interested in Eastern religion.

"Cravings are mind tantrums: 'I want this and I won't be okay without it!' Mindfulness allows you to experience them as fleeting states of mind. When you think you have to have a doughnut, practice an attitude of disidentification: 'I am noticing this craving, but I see that this craving is not me. I see it coming and going. I don't need to look for a way to act on it. I am already full in the calmness of my mind.'"

—PAVEL SOMOV, PhD, psychologist and author of *Eating the Moment, Reinventing the Meal*, and *Mindful Emotional Eating*



YOU'RE GETTING LIGHTER

How meditation can help you lose weight.

The day has arrived: You can now slim down using the power of your mind! Of course, you also need to eat well and move more—but meditation can be a crucial part of reaching your goal, says health and wellness expert Tiffany Cruikshank, author of *Meditate Your Weight*. Cruikshank began incorporating meditation into her program after some of her patients' weight loss efforts had stalled, no matter how ardent their commitment to kickboxing and kale.

"There was some mental block keeping them from getting to the next step," she says, "and since stress was such a big component in their lives, we started playing around with meditation." After her patients made breath work, mindfulness, and visualization part of their routine, the numbers on the scale eventually began going down again. "My hunch was right," she says. "They were putting so much effort into counting calories and exercising in already-packed schedules. Meditation gave

them the nourishment they needed because they could finally just sit."

Meditation may lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which affects insulin sensitivity and plays a key role in metabolism; mindfulness can also make us more aware of what we're eating and why, says dietitian Marsha Hudnall, president and co-owner of Green Mountain at Fox Run, a retreat in Ludlow, Vermont, where she counsels women with issues related to weight management and emotional eating. "Mindfulness is a way to connect with yourself and ask, *Am I actually hungry? What do I really want right now?*"

Hudnall, who has a history of disordered eating, meditates daily. "I grew up a round kid in a thin family, and when Mom says you shouldn't have that cookie, it becomes the most desirable thing in the world," she says. "Mindfulness took away those shoulds and shouldn'ts. When I could focus on what I truly wanted, I realized I didn't actually like sugar as much as I thought."

"I've been meditating for 18 years, because a settled mind is a happy mind. The first few minutes of my practice, I take inventory of my emotional judgments and choices, and I'm able to see these things with less attachment and more clarity."

—RUSSELL SIMMONS, cofounder of Def Jam Recordings and coauthor of *Success Through Stillness: Meditation Made Simple*

In Case of Emergency...

When there's just no time for immersive contemplation.

IT'S USEFUL TO think of meditation as preventive medicine: Keeping up a regular practice is the best way to stay strong in the face of challenges. But sometimes you just need a quicker fix, like when...

You're about to lose your \$@&%!

INSTANT KARMA: If the dog just threw up again—this time on your wedding gown—try repeating "patience" or "kindness" in your head or just above a whisper, says Lodro Rinzler, author of *The Buddha Walks into the Office* and cofounder of Mndfl meditation studio. "Repeating it will help you keep it top of mind," says Rinzler.

A stranger asks, "When are you due?" You're not pregnant.

INSTANT KARMA: Jill Blakeway, founder of the YinOva Center, finds the Taoist inner smile meditation particularly effective for quieting your inner critic. Take a few deep breaths and smile gently. Visualize the energy from your smile radiating to the space between your eyebrows. Then gradually move it through your body, paying a little extra attention to any part you're not thrilled about. Finally, direct your smiling energy to a point about two inches below your navel, your energy center.

Your speech is in five minutes.

INSTANT KARMA: To counteract nerves and anxious energy, advises John Dunne, PhD, distinguished professor in contemplative humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, sit with your eyes lowered or closed and contemplate your navel. No, for real: Visualize a black dot at your navel, and after a few minutes, visualize the color draining away until it disappears completely. "As the black dot fades away," Dunne says, "you'll be grounded and calm." —KELLY DINARDO



1968: Beatles head to India, where study of Transcendental Meditation inspires much of the *White Album*; sadly, newfound tranquility fails to keep quartet together.



