



Close your eyes,
Take a breath,
Inhale calm,
Exhale stress.

*The range of what we
think and do is limited by
what we fail to notice...*
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YMCA, first and third
Tuesday, 1.30 – 3.30 pm

Discussion paper for September 2nd, 2025 – **“Stop and drop” which is an invitation to drop into wakefulness, the Art of Non-Doing.**

In the first part we’ll cover Meditation: In his book *Coming To Our Senses*, when Jon Kabat-Zinn says that “meditation is not for the faint-hearted”, he’s pointing to the fact that mindfulness practice is not just about sitting quietly and feeling peaceful—it’s about turning toward whatever is present in your experience, even if it’s uncomfortable, painful, or frightening.

In other words, meditation asks you to:

1. Face your inner world directly – thoughts, emotions, body sensations – without distracting yourself or immediately trying to fix or avoid them.
2. Stay with discomfort – physical pain, anxiety, grief, boredom – and watch how they move and change, rather than running away.
3. Let go of illusions of control – seeing clearly that much of what happens in life (and inside us) is not under our command.
4. Be radically honest – meeting the truth of your experience, even if it contradicts your self-image or expectations.

It takes courage because our habitual tendency is to avoid what’s unpleasant or to cling to what’s pleasant. Mindfulness reverses that pattern by encouraging you to meet all of life—pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral—with openness and curiosity.

Kabat-Zinn’s point is that mindfulness isn’t about zoning out or escaping reality—it’s about waking up into reality, which can be raw, unpredictable, and vulnerable, but also deeply freeing.

The “not for the faint-hearted” part is this:

Meditation asks you to open the door to everything—grief, rage, shame, fear, longing—rather than keeping them locked deep inside of ourselves. It’s not a quick escape; it’s a training in staying present in the middle of the storm. Over time, that presence becomes a source of real strength and peace.

Here are a couple of practical examples that show what Jon Kabat-Zinn means by “Not for the faint-hearted”:

1. Sitting with emotional pain instead of distracting yourself: You’ve had a big argument with someone close to you. Normally, you’d go watch TV, scroll your phone, or throw yourself into work to avoid the ache.

In meditation, instead of running from that ache, you sit down, close your eyes, and feel it: the tightness in your chest, the heaviness in your stomach, the hot flush in your face.

Your mind screams “Make this stop!” but you keep returning to your breath, staying with the sensations as they shift. It’s uncomfortable, but over time you see that feelings are waves—they rise, crest, and pass. That understanding only comes from courageously staying with them.

2. Facing physical pain without immediately resisting it: You're meditating, and your knee starts throbbing. The first impulse is to move or think about something else.

Instead, you direct your awareness into the pain: noticing its edges, its pulsing, its heat. You discover it's not one solid block of agony but a changing dance of sensations. You may still move eventually, but you've learned something profound—that suffering grows when we fight what's here.

3. Meeting your own mind's chaos: You sit down expecting a serene mind, but instead thoughts are racing: "I'm doing this wrong... I can't stop thinking ... I'm a failure at this."

Mindfulness means noticing these thoughts without pushing them away, labelling them as "thinking," and returning to the present moment.

That repeated act of seeing clearly but not judging takes real bravery, especially when your thoughts are self-critical or scary. Here's the surprising part — the reason meditation can feel more freeing than exhausting, even though it's about-facing discomfort head-on:

Fighting reality is more draining than feeling it.

1. When we resist sadness, pain, or fear, we're actually holding them in place by tensing against them. That constant resistance burns a huge amount of mental energy.
2. In meditation, by allowing the feeling to be there without trying to push it away, you stop the inner tug-of-war.
3. It's like finally putting down a heavy bag you didn't even know you were carrying.
4. You discover pain isn't solid — it's alive and changing.
5. A big fear is, "**If I open to this, it'll swallow me whole.**" But when you actually look closely, sensations and emotions are more like clouds than bricks — they move, morph, and eventually dissolve.

This breaks the illusion that you're stuck in them forever. That's where freedom sneaks in.

1. You build trust in your own ability to handle life.
2. Each time you sit with discomfort without panicking, you prove to yourself, I can be here for this.
3. That's a deep confidence—not the kind that says, "Everything will be fine," but the kind that says, "Whatever comes, I can meet it."
4. The heart softens when it's no longer on guard.

Ironically, when you stop pushing away your inner storms, you also stop numbing yourself to the good stuff. Joy, connection, gratitude—they all feel richer when you're not constantly armouring yourself.

What JKZ says in his book about the planet and Mindful Meditation...

Years ago, a meditation teacher asked JKZ "how is the world treating you" he mumbled some sort of reply, but then he was asked "how are you treating the world" and it ultimately made him aware that these questions were two sides of the same coin, and it was related to what we now call 'climate change'. 20 years ago, when he wrote his book this wasn't really a term, so he phrased it as "Planetary autoimmune disease" due to, in his opinion, humans seriously undermining the overall dynamic balance of the body of the earth as a whole. Here's how he links the "planetary autoimmune disease" idea to individual mindfulness practice — and why he sees personal awareness as part of planetary healing:

1. The outer reflects the inner: Kabat-Zinn often points out that the way we treat the Earth mirrors the way we treat ourselves. If we live on autopilot—rushing, over-consuming, avoiding discomfort—we tend to ignore our own needs and the planet's needs. Mindfulness helps us slow down enough to notice both: the tightness in our own chest and the smog in the sky.

