

Living in *Flow*

The key to unlocking your greatest potential



By Catherine Krame

Introduction

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On the fringes of consciousness there was a restlessness brewing, an awakening of sorts. I had the simple recognition that change was coming, for myself and for the world. An internal flame that would grow brighter and brighter first flickered into my awareness quite a number of years ago.

It all felt so large, so overwhelming and very abstract. I'd followed new age spiritual teachings and the term "evolution of human consciousness" was not new to me. But what did that actually mean? I knew something huge was happening; I could feel it deep within myself but the context in which to frame it eluded me. Dreams of old and new, visions of past humanity bleeding through to the present, and, time and space taking on a new meaning were the images that flooded my psyche. These confusing glimpses perhaps foretold the birth of an awakening, but how that would unfold was still a mystery.

It would prove to be interesting that one of the first words written in the spiritual journal I began to keep was: Convergence. I had the profound sense that old and new were about to intersect, forming a paradigm-shift in the evolution of mankind. I did not know it at the time, but I would experience my own personal "convergence" with the head-on collision of my abstract spiritual journey and the concrete practices of mindfulness. The effects of incorporating mindfulness practices into my daily life were staggering—life changing and exponential in nature. As I ventured more deeply into practices that I hoped would bring about transformation, I began to experience periods of profound spiritual growth that were marked by episodes of what I can only refer to as, "psychic phenomena." But isn't "psychic phenomena" just another way of trying to explain something that falls outside the realm of our current grasp of understanding? I believe what was happening was that I was simply becoming more in tune with the universe, and becoming sensitive to varying levels of energy and alternate realms of consciousness. I found myself in heightened states of being for extended periods of time. I would later look back and realize that during those heightened states, I was simply experiencing life unfolding in extreme present-moment awareness. I

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was, in fact, experiencing intense periods of *Flow*. The energy levels associated with this state of consciousness varied in intensity, with some being indescribably sacred. I looked in vain for explanations of these events in many different places. What was becoming crystal clear, however, was that there is so much more to our existence than we can even imagine. My interest in mindfulness and my desire to uncover the power of human consciousness naturally merged when I realized the impact one had on the other. More specifically, I realized that moment-to-moment awareness is the crucial element in determining the quality of our consciousness that lasts well beyond the moment we are in. In fact, a fully embodied awareness that enlists all the senses seems to be the key in unlocking the gateway into *Flow*. Releasing the cognitive thought process during these moments and relying on the infinite wisdom inherent in the physical body brings about a richer, more harmonious experience of life. It is through the simultaneous connection to a universal consciousness that we glean important information, resulting in an extraordinary ability to adapt to our environment. It was also becoming increasingly evident to me that we have the ability to control the content of our consciousness and in doing so, determine the quality of our own lives. Essentially, we can 'choose' how we want to live life. This, however, is easier said than done and requires dedication to what seems to be a life-long practice.

As I began to dig deeper into the ideology behind mindfulness I came to understand that there was something highly effective about these practices. In support of what the ancient wisdom traditions have known for centuries was mounting evidence that we can successfully rewire our brains and create new neural pathways through meditation. I was becoming convinced that we needed mindfulness-based interventions in all aspects of life from the classroom to the boardroom, and beyond. If we could use these tools to shape how we think about thinking, then perhaps this could be our road to salvation, lasting peace, and the shift in human consciousness so desperately needed. Perhaps this would allow us to live with meaning, purpose, and *Flow*. I have great optimism that we can create this desired way of life for ourselves by tapping into elevated levels of energy that are available to each and every one of us. Through prac-

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ticed skills we can enter into a state of consciousness in which life unfolds with greater ease and *Flows*.

What was happening rapidly was the cultivation of a singular purpose and focused intention. My ideas about conscious evolution weren't some vague, elusive concept anymore. The spiritual uncertainty I had experienced for years began to melt away and what was emerging was a blueprint for change—a plan. It became my mission to bring mindfulness out into the world. With that recognition the seeds were planted to co-found a center for Contemplative Studies and Mindful Living at a nearby college.