TUNE IN, TURN ON!

Sex educator **Pamela Madsen** rocks her own special—and sensual—meditation style.

In 2013, I spent a year attending Deepak Chopra's meditation retreats. One day I was meditating while perched on my heels, and I started to rock back and forth. I wound up having this extraordinary meditation, the best of my life. I realized that the way I was sitting and rocking was putting pressure on my vulva, where there are all kinds of nerve endings. Stimulate them, and you can release endorphins in your brain. We have an inner pharmacy, and I was accessing it!

I started to practice this way and teach it to my students. I tell women to either tightly cup their vulva with their hand or rock back and forth while meditating. I named it lotus lift meditation. The idea is that you're fostering a better connection with your body and entering a state of

mental, physical, and creative arousal. As I've experienced and many of my students have told me, it dramatically improves your sex life.

In many religions, prayer involves a rocking motion—think of Orthodox Jews swaying while praying. There's a link between rhythmic movement and connection to the divine. And that's what we do when we meditate: We connect. I'm trying to teach women how to enhance that connection with themselves, and the result is often that they're more open to sex. Orgasm isn't the point; this isn't masturbation. But being in touch with your body through this kind of meditation does make your orgasms better, that's for sure.

—AS TOLD TO KATIE ARNOLD-RATLIFF



MEDITATION NATION GOOD GRIEF

"The pain is still profound," says Susan Numeroff, whose husband of 28 years died 18 months ago. "I'm traveling to places we used to go, and there are so many memories. And now I'm starting to make memories without him."

When she's overcome by sadness, Numeroff returns to her breath. If she cries, that's all right; "the sound is a meditative vibration in the body," she says. "And howling—let it out, and it's an amazing release. Then it slows, and then you're breathing, and that turns into meditation."

"Meditating through grief isn't about pushing emotions away," says

Sensei Robert Chodo Campbell of the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care (*below right*), which offers support to the sick and bereaved, and trains caregivers. "You're feeling the sadness and anger arise, but not clinging to them." Campbell and Sensei Koshin Paley Ellison (*below left*), cofounders of the center and coauthors of *Awake at the Bedside*, bring the gentle acceptance of Buddhism to a subject our culture meets with deep unease.

"Families will be weeping and arguing but then tell me, 'We didn't let Dad know he's dying. He'd be too sad,'"

says Campbell. "We want to give people a nurturing, real way to deal with death."

Numeroff and her late husband, Marvin, found peace in Campbell's visits; she still meets with Campbell to talk. "It's so important to have him listen without rushing in to say, 'It'll be okay.'"

Meditation also helps her notice moments of joy. "The other day I'd been in Marvin's closet and then looked out the window and saw one lonely cloud," she says. "I thought, *He's saying hi*. Instead of thinking about the past or worrying about the future, I just appreciated the present. It was like getting a hug."



HOW TO HURT LESS

The cure for chronic pain? Curiosity.

Since the summer before college, I've suffered inexplicable stomach pain at night—no doctor has ever found a reason for it. I'm now 38, and in the past four years, I've been in three serious car accidents: One cracked my tailbone, another gave me severe whiplash, and the third exacerbated my injuries. I've been dealing with chronic pain for most of my adult life.

Chiropractic and other medical treatments have done only so much. But I've been meditating in earnest since my early 20s, and recently it's become my primary pain management strategy. My mindfulness practice helps me simply be curious about my pain—*What is this sensation? Is it a tingling, is it sharpness, is it heat?* When I break it down this way, it becomes so much more bearable than an abstract thought like *I'm in pain and I want it to go away*.

Even when I'm in agony, I can ask myself, *How do I want to be with this right now? Do I want to merely sit with the sensation itself, or get caught up in the story I'm telling myself about it?* Which is usually that the pain is unbearable, it's ruining my life, and I hate it.

