

the effortless mind

**meditation for the
modern world**

will williams

'Say hello to a clearer mind thanks to your new bulletproof technique to help you relax and unleash your best self.'

Madeleine Shaw, author of *Get the Glow*

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Preface

Why Are You Here?

Don't worry – that's not an existential question. What I mean is: why are you here, now, reading this book?

It might be because you've been curious about meditation or mindfulness for a while and have decided to see what it's all about. Or perhaps you've tried other forms of meditation in the past but for some reason or another they haven't been quite right for you. You might have a specific problem that you are desperate to resolve, maybe an illness, a difficult relationship, or issues at work. Equally, you may have no real problems to overcome; you're a generally happy individual, yet feel as if there might be more to life – that you could feel happier, more satisfied.

Whatever your reason, I'm really pleased you've decided to take the time to read this. And whatever it is you're looking for, I'm pretty sure I can help.

Before we get going, a bit about me. I'm Will, and I've been teaching meditation for seven years, mostly in London, but also in many other places around the world. I've found that every country I've visited, just like every person I've taught, has its own unique characteristics, and yet, underneath it all, there are always the same themes concerning the human

condition and the human story that transcend all cultural orientations.

My approach to teaching meditation is to do so in the most accessible and easily understandable way, so that literally anyone can do it. I've taught artists and academics, housewives and hipsters, judges and janitors, lawyers and labourers, psychologists and scientists, bankers and billionaires, athletes and addicts. I've even had the rare privilege of teaching royalty! In each case, everyone is ultimately looking for the same things. The key, I always say, lies in how they go about finding them.

A lot of people have preconceived notions of what a meditation teacher might look or sound like, and I don't quite fit that stereotype. I don't wear robes and I don't speak in flowery, cryptic language. I don't live in a cave, an ashram, or on a mountain top, and I don't do denial. I live in a flat in east London and I'm very much of the pleasures of this world.

But I do know my stuff. I've studied and come to comprehend all the fundamental principles behind the ancient practice I teach, and I understand the science – the physics, the neuroscience, the biology – that backs it all up. I can show you how and why meditation works, and that's what I want to do in this book.

I'll also explain why meditation is so relevant to the way we live now. We're a long way from the Indian Himalaya, where this technique was originally developed thousands of years ago, but it can and does make an enormous difference to modern, Western lives. And there's an incredible level of convergence between the ancient wisdom behind this form of meditation and current scientific understanding.

One of the most important lessons I learned on my journey to becoming a teacher was that the greatest and most powerful techniques are often the simplest. The form of meditation I teach is just that. It can be done by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and provides the perfect antidote to the enormous levels of stress and over-stimulation that we in the Western world experience every day. I know – and the research backs it up – that meditation helps: with mental health, physical health, relationships, work, creativity and spirituality.

For many people, a simple technique for enriching daily life with greater calm, clarity and capability is enough. Others have a desire to take a deeper dive into the ancient knowledge base. Both of these paths can be taken using the tools I teach, which have been handed down from master to student for thousands of years.

For me, the individual challenges we face, and indeed the wider global ones, always come back to the fundamental quality of consciousness. There's a quote from the genius that was Albert Einstein that, when I first read it, elicited the most profound 'Eureka!' moment of my life. He said: *'You cannot solve problems from the same state of consciousness that created them.'*

That very wise epithet confirmed my intuitive sense that teaching meditation was the most powerful way I could help bring about meaningful change in the world – by expanding people's states of consciousness (I'll talk more about exactly what that means later on) and thereby enabling them to see the challenges they face in life from a much more enlightened perspective. By helping people find a sense of purpose, peace, inspiration and fulfilment, expanding their empathy,

compassion, co-operation and creativity, I give them the tools to engage with the world in a far more effective way.

This, above all, is why I believe meditation is so important. The power to effect momentous change – whether that be within our own lives or in the larger, more universal sense – is available to each and every one of us, and I'd like to show you how to find and harness it.