After the center was up and running, synchronicity would continue to map out a clear path for me and I simply followed the signs. My ongoing investigation into mindfulness led me to an “Ethics in Mindfulness” conference held at the University of Massachusetts in the Center for Mindfulness founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Arriving at the center evoked the sense of coming home to a place where I belonged. It was a powerful and life-changing weekend by the end of which I was compelled to undertake their Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teacher training. Over the course of the weekend I experienced a profound personal shift that carried with it a new sense of clarity and resolve as to the importance of this work. In actuality, the turning point for me came early Saturday morning of the conference with director Saki Santorelli's opening remarks. The passion with which he delivered his talk on the impact of “lineage” distinctly shifted the energy in the room from attending a conference, to being part of something greater than ourselves, to a call for action. I found myself reflecting on how powerful the notion of lineage is and what it really means to stand on the shoulders of those who came before. I felt a great sense of responsibility, while at the same time feeling liberated to understand that I could shape the small slice of lineage I represent, and choose the legacy I leave behind. Although we are tiny specs in the fabric of mankind, each of us is a necessary part of a thread without which there would be a visible gap in our wholeness. By the end of that weekend not only did I know that I would embark on the MBSR teacher-training path, but the historical importance of the

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larger mindfulness movement was palpable. Keynote speaker Rhonda Magee, a professor bringing mindfulness to law at the University of San Francisco, thought so too as she changed the beginning of her lecture to talk about her own lineage.

This was the start of a remarkable journey of self-discovery. As my mindfulness practice deepened, so did my desire for learning—learning on the level of “felt sense” to connect with my own innate wisdom and learning on the philosophical level of what it means to be human. Tapping into this wisdom happens through our sensory intelligence (or, felt sense intelligence) when we engage the five senses, inhabit our bodies and become tuned in to our internal experience. Discovering this led to a deeper understanding of the “Two Kinds of Intelligence” written about by Rumi, the thirteenth century Persian scholar, poet, and Sufi mystic. His very reference to an inherent intelligence beyond the mind confirmed what early philosophers already knew: the mysteries of life go beyond man’s ability to think.

What was also becoming clear to me was that the face of “mindfulness” was going through a transformation of its own and there was a convergence occurring, an intersection of ancient philosophies and modern needs. What the Buddha taught twenty-five hundred years ago had at its very essence the solid building blocks for a far-reaching application; timeless in nature, it transcended cultural and geographical borders. Ancient wisdom was meeting contemporary needs in a re-contextualization of information. Bringing with it tides of change, an inherent esoteric knowledge was being revealed in an exoteric world. Jon Kabat-Zinn, known to many as the father of western mindfulness, saw the value in these teachings and introduced a modernized version in the 1970s. In his brilliance, he produced sound bites that the western mind could grasp when he developed the seven foundational attitudes of mindfulness. These became the basis for the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that he launched at UMass medical center. Secular in nature, but sacred in its heartfelt delivery, Kabat-Zinn’s curriculum managed to keep the Buddhist underpinnings intact without the religious overtones that would surely have prevented its success in the western world. At the core

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of mindfulness is present-moment awareness, which is also at the core of many current day health initiatives, approaches to optimal wellness, and the vast majority of new age spiritual teachings. Mindfulness is also a key component of Positive Psychology. So, it was not at all surprising to me that my journey into mindfulness led straight into the arms of a Positive Psychology program.

I was about to experience yet another convergence; or perhaps more accurately, the intersection of two relevant schools of thought in which one becomes the spring point for the other to blossom. Here I'm referring to mindfulness as the foundation of, and natural point of departure for, Positive Psychology; the principles of which resonated deeply on my quest for transformation. We seem to be reaching an axis point of monumental change and are teetering on a global shift. Tal Ben Shahar from the Positive Psychology camp refers to it as the Happiness Revolution, but I think of it as the revolution of our human psyche and a crucial piece of the puzzle to save humanity. It might sound a little dramatic, but if we evaluate the world around us you might agree that our collective situation can be characterized as dire: socially, physically, politically, environmentally, and globally. On a personal level I was not immune to the destructive qualities of the human mind, on the contrary, it was the very reason I found myself on this path of self-discovery.