Does meditating make pain go away? Yes and no. The sensation doesn't diminish. But my perception of it has changed so radically that I no longer dread it. —NICHOLE PROFFITT

GRIEF: COURTESY OF NEW YORK ZEN CENTER FOR CONTEMPLATIVE CARE (2); FRAMES: GETTY IMAGES (2); YOGI: RAINER BINDER/JULSTEIN BILD/GETTY IMAGES.

Let's Get Metaphysical

staffers try a few adventures in meditation: visiting a chipmunk, "booty dropping," letting the rhythm get 'em....



	THE PRACTICE	THE GOAL	THE JOURNEY	LEVEL OF ENLIGHTENMENT	TRY IT IF...
YOGA NIDRA PURE YOGA	Guided visualizations done while lying on a mat in the dark. A deeply restorative practice known as "psychic sleep."	Your body slumbers; your mind stays awake. They say 30 minutes is equal to two hours of sleep!	The teacher took us on various mental travels to a green ocean, the dwelling of a chipmunk...or so she told me later. After my mind woke up. Oops.	Even after a late night of binge-watching <i>Fit to Fat to Fit</i> , I jumped out of bed the next morning raring to go.	You have trouble sleeping—or you're just a slacker. (yoganidranetwork.org)
ANTIGRAVITY COCOONING CRUNCH GYM	Weightless yoga/guided meditation/return to the womb. You hang in a sling hammock for stretching and resistance, then crawl in and curl up, larva-style.	The suspension exercises release hip, neck, and shoulder tension so you can chill out in blissful weightlessness.	Trying to do bicycle kicks in midair made me feel like a blob of Jell-O that had been spooned into a tube sock.	It was invigorating. But I'm not sure how enlightened you can get when somebody's telling you to "booty drop" into a cocoon.	You have Cirque du Soleil fantasies. (antigravitycocooning.com)
HIMALAYAN SALT ROOM MEDITATION BREATHE SALT ROOMS	A guided meditation in a "salt cave" made of 24,000 pounds of pink salt; a "halogenerator" grinds up the stuff so it can float through the air.	The salt supposedly emanates negative ions to counteract the positive ions given off by some electronics. (No need for that tinfoil hat!)	The shaman wafted smoke from palo santo wood with a bundle of turkey feathers. There were rattles. And I now know that my spirit animal is a hummingbird.	I felt like my mucus blockages went away. Plus, I got foxy beach hair.	You're Stevie Nicks. (breathesaltrooms.com)
KUNDALINI YOGA HARI NYC	A hybrid of yoga and meditation; chanting and a lot of breath work.	You awaken the Kundalini energy coiled at the base of your spine, then use breath to move it up through your chakras and out the top of your head.	Try lying with your legs six inches above the floor as you do the rapid "breath of fire," moving your navel in and out. I felt the burn.	One thing Kundalini yoga is supposed to do: activate sexual energy. LOL! Afterward I was too sore to even get my clothes off.	You're in touch with your inner goddess. (kundalinilive.com)
SOUND BATH MDNFL MEDITATION STUDIO	A sound therapist plays gongs, chimes, and resonant "singing bowls" (rub the rim and they make music—it's like playing water glasses).	The concert of harmony, sound waves, vibration, and unusual notes lures you into tranquility.	I entered an out-of-this-world state of semiconsciousness. When it was over, I felt like I'd spent a restful night on the astral plane.	I've already been back for another class!	You loved those whale-sounds tapes in the '80s. (saraauster.com/sounds)
5RHYTHMS MARTHA GRAHAM STUDIO	Ecstatic trance dance with five different rhythms to which you wiggle or gyrate, depending on what the music tells you. And your embarrassment level.	You "embrace your tribal longings" by giving yourself over to whatever your body wants to do.	Imagine a roomful of sweaty, half-naked Elaines from <i>Seinfeld</i> screaming "Wool!" The teacher asked what our hips wanted to "say to the sunset."	I was ready to make fun of those lunatics, but it turns out I'm one of them. It was truly meditative: I felt absolutely present in each moment.	You're a dancing machine who wants to get her ya-yas out—with the added bonus of watching grown men skipping and giggling. (5rhythms.com)

Reported by Katie Arnold-Ratliff, Zoe Donaldson, Amy MacLin, Elyse Moody, and Molly Simms



EARLY '70s: Yoga explodes, bringing the meditative mind-set to Main Street. For Westerners, practice becomes less Eastern discipline than far-out way to expand your mind, man.