As I mentioned before, the wonderful thing about this form of meditation is how simple and easy it is. It takes only twenty minutes, twice a day, and you don't have to try to empty your mind or learn any complicated techniques to do it successfully. In the modern world, with its many pressures and demands, life can often become stressful, which makes everything seem more of a challenge. The type of meditation I teach, as you might have guessed from the title of this book, is effortless, yet it leads the people who practise it to a state whereby everything in life 'flows', where your mind can find peace and your body can heal itself – all of which means that you can really thrive (rather than just survive).

In this book I also want to share with you, in their own words, the stories of some of the people I've taught. Some of them simply needed a little boost in life, to be a bit happier, or to feel more inspired. Others had found themselves in very dark places and were struggling to find a way out. What these people have in common is that they *are* all now happier, and much more in control of their lives. I hope their stories inspire you.

I'll also be explaining exactly how my form of meditation works, on a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level. And, as well as going into the science and philosophy behind

it, I'll give you practical tips on how to integrate the practice into your everyday life.

A NOTE ON THE UNCONSCIOUS

I will sometimes refer to the term 'unconscious' when describing how some psychological phenomena interact with and are affected by meditation. 'Unconscious' has many different meanings, but for our purposes we will use the term to refer to thoughts, feelings, memories or beliefs that we are not aware of but (as some of these stories will show) have a massive effect on how we feel, think and behave.

What Form of Meditation Do I Teach?

My form of meditation, Beeja, is inspired by the Vedic tradition, which originates from the Himalayan region of northern India and is many thousands of years old. It is part of an ancient, holistic way of understanding and enhancing one's life experience, and sits alongside yoga and Ayurveda. Yoga is arguably the most famous example of this very rich knowledge base, but you may well have come across Ayurveda before too. The word Ayurveda means 'science of life' in Sanskrit, the sacred language of ancient India from which most Indo-European languages derive. From this ancient worldview, the key to the science of life is attained by putting yourself in a state of calm, balance and heightened brain function. I feel that's very relevant to our lives today, which is why I've adapted this particular form of meditation to suit the thoroughly modern world we find ourselves in. It's about living to your full potential, in each and every moment, and it's the most powerful technique that I've found – if I'd come across a better one, I'd be teaching that!

The Power of Sound

There are many different forms of meditation, and they all use different methods to achieve a state of greater balance and awareness, each having a unique effect on our

physiological and neurological programming. The form of meditation that I teach is based on the power of sound.

When I introduce someone to meditation, I give them a sound, which comes from an ancient repository of sounds called *beejas*, that I, as a teacher, have learned. I allocate them to each student using my understanding of which one I intuitively feel would resonate with them and optimally impact on their nervous system, which will thereby change the way their mind and body behave. You might have heard of these kinds of sounds (*mantras*) before, or even be familiar with them in other types of meditation, such as the Buddhist mantra '*Om mani padme hum*' or the yogic '*So hum*'. The key difference in this practice is that, since every individual (and nervous system) is unique, your personalised sound, or *beeja*, will thereby be able to carry you much more easily and effortlessly into a very calm, meditative state.

The student then repeats their sound very gently in their head, for about twenty minutes. It isn't chanted or even articulated in any way – you just allow it to come into your mind. If other thoughts appear, you simply repeat the sound whenever it occurs to you. Unlike some forms of meditation, which stem from monastic practices, there's no attempt to concentrate or control the mind. Your personal sound works as a vehicle to transport you beyond your cares and concerns, to a place of no thought.

There are no tricks, no special techniques. The beauty of this form of meditation lies in its simplicity.

Within minutes, you're physiologically more deeply relaxed than when you're in deep sleep – on average a good 30–40 per cent deeper – and neurologically in a much clearer and more coherent state. From this state of deep, restful and

coherent awareness, the mind, body and nervous system can begin self-correcting and purge themselves of unnecessary pain, trauma, stress and emotion, which leaves you feeling fresh, clear and much more balanced.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEEJA MEDITATION AND TM®

Some of you will have heard of Transcendental Meditation® (TM®), or even tried it. Like Beeja meditation, it's based on the power of sound. There are many similarities between the two techniques, but I just want to add a note on the differences.

