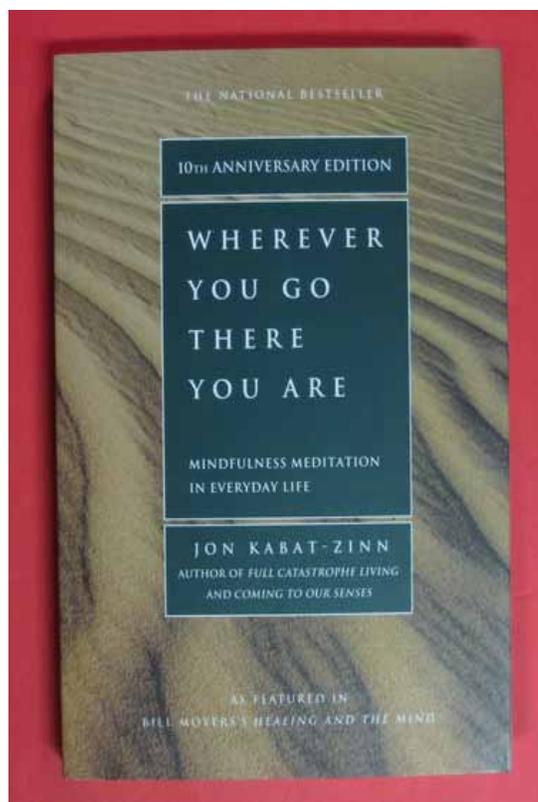


Book Review

Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life

By Jon Kabat – Zinn
1994, Hyperion, New York, U.S.A.

Review written by
Catherine Mac Guinness, R.N.
Rosen Method Practitioner
Alameda, CA
catherinemacg@sbcglobal.net
www.bodytherapyforhealth.com



The Rosen Method Journal invites book reviews that provide resources related to Rosen Method practice. The review of *Wherever You Go There You Are*, by Jon Kabat–Zinn, offers us an opportunity to examine mindfulness in quite some depth. The book unfolds in much the same simplicity as the title. How simple and ordinary is: wherever you go there you are! To me it sounds like something Marion Rosen would say. It is how she embraced the ordinary as she lived her life and developed Rosen Method Bodywork and Movement. And so it is the ordinary that forms the substance and meat of mindfulness. I believe this is a subject that interests us Rosen practitioners and students as we work with our clients observing, feeling, seeing, noticing, touching, paying attention to the breath, the words, the aliveness, the muscle tension, the holdings, the ordinary, as they manifest in the body in the here and now. This book also invites us to examine how mindfulness shows up in our life, our work and our relationships, and to consider what fosters it. Perhaps the material in the book will encourage us to reflect more on how mindfulness can foster and nourish those values that we already have and cherish in our connection and presence with clients as we accompany them in their own unfolding.

Jon Kabat–Zinn, Ph.D., is the founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine. His clinic was featured in 1993 in the Public Broadcasting Series *Healing the Mind*, with Bill Moyers. His major research interests include mind/body interactions for healing, clinical applications of mindfulness meditation for people with chronic pain and stress-related disorders, and the social applications of mindfulness.

I found this book a delight to read, full of warmth, love, wisdom, insight and profound in its simplicity. It is an exploration of the art of mindfulness. It is about waking up to the most important moment we have, the present moment. As Kabat – Zinn explains, often as we live our lives we are preoccupied with the past, with what has already happened, or with the future that has not already arrived yet. We may never quite be where we actually are. We live in our thoughts, fantasies and impulses about who we think we are, about where we are going, about the past and the future, about what we want and like, about what we fear and don't like, which spin out continuously, veiling the present moment, our direction and the very ground we are standing on.

As Kabat-Zinn sees it, the work of waking up from these dreams is the work of meditation. The author guides and inspires the reader toward the systematic cultivation of wakefulness, of present-moment awareness. He explains how this waking up goes hand in hand with what we might call "wisdom:" a seeing more deeply into cause and effect, and the interconnectedness of things so that we are no longer in a dream-dictated reality of our own creation. He insists that to find our way we will need to pay more attention to this moment, this present moment. It is the only moment we have to live, grow, feel, and change.

This book provides brief and easy access to the essence of Mindfulness Meditation (MM) and its application for people whose lives may or may not be dominated by problems of stress, pain, and illness. It is offered particularly for those who are curious about mindfulness and its relevance. It is also offered to those who are already practicing MM and who would chart the course toward greater wisdom and wish to expand, deepen and reinforce their commitment to a life of greater awareness and insight. It explores the willingness that is required to look deeply at one's present moments, no matter what they hold, in a spirit of generosity, kindness towards oneself, and openness to wonder what might be possible.