MEDITATION NATION
READING, WRITING,
AND RHYTHMIC BREATHING

When one of the kids at Robert W. Coleman Elementary School in West Baltimore acts out, chances are she'll be sent not to the principal's office but to the Mindful Moment room, a soothing space with comfy cushions and beanbags, lit by glowing pink Himalayan salt lamps. It's part of the Mindful Moment program run by the Holistic Life Foundation, a nonprofit started in 2001 by brothers Atman and Ali Smith, who grew up in the neighborhood, and their friend Andres Gonzalez. Longtime meditators, they wanted to give kids better tools to cope with stress and anger in this low-income, high-crime neighborhood, which was at the epicenter of the riots that followed Freddie Gray's death in police custody. They began by teaching mindfulness first at another elementary school, then at a local YMCA. Now, thanks to their efforts, the day at Coleman starts with a breathing exercise over the PA system and ends with an after-school program where, in addition to sports and tutoring, students can learn yoga. All day, staffers guide students through breathing and other centering exercises in the Mindful Moment room. And it's working: In the 2013–14 school year, Coleman had zero suspensions.

With their smiles, beards, and cool T-shirts, Gonzalez, 36, Ali, 40, and Atman, 38, make ideal big brothers, and that's how the kids see them. Several have even come back after graduating to work with them. The enthusiasm starts young. A fourth grader told the guys that a little time in the Mindful Moment room calms her down "when I have an attitude." And a fifth grader said she uses the breathing techniques when she babysits little kids—when they're hyper, she tells them to take ten deep breaths. Gonzalez wants all the students to have that kind of resourcefulness and share it: "That's how you stop the trickle-down effect, when Mom or Pops has a hard day and yells at the kids, and then the kids go to school and yell at their friends," he says. "We've had parents tell us, 'I came home the other day stressed out, and my daughter said, *Hey, Mom, you need to sit down. I need to teach you how to breathe.*'"

ENLIGHTEN ME

Why is the lotus position spiritual?

The practice of meditating with your legs pretzeled originated in India thousands of years ago likely because it offered a cushy base for sitting on the ground. "You get the broadest seat and take some pressure off the tailbone because you're tilting forward a little," says Rajshree Patel, a meditation teacher who's held courses at the United Nations. "And you're allowing energy to move up the spine." The lotus flower also symbolizes enlightenment, adds Dawn Eshelman, head of performing arts at New York City's Rubin Museum of Art, which focuses on Himalayan culture: "No matter how much muck you're rooted in, you can bloom into a pure flower."



ALL IN GOOD TIME

So how much meditating do you need to do before you see a payoff? Here's the cost-benefit analysis, according to various university studies conducted over the past 15 years:

TO FEEL WARMLY TOWARD A STRANGER	7 minutes
TO FEEL LESS STRESSED	3 consecutive days, 25 minutes a day
TO IMPROVE ATTENTION	4 days, 20 minutes a day
TO REDUCE CIGARETTE CRAVINGS	10 consecutive days, 30 minutes a day
TO FEEL CLOSER TO YOUR PARTNER	8 weeks, 150 minutes a week
TO BECOME THE HAPPIEST PERSON ON EARTH*	10,000+ hours

*Title given to Matthieu Ricard, the Buddhist monk whose brain exhibited some of the highest recorded levels of activity in an area associated with positive emotions (i.e., his happy place).

BOY: LARRY JACKSON. GIRL: MARK MAHANEY. FRAMES: GETTY IMAGES (2). MAD MEN: COURTESY OF AMC.

2015: In *Mad Men* series finale, cad protagonist realizes, mid-lotus, he'd like to buy the world a Coke. If Don Draper can attain enlightenment, anybody can.