TM® was popularised in the 1960s and '70s by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a great teacher and real sage. It was taken up by all sorts of cool people – most famously, perhaps, the Beatles. Like my own form of meditation, it originates from the Vedic technique of *nishkam karma yoga*, which involves sitting quietly with your eyes closed, effortlessly repeating a personalised sound in your mind for twenty minutes at a time. This sound helps you get into a physiologically restful and neurologically powerful state that the ancient sages of India called *turiya*, which is a state of transcendence that's very nourishing to body and mind. This is why the Maharishi called his movement Transcendental Meditation®.

The origins of the techniques, therefore, are the same, however I allocate the sounds slightly differently to TM®, and I weave in other knowledge from other traditions to make my approach as universal as possible. Whereas TM® is a large organisation, each Beeja teacher is fully independent, which means it's possible for them to really personalise what they teach, and tailor it to each individual. Our aftercare differs too, in that my team and I offer considerably more follow-up support to ensure that the people we work with always have access to someone who can answer their questions and support them in their meditative journey.

There are many great TM® teachers out there, and it's always worth trying out a few different techniques to see which works best for you.

Why Do We Need This So Much Now? What Makes This Ancient Technique So Relevant to Our Lives Today?

The answer to both questions is simple: stress.

Everywhere I look I see stressed people who are not living their full potential. The symptoms are fairly ubiquitous: anxiety, depression, insomnia, anger, eating disorders, chronic fatigue, digestive complaints, broken relationships, toxic workplaces – the list goes on and on.

An understanding of how we've evolved as a species is essential if we wish to know why we find ourselves in this desperate situation.

For most of the 2.5 million years we humans have been roaming the earth, our lives consisted of foraging for a few hours each day, while spending the rest of our time socialising, procreating and sleeping. Except, of course, when a predator or adversary entered the picture, in which case we had two choices: we could either run away to escape the danger or fight for our lives. In the face of a threat, our bodies instinctively prepared us for both scenarios, a reaction that has become well-known as our innate 'fight or flight' response. You may well have heard of it.

Now, imagine you're a human wandering the savannah 30,000 years ago. You see a predator padding towards you, triggering your 'fight or flight' response. What happens?

- A little part of your brain called the amygdala, which is geared solely towards survival, is immediately activated.

- Stress chemicals such as cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline are released, sending alarm signals racing throughout your body.
- Blood vessels become constricted so that blood can travel faster around your body, while your lungs start hyperventilating in order to deliver oxygen to your muscles, which will be needed whether you fight or flee.
- Your blood fills with clotting agents in preparation for any wounds you may receive, so that you can continue fighting or fleeing even while injured.
- The part of your immune system that deals with bacteria spikes up in case you suddenly find yourself inundated with foreign bacteria, should you be wounded by your adversary.
- Your digestive system shuts down, since your body sees this as an unnecessary waste of energy – who needs to extract nutrients from food when you might be dead in twenty seconds?
- Fat cells immediately release all the fat and sugar into your bloodstream to break down into glucose, which will give you the energy to race across the savannah or deliver a knockout blow to your adversary.
- Your adrenal glands release steroid hormones called glucocorticoids, which help to accelerate all these biological changes. One of the ways they do this is to start inhibiting various centres within your brain that are now considered surplus to requirements. So, they race to the rear of your brain and limit your sensory perception, narrowing your vision to whatever threat you're currently facing. They travel to the mid-brain,

where your memory centre sits, and start to suppress most of your memory functions. (After all, you don't need to remember what day of the week it is or what you had for lunch when something with big teeth is chasing after you.)

- Most significant of all, perhaps, are the changes that occur in the front of the brain, in the area called the prefrontal cortex. This is the most highly evolved part of the human brain, and it plays a key role in our executive functions, like learning new skills, prioritising tasks, organising information and so on. Creativity, problem-solving, lateral thinking, the ability to feel love, compassion and empathy are all processed here too. These functions become inhibited, and fear, aggression and hypervigilance take over.