2. Separation is the root problem: Autoimmune disease in the body happens because the immune system fails to recognise self. On a planetary level, we act destructively because we see ourselves as separate from nature, rather than part of it. Mindfulness practice repeatedly brings us back to the truth that there is no clear boundary between “me” and “environment.” The air you breathe is your body. The water you drink is your body.

3. Awareness leads to different choices: When you see clearly that your well-being is tied to the well-being of the planet, your actions naturally shift—not from guilt, but from understanding.

This could mean:

- 🌍 Consuming less
- 🌍 Protecting natural spaces
- 🌍 Choosing products and policies that sustain life rather than deplete it

The important thing for JKZ is that this shift grows out of awareness, not just ideology.

4. Collective healing starts with individual presence: He often says: “If we’re going to heal the planet, we have to start by healing ourselves.”

By learning not to attack our own difficult emotions or uncomfortable truths, we stop practicing the habit of aggression—both inwardly and outwardly.

This kind of inner work changes the tone of how we meet the world.

In short, Kabat-Zinn’s point is that global change won’t happen just from better technology or policies. It also requires a transformation in how we perceive and relate—to ourselves, each other, and the Earth.



Mindfulness Meditation is one way to retrain that perception, so we stop “attacking” our own planetary body. JKZ teaches that mindfulness awareness can act as a safe haven because it offers a space where we can rest in the present moment without needing to fix, control, or escape what’s happening. In that stillness, we can reconnect with clarity, compassion, and stability—resources that restore us from the inside out.

He also emphasises that peace is not just a personal wish but a universal human aspiration. Across cultures and histories, we have sought a way to live without violence, in harmony with one another and with the planet. Kabat-Zinn believes this is not a naïve dream but an achievable reality—if we recognise that peace begins within us.

As he often frames it, the state of the outer world reflects the state of our inner hearts.

Healing one transforms the other. And in the words of the timeless adage:

“There is no way to peace, peace is the way.” ... Image by Chat GPT

In the forward of his second book *Falling Awake* (2016) which was previously published as *Coming to our Senses* (2005) JKZ beautifully explains the art of non-doing:

“The invitation is always the same: to stop for a moment—just one moment—and drop into wakefulness. That is all. ‘Stop and drop’ meaning, drop into your experience of experiencing, and for even the briefest of moments, simply holding it in awareness as it is—in no time, or to put it differently, in this timeless moment we call now, the only moment we actually ever have.”

He follows with a powerful reflection: “It seems so simple. And it is. But it is not easy.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn emphasizes “stopping” and “dropping” as simple but radical invitations to step out of automatic pilot and reinhabit the present moment.

Stopping: Pause the momentum: He describes stopping not as freezing but as interrupting the momentum of mindless doing, reacting, and striving. Wakefulness: By stopping, you

recognise that you are alive right now, not lost in thought or anticipation. Access to choice: Stopping reveals freedom—you can respond rather than react.

Dropping: Letting go into awareness: Dropping means releasing into what is already here, without judgment or clinging.

1. Embodied mindfulness: He likens it to “dropping into” the body, breath, and awareness—grounding yourself in presence.
2. Effortless arrival: Rather than trying to get somewhere, dropping is a relaxation into being.

Integration: JKZ explains that “stopping and dropping” can take only a moment—like a micro-meditation within daily life. You can stop walking, stop in the middle of a thought, or pause before reacting. Then, by dropping into awareness, you reinhabit experience with clarity and compassion.

One Example I use: Standing in a queue, instead of fidgeting or wishing I’d joined a different queue! I stop. Then I drop into the sensation of standing, breathing, hearing sounds. I’m instantly back in presence.

What does it all mean??

1. “Stopping”

1. It means **pausing your habitual mental or physical busyness**, even if only for a single moment.
2. This doesn’t mean halting entirely—rather, it’s hitting the pause button on automatic pilot: rumination, planning, reacting.
3. In that pause, you create **a gap of wakefulness**, a stillness that allows presence to seep in.

2. “Dropping”

1. After pausing, you “drop into” your immediate lived experience—into sensing, feeling, breathing.
2. It’s about **becoming grounded in the present**, whether that’s noticing the body, breath, sounds, or emotions as they are.
3. You hold what arises **without judgment**, simply affording it awareness.
4. Kabat-Zinn calls it “holding it in awareness as it is.”

3. The Paradox of Simplicity

1. This practice is deceptively simple—but profoundly challenging.
2. He writes: **“It seems so simple. And it is. But it is not easy.”**
3. It takes intention, because in daily life our minds are conditioned toward distraction and doing.