At the turn of the last century Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity changed how we viewed the relationship between time and space. Advances in Quantum Physics by Max Planck would change the way we interpreted the behavior of all matter. In discovering the existence of sub-atomic particles we were catapulted into an even greater understanding of our material world with the recognition that everything can be reduced to varying forms of energy, and is interconnected on the most fundamental level. Other scientific discoveries were spearheading a giant shift in understanding human biology. The previously held notion of hardwiring implies stasis and rigidity, but all of these advances were revealing that nothing in our universe is hardwired—our bodies consist of constantly changing molecules of energy and we connect with a world comprised of the

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same thing: varying forms of energy that are also in constant flux.

The discoveries in the field of quantum physics revolutionized the scientific community and fueled new age spiritual teachings while the Human Genome Project mapped DNA for the first time. These scientific advances along with the emerging fields of neuroscience, epigenetics, and psychoneuroimmunology were changing the landscape of modern medicine. Positive psychology and other advances in behavioral health were shedding light on the need for a new model of psychiatric care. In fact, what was becoming increasingly evident was the need for a whole-systems approach to treating mental, physical, and spiritual health as one. What was also coming to light with all of these discoveries is that we are limitless beings and not hard-wired as previously thought. We are beginning to understand that we have the ability to heal ourselves from within, and any failure on our part to recognize the powerful influence of thoughts, feelings, and emotions on our reality would be a huge disservice to humanity. The implications are staggering, and while we are just beginning to understand our true potential as human beings, we must not underestimate the impact of present-moment awareness and mindfulness practices on our overall wellbeing. There is an undeniable link between the state of our consciousness and physical health, so why wouldn't we do everything in our power not only to understand human consciousness, but also to learn how to use it to shape the outcome of our reality?

Indeed, the emerging fields of neuroscience, epigenetics, and psychoneuroimmunology provided irrefutable evidence that mind, body, and spirit cannot be viewed separately and that overall health cannot be treated as a sum of its parts. Advances in these fields give solid proof of the power of our innate ability to heal, change, and evolve. The most profound finding in neuroscience was that the adult brain is fluid and plastic throughout our lives, contrary to the previously held belief in a fixed, hard-wired brain that lost neurons at an increasing rate after about the age of two. Research has demonstrated that the brain continues to grow and re-shape itself across the lifespan, changing in response to ongoing experience. The basic concept of neuroplasticity is that anything we do alters the physical characteristics of our brain. With this in mind, the burgeoning field of epi-

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genetics shows that lifestyle and environmental factors indisputably impact health all the way down to our DNA. The science of epigenetics reveals that genetic codes don't necessarily determine our destiny, but rather the regulation of gene expression influenced by lifestyle and environmental factors do. The field of psychoneuroimmunology elucidates an interconnectedness that gives further evidence that a whole systems approach to health is absolutely necessary. Studies in this field show that many of the body's systems do not operate independent of one another. Research has shown that the immune system is regulated in large part by the brain and nervous system. This important connection gives rise to a conceivable working theory within the scientific community that our thoughts, emotions, and experiences influence our vulnerability or resistance to disease.

These discoveries are game-changers and have resulted in the paradigm shift happening within the medical community. As the implications become clear, we are beginning to acknowledge that a holistic, integrative approach to health is paramount. This promotes a more comprehensive perspective within the field of medicine by recognizing that we are not simply a sum of our parts. Quite the contrary, we are beginning to acknowledge that our mind, body, and spirit are inextricably linked. These findings suggest that as functioning whole systems we are the source of our own change and evolutionary capabilities.