Your body is now prepared to fight to the death or run like crazy to escape your lethal foe.

So What Does All This Mean for Us Now, in the Twenty-First Century?

The principles of natural selection mean that those with the fastest and most effective fight or flight response are the ones who survive. The very fact that we're here today is because our ancestors were those with the most evolved responses to such threatening stimuli. To put it simply, we are the evolutionary masters of stress.

Ten thousand years ago, the most significant event in human history took place: the discovery of agriculture. With

this came a complete change in the way humans lived their lives, the effects of which were felt at every level.

Instead of spending a small part of our day gathering food that was readily available to us, whether that was roots, berries or nuts, we now worked for most of the day, toiling in ways that didn't suit our skeletal structure. We began sitting down, discussing what and how many crops we should grow, and where we should grow them. We felt in control – the masters of nature! But then, of course, came pestilence or inclement weather, so we had to think of ways we could try to control that. For the first time in human history, a certain rigidity and feelings of expectation crept into our day-to-day lives. And, despite the increased 'security' our new life gave us, it introduced more fear. After all, if we were really successful, other humans would come and try to steal our crops. Psychologically, therefore, as well as physically, it was a huge and draining shift.

Socially, our easy days of chilling out – having a gossip with our friends, enjoying some jiggy time here and there – were over. Not only did we have much less free time to play and simply *be* with others, the context within which we interacted underwent a seismic shift too. Those who were 'successful' grew lots of food, which created a population explosion, causing added pressure to keep producing the goods to feed all those hungry mouths. We had officially stepped onto the treadmill of incessant workloads and a never-ending trajectory of growth. You can just imagine our prehistoric forebears saying to themselves: *Give it a few years of hard work, and then we'll have enough.* But salvation never came. We needed to keep growing just to stand still.

As time went on, we progressed from small bands to bigger tribes – to villages, towns and, eventually, full-blown cities. Then, of course, these larger masses of people needed organising, corralling into effective work and social dynamics. So in came the bureaucracies, the hierarchies and the dreaded tax collectors to fund the ever-increasing echelons of social organisation. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, we have moved further and further away from nature, living increasingly more in urban and (since the dawn of the internet) digital worlds.

Meanwhile, human beings' innate fight or flight response has remained the same. Even now, 10,000 years later, it's activating in us all just as it always did. As soon as the trigger is pulled, all of the processes I listed earlier automatically leap into action. The problem we face in this hyper-challenging world of ours is that we cannot turn this reflex off.

Outwardly, we have become more 'civilised', but biologically, survival dynamics are kicking into gear far more often than is either helpful or necessary.

And now, in the twenty-first century, the situation has become intensely acute. Technology has seeped into every aspect of our lives. We're in constant communication; our days are extended through artificial light to the point where true darkness is a rarity in our cities; stimulation comes at us 24/7 in every kind of sensory form. In the past twenty or thirty years, since the birth of the internet and the widespread availability and use of mobile phones, we've experienced a vast amount of change. We're now experiencing more stimulation in a day than we experienced in a month a hundred years ago. The world has sped up so

much that our bodies' fight or flight response is no longer fit for purpose. Evolution has not been able to keep up, and our brain's alarm system – the amygdala – is responding to all sorts of everyday stimuli as if they were potentially life-threatening scenarios.

Potential triggers of our fight or flight response, in other words, are around us all the time.

As a result, our stress levels have absolutely rocketed. Instead of getting stressed once in a while, when we encountered a particularly dangerous predator, our stress response is now activating many times a day. If you find that hard to believe, just think what happens to many of us on a normal working weekday. We wake up to an alarm; rush to the office (via a commute where we're surrounded by other stressed-out people); get stuck in traffic or miss a train; have stressful meetings; make difficult decisions; struggle to meet a deadline; race home in time for dinner; watch a thriller or an action movie or rush to the next social engagement; bicker with our partner; go to bed late.