4. Turning Moments into Practice

1. Importantly, you don’t have to meditate for long or sit in stillness to practice stopping and dropping.
2. Even tiny interruptions— “just one moment”—can rekindle wakefulness.
3. And if you miss it, **there’s always the next moment to begin again:** stop and drop into now.

A Brief Example in Daily Life

Imagine you’re typing an email, and your mind is racing. You might:

1. **Stop**—pause your hands on the keyboard and your inner chatter for a beat.
2. **Drop**—gently shift into awareness of your breath or the contact of your chair beneath you.
3. **Stay present** for just a moment, noticing —without judging—what’s present.
4. **Resume** your activity with a renewed connection to the here and now.

Why It Matters

1. **Freedom from autopilot:** You reclaim choice—respond rather than react.
2. **Embodied awareness:** You reconnect to your senses and your body in real time.
3. **Momentary homecoming:** You rediscover presence, even if only briefly—a refuge in the “timeless moment we call now.”

JKZ is widely accepted and attributed with the concept and naming of the STOP acronym in his MBSR programmes, some educational and institutional references have cited Eisha Goldstein, Ph.D. (Clinical psychologist, author and co-founder of The Centre for Mindful Living in Los Angeles. Healing). Particularly the Rowen Centre for Behavioural Medicine and the University of Utah Health.

STOP	S- Stop: Simply pause – Hit the mental brakes that instant.
S Stop for a moment	T- Take a Breath: Breathe in and out consciously to settle the mind and body.
T Take a breath	O – Observe: Gently notice what’s arising – thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations.
O Observe what’s happening in your mind and body	P – Proceed: Move forward with clarity and kindness, responding rather than reacting.
P Proceed	

How can we utilise this concept into our daily lives.?

By taking a moment to stop, take a step back, observe, and proceed mindfully, you can diffuse the situation and respond in a more effective way. Instead of saying something you might regret later, you can take a deep breath and choose your words carefully.

Alternatively, if you’ve done this and used up all your words, and the situation is that the other person or persons, doesn’t or won’t respectfully listen to your perspective and just tries to wear you down, remove yourself physically from the room to defuse the situation, then if it’s important try again once you’ve given every one (including you) breathing space.

If it isn’t important, accept the situation and just walk away.

JKZ goes explains that we cultivate mindfulness through the deliberate practice of paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and kindness. He often describes it as a muscle we strengthen by returning again and again to awareness, especially of the body and the breath.

Key points in his teaching are:

Formal practice: Sitting meditation, mindful breathing, body scan, body sensations and mindful movement (like yoga or walking) create a structured way to train attention. These practices give us the ground to notice thoughts, sensations, and emotions without clinging or pushing away.

Informal practice: Mindfulness extends into everyday life—eating, listening, walking, or speaking with awareness. Any ordinary moment can become practice if we bring full presence to it.

Attitudinal foundations: Nine attitudinal factors constitute the major pillars of mindfulness practice as JKZ teaches in the stress clinic. They are nonjudging, gratitude, patience, a beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, letting go, gratitude and generosity. These attitudes are to be cultivated consciously when you practice.

Consistency: JKZ notes that mindfulness grows through steady, regular practice—like tending a garden. The more we cultivate it, the more it naturally infuses into daily life.

In essence, we cultivate mindfulness by practicing awareness deliberately, both in stillness and in ordinary living, **until presence becomes a way of being.**

JKZ recommends starting with one short formal practice **each day**, then carry the same awareness into one daily activity.

Here's his Guided Reflection on Non-Doing to assist you, when you're used to the concept, use your own words...

Take a moment to pause.
You don't need to get anywhere.
There's nothing to fix.
Nothing to achieve.

Notice that the breath is already breathing itself.
The body is already sitting, or lying down, without your effort.
Awareness is already here.

See if you can allow this moment to be exactly as it is.
No struggle.
No reaching.
No pushing away.

Non-doing is not about trying to make something special happen.
It's about resting in what's already here —
the simplicity of being alive,
the hum of sensations,
the flow of breath,
the field of awareness itself.

For these few minutes, let life be life.
Let yourself be just as you are.
This is the art of non-doing



Finally... Kabat-Zinn's idea of "stopping and dropping" is a simple yet profound invitation to reclaim the present moment. By **pausing**—even for a breath—you interrupt the rush of **automatic pilot**. By **dropping** into **awareness**, you meet **experience** directly, without judgment or resistance. **Practiced** in daily life, this small act opens a doorway to **clarity, balance, and freedom** in the only time we truly have—**now**. **Recommendation:** Use brief pauses throughout your day as reminders to stop and drop into awareness. **Begin with one intentional pause today**—before speaking, moving, or reacting—and notice the shift it brings.

*I'll finish with the poem by Wendell Berry **The Peace of Wild Things***

When despair for the world grows in
me and I wake in the night at the least
sound in fear of what my life and my
children's lives might be,

I go and lie down where the wood
drake rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought of grief. I come into the
presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world and am
free.