Humanity is under fire and in a fight for its very survival. What we need to create is an arsenal in which we combine all the technologies, tools, and advancements that have emerged over the course of the last century. The nature of these discoveries is an opportunity not to be squandered—our very existence depends on it. The question remains...how? How do we harness and process this information to elicit true and lasting change?

In this book I will explore how we can use advances in science, technology, and medicine for the betterment of overall health and wellbeing in our daily lives. We will be required to learn a new language: a language of the body, mind, and spirit. Feeling and emotion are a language in and of itself, as expressed by our bodies, and through which we communicate. When we employ moment-to-moment awareness we are in unique relationship with

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ourselves, and the world around us in an unfolding experiential way of being that involves all the senses. Using mindfulness and other tools we will explore the power of direct experience and how this new “language” uses the level of felt sense to determine how we perceive our reality. Our subjective awareness of objective circumstances only becomes the experience of reality when registered as such in our consciousness. There are many factors influencing this process, one of which is intention. The focus of our intention, and subsequent attention, precedes the outcome of our experience. Not only can we alter our consciousness to a level that will create more desirable outcomes, but I am also suggesting that this new language is in fact the dynamic state of consciousness called *Flow*. I am proposing that we can use all the knowledge uncovered in recent history to operate at a higher level of consciousness, a state of being that researchers currently refer to as *Flow*. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues at the University of Chicago were the first to coin the term when they identified a specific state of consciousness associated with effortless doing. They described the experience as occurring when a “person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity.” (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “*Flow*”) Entering into states of *Flow* is a solution to the destructive levels of consciousness that humanity seems to be floundering in. It’s a solution that doesn’t require any resources other than our own innate ability to turn inward and tap the vast well of human potential that lay deep within us. This potential, untapped by most of us, has sparked a familiarity within anyone who has encountered it accidentally or momentarily. This familiarity is more like the gentle stirring of a dormant and long-forgotten memory; it’s the idea that our true nature is something we’ve known all along but has become obscured or forgotten. It is our birthright to know or remember the luminous beings of splendor that we are, and it is also quite possibly the key to a widespread spiritual awakening of mankind. For certain, it holds the key to living more harmonious lives.

What we will come to see is that *Flow* is an elevated level of positive energy in which life not only unfolds with greater ease, but in which we are the masters of our own fate. As the word itself suggests, positive energy flows while negative energy stagnates. What it boils

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down to is the age-old quest for happiness and the fundamental recognition that happiness is the dominant core value of human existence. This firmly held belief, predating modern times, has been contemplated in ancient wisdom traditions and by early philosophers who have written about the shortcomings of the human condition since the beginning of recorded time. By entering a state of *Flow* we can successfully raise our baseline level of happiness, raise our level of consciousness in the process, and effectively create a new normal for mankind. Although the state of *Flow* is available to us at any time, present-moment awareness is the crucial component to entering and maintaining it. We will focus a great deal on the importance of mindfulness practices and other tools that will enable us to cultivate an awareness in which we can awaken to the fullness of our lives. This awareness creates a spaciousness in which time takes on a new dimension and life takes on an enhanced texture that we would otherwise not experience. Born out of this expanded consciousness, *Flow* exists in a seemingly timeless state of being during which it is quite common to lose complete track of time. We will explore the idea that this state can become more than a temporary and transitory way of being.

For the first time in the history of mankind we are in the unique position of being able to bridge the gap between science and spirituality. It's time for us to capitalize on the revolutionary advances of the last century, stepping out of the darkness and into the light as we explore the relationship between spiritual awakening and *Flow* states. We can tap into levels of energy that are available to us all, and reach a much greater understanding of our own capabilities as human beings. In doing so we will effectively raise human consciousness on a global scale, and move towards the evolutionary change so sought after for the very survival of mankind. Our existence depends on attaining this next level of consciousness, in which we will have the ability to experience reality in ways that we never have before. As a species we are on the cusp of a new frontier where we can shift our limited understanding beyond what has ever been thought possible. Collectively we can create a new reality for mankind. The bottom line is that there is a better way to live—with purpose, meaning and *Flow*.