Instead of activating every time we encounter true life-or-death situations, our fight or flight response is firing every time we get an annoying comment from our boss, every time someone pushes past us on the underground, or we find the sink full of dirty plates. Even some slightly irritating behaviour from our child can be enough to set us off. That brilliantly cultivated stress response that saved our lives for 2.5 million years is now slowly corroding our way of life, and in many cases our minds and bodies too.

As each of us ages, what was intended to be a temporary, emergency response to stressful stimuli becomes a chronically ingrained feature of our lives – as does the

inhibition of those biological systems mentioned earlier. Sooner or later (and increasingly it's sooner), we all develop what's known as chronic background stress, where ongoing stressors follow us throughout life, which has been shown to have profound physiological and psychological implications. The World Health Organization has called stress 'the health epidemic of the twenty-first century'. Instead of being our principal means of survival, our over-activated stress response is slowly but surely wearing us out.

And very rarely is a response intended only for emergencies a good idea as an ongoing default state.

As you'll see in this book, that overactive response affects immunity, reproduction, ageing, digestion, weight, sex drive, communication, relationships, productivity, creativity – and just about every other part of our lives. While we try to compensate by focusing on our outward appearance – going to the gym, dieting, using expensive face creams – the internal reality is very different.

How Does Beeja Meditation Help?

The chronic levels of stress we're seeing is one reason this form of meditation is such an essential tool for 21st-century life. The practice my team and I teach is incredibly effective when it comes to delivering increased levels of physical and psychological rest and repair, enhanced neurological functioning and greater resilience – all of which means that your reactions to stressful situations, and the systems that cause your body's fight or flight response to go into overdrive, are more balanced.

You don't have to just take my word for it. Researchers at UCLA invited subjects into a lab and hooked them up to every possible monitoring device – a face mask (to measure CO₂), butterfly catheter (blood chemistry), pulse oximeter (oxygenation of the blood), EEG skullcap (brainwave output) and rectal thermometer (core temperature). In these not-so-relaxing conditions, participants began to say their personalised sounds in their heads, just as they would do normally.

What the researchers found astonished them.

Respiration levels dipped considerably, indicating deep levels of relaxation akin to a hibernation state. Blood pressure tended to normalise. Heart rate fell on average by five beats per minute. Blood chemistry changed for the better. Core temperature dropped by a very significant two degrees, an indicator of metabolic rate falling and the body going into rest and repair mode.

Most impressive of all, however, was what researchers saw happening in the brain. When the subjects started to repeat their sound, their brainwave frequencies calmed down from their previously revved-up states. They began producing highly coherent alpha wave patterns (a powerful combination of brain signals linked to deep physical and mental relaxation) in all areas of the brain at different points during the meditation. This is hugely significant, because alpha wave coherence helps us learn, be creative, memorise, and read the thoughts and emotions of others. In the beta state (the usual level of mind activity exhibited when you're awake), the brainwave frequency is higher, which means that the brain tends to get cluttered by thoughts, making it altogether less capable and perceptive. That's why achieving an alpha state,

which techniques such as this form of meditation can elicit, is so important: because when the clutter is cleared away, your brain is able to work more efficiently. Receiving information when in the alpha state makes you far more likely to remember it, too, as a result of the dramatic increases in focus, concentration, memory, learning and powers of insight.

Of course, this all happened under extremely uncomfortable conditions – the effects of this form of meditation might be even more impressive when you're chilling out at home. From my own experience, and that of the thousands of others who practise meditation, the combination of these phenomena activates hugely significant changes within the mind and the body:

- Both body and mind enjoy significant periods of energy restoration, during which the brain – so often filled with a noisy internal monologue and obsessive worry – calms down, so you're no longer overwhelmed by the cacophonous nature of anxious thoughts.
- Your mind and body begin to purge themselves of the emotional charge associated with old hurts, pain and trauma, freeing you from the damaging weight of past experience.
- The corpus callosum (which connects the two hemispheres of your brain) becomes more active, allowing a greater flow of information between the two. The left side of the brain processes information in a very analytical way; it's focused on detail, and is very task-oriented. The right side of the brain processes information in a big-picture way; it's much

more contextual, and tends to be more emotionally intelligent and collaborative in its approach. Better connections between the two leads to greater focus and heightened capability.