And what has all this got to do with Rosen Method Bodywork and Movement? Quite honestly, I think it has everything to do with Rosen Method and more besides. When I first read this book, before I knew I would be writing a review about it, I had taken a pencil and wrote "Rosen Method" in many places throughout the book. For example; there is a chapter on "Stopping" and being present. Another one is "This Is It," about a clear acknowledgement of what is happening. As Kabat-Zinn says, it is not about trying to improve oneself or to get anywhere else, but simply to realize where one is. This allows us to let go of the past and the future, and to wake up to what we are now, in this present moment. All of us who have been touched by Rosen Method know this type of acknowledgement can have a healing effect.

There are also chapters on: Capturing Your Moments, Breath, Non-Doing, Letting Go, Non-Judging, Trust, Going Inside, and another chapter about Vulnerability. Here the author suggests that what looks like weakness is actually where one's strength lies, and what looks like strength is often weakness, an attempt to cover up fear. Allowing vulnerability seems to me to be the essence of Rosen Method, both our own, as practitioners, as well as that of students and clients as we accompany them on their journey. Sometimes I feel this book was written for us.

Here in these brief chapters are gems of wisdom, focusing on the spirit of mindfulness. Most chapters end with suggestions and questions for the reader to reflect upon. They are basic, deep and close to the core of who we believe ourselves to be, what we value most, what is most important in our life, and where we see ourselves going. Also quite often at the end of a chapter there are inspiring quotations from Rumi, Kabir, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Dante, Lao-Tsu and others to ground us in our own experience as we read the book. One such quote from Kabir that I love and carries the spirit of Rosen Method is:

Don't go outside your house to see the flowers.
My friend, don't bother with that excursion.
Inside your body there are flowers.
One flower has a thousand petals,
That will do for a place to sit.
Sitting there you will have a glimpse of beauty
inside the body and out of it,
before gardens and after gardens.

Kabir

In the last chapter of the book Kabat – Zinn asks: Is mindfulness spiritual? We may ask also, is Rosen Method spiritual? He prefers to use the term “consciousness discipline” because the word spiritual evokes such different connotations for different people. He suggests that mindfulness and, I believe, Rosen Method also, allows everything to come up and that ultimately spirituality simply means experiencing wholeness and interconnectedness directly, a seeing that nothing is separate or extraneous. If we see ourselves in this way then everything becomes spiritual in the deepest sense. Doing MM is spiritual and so is doing Rosen Method.

Kabat- Zinn reminds us that it is the inner experience that counts and that we have to be there for it. This is especially true of Rosen Method. Actually, I think Rosen Method Bodywork is importantly different from mindfulness. It is done with the direct interpersonal guidance of a practitioner who has been trained to stay in the present moment. The practitioner can feel when the client slips out of the present moment and then guide the person back. In many meditation practices people can get stuck in their own loops of defense and somatization without realizing it: they only think they are feeling. There is no other practice like Rosen Method Bodywork in which the focus is on the present moment and we have another person right there with us who follows our every move toward and away from that moment. It is this important difference that makes Rosen Method so special. It is in the present moment of sustained embodied self-awareness that healing happens. It is where the person comes into calmness, ease, balance and wholeness. All else is mere thinking.

The author touches on soul stories, stories of quest, of risking one's life, of enduring darkness, of being buried underground or underwater, of being lost and confused. Fairy Tales are soul stories. Kabat–Zinn concludes that MM practice is a mirror of this growth and development. Both MM and/or Rosen Method take us down as well as up, to face pain and darkness as well as joy and light. Whatever comes up is an occasion for exploration and opening as we seek to find ourselves and our place in this world. Our demons, dragons, our witches, our princes and princesses, our kings and queens are all here now, ready to teach us. But we have to listen and take them on in the very fabric and substance of our human body and life. In many different ways throughout the book, Jon Kabat–Zinn states simply that meditation is about being oneself and knowing something about who that is. The author reminded me over and over again that I am on a path, the path of my own life and that this path is always unfolding moment by moment. What happens in this moment influences what happens next. And all this is true of Rosen Method. Above anything else it is Rosen Method that has helped me with my own meditation practice, has helped me to be more present in my own body, more focused and grounded in the present moment, and in my own embodied self awareness and mindfulness.