- The engine of your stress response, the amygdala, becomes functionally less active. So instead of firing at any old trigger, perpetuating a need to firefight your way through life as if in constant survival mode, it begins to become more discerning as to what actually deserves a response.
- The hippocampus, part of the limbic system in your brain and responsible for consolidating information from short-memory to long-term memory, begins to grow, which gives you greater recall capabilities.
- The prefrontal cortex becomes much more active, so that your ability to learn new skills, prioritise tasks, organise information, engage in lateral thinking, solve complex problems and express yourself creatively all become heightened.
- Both right and left frontal lobes become more balanced, leaving you feeling more able to make rational, healthy choices for yourself in a calm state of mind.
- And, perhaps most significant of all, the ability to feel more connected to yourself and to others is improved. By enjoying a balanced flow of endorphins, and greater activation of your prefrontal cortex, you find that love, compassion and empathy begin to replace unnecessary aggression, anxiety or sadness.

The exact reasons Beeja meditation has such an impact are still unknown to us. Although science is slowly getting closer to being able to map the processes of the brain and their effects, we've still got a long way to go. We're also a little behind in our understanding of resonance and sound, and how these phenomena interact with our brain and wider nervous system.

While it feels appropriate that you can't patent forms of meditation, the absence of an obvious commercial opportunity means there aren't many multi-billion-dollar institutions channelling masses of research money into exploring its full effects in minute scientific detail. Despite this gap in scientific explanation, however, there is no doubt it does have a significant impact. The stories in this book are a testament to that.

THE POWER OF RESONANCE AND SOUND

When musicians play together, they need to make sure they're in tune with each other. They all tune their individual instruments to the same pitch, and, since 1955, the international standard has been 440 Hz. But actually, this may not be ideal, because many experts feel a more natural intonation is 432 Hz. Listening to music at 440 Hz can feel less relaxed than the harmonic quality of music at 432 Hz, which many say feels warmer and richer.

Likewise, the mode of music can be important. The ancient Greeks were big proponents of this. For example, Aristotle claimed a symmetrical scale called the Dorian mode settled the mind and Plato advised people to listen to music in that mode during times of war and crisis. It's been known for decades that the music of Mozart has a more powerfully active impact on our brainwave function than other forms of music.

Another interesting fact is that the earth's magnetic field resonates at 7.83 Hz, (the Schumann resonance). If you listen to sounds at that frequency, it has a very calming, soothing effect on mind and body.

What these examples demonstrate is that sound, or resonance, can powerfully affect how our brains, bodies and minds function. This is why the sounds I give my students are very carefully chosen, and it's why they work so well; our minds and bodies instinctively react to them in a positive way, without the need for effort or thought.

How Do I Teach?

Most of the time, I teach meditation on a three-day course. The beauty of doing the course in such a condensed format is that you're up and motoring almost straight away. Over seven hours spread out over those three days, I give my students all the information and understanding they need to be able to practise confidently on their own, no matter what their starting point.

On the first day of the course, I have an hour-long appointment with each student, during which I give them each their personalised sound and some initial instructions on how to use it, so they can immediately get going. There's nothing like diving in and experiencing the depth and beauty of this practice for yourself. I then use the following two days to build on those first instructions by helping you to really refine your meditation, also providing you with tips on how to integrate it seamlessly into your life. I then teach students how they can tactically use their meditation to overcome many of the challenges they may face. For example, I can teach you how to use it to get through interviews and

presentations without getting nervous, or how to prevent jetlag when travelling. These sessions are really relaxed, and last about three hours each.

By the end of the course, you'll feel really confident in your meditation techniques, with all the tools you'll need to implement it in your daily life.

How to Make Meditation a Part of Your Life

Practising this form of meditation is, as I've said before, an effortless process, which makes it really enjoyable. And because it releases lots of endorphins, all those happy hormones will serve to put you in a really good space, both within the meditation and in your everyday life. Combined with the deep rest and relaxation you get when you do it, you'll quickly find it a refreshing and energising way to start or end your day, and you'll be much clearer and sharper in everything you do afterwards.

As a general principle, wherever possible, the most productive way to meditate is for twenty minutes, twice a day. If you can do this, and make meditation part of your routine, the benefits will include a greater sense of connectivity (to yourself and others), an increased sense of joy in life, and the gradual unravelling and healing of past hurts and painful memories.

Of course, there might be times during the day when you feel like you need a bit of a boost. Maybe it's a job interview, or you have to do some public speaking, or you're about to go to a tricky family gathering, or have a difficult conversation with a friend. In those situations, do what works best for you. Say you usually meditate in the morning and evening (which

is what lots of people like to do) – change it around and do your meditation when you need to be extra-calm or on top form. On your way to that interview or party, or backstage before you go on to speak, find somewhere to sit down, close your eyes and repeat your sound. You don't have to worry about mastering different techniques for different situations; simply use your personalised sound in the way that you've been shown, and *voila!* Twenty minutes later, you'll be much calmer, clearer, and ready for anything.

Beeja meditation is brilliant both as a *strategy* and as a *tactic*. A *strategy* is something you apply on a long-term and regular basis and is what ultimately delivers the biggest gains, whereas *tactics* are employed according to need, in order to respond to occasional demands – i.e. to help dig you out of a hole. The *strategy* of regular meditation means that you don't usually need to meditate *tactically*. It takes care of 95 per cent of your daily dramas by putting you in a much better place to deal with them in the first place. You'll also find that, because you're less cranky in general, what once would have been major problems now barely register on your radar. Sometimes, however, you need to listen to yourself. If some tactical meditation is what you need on the day, then go for it – make it work for you.

But How Will I Find the Time?

Many people who are stressed – whether by work commitments, family, or simply the sheer pace of life – often can't believe that they can spare even twenty minutes, let alone forty, in the space of one day.

What they're doing is assuming that, by meditating for forty minutes a day, they've 'lost' that time. In fact, by carving out those precious minutes for meditation, you'll actually be *saving* time. With a mind that's calmer, you'll be more productive, focused and clear about what you need to accomplish. You'll be able to prioritise more efficiently; you won't spend your day procrastinating; you'll make better decisions; and you won't feel overwhelmed. You'll be able to take care of everything you need to do but without fuss. For this reason, lots of people I teach say that meditation gives them *more* time, not less.

In any case, it's not the quantity of time we dedicate to aspects of our life that's important, but the quality. Is the time you spend with your partner super-high value, or has it diminished into the ordinary and familiar? Does your time with your friends or your kids fill you and them with a sense of love, life and laughter? Or is that time spent on autopilot, or spent looking at your phone?

Life is short, and how we allocate our time each day is crucial. It can be helpful to spend a few minutes making a list of what is most important to you. Is it love? Health? Wisdom? Purpose? Fulfilment? Adventure? Fill in the blanks, then prioritise. Look at the list and ask yourself: are you living your life in accordance with those priorities? Or are there improvements that can be made? Go ahead and start making them now, and know that meditation will help you realise all of them.

My students are pretty inventive about finding ways to find their twenty minutes twice a day. Since you don't have to be in a peaceful place to do it, it can be relatively easy to integrate into your routine. You're not trying to focus or

clear your mind, so it doesn't matter if there is noise around you.

Here are some of their suggestions:

- On your commute
- In the back of a taxi
- During your lunch break – find a park bench or a café to do it, then have a sandwich after
- Fitting a cheeky one in between meetings
- In a smoking break (not whilst actually smoking, obviously . . .)
- While your child or baby naps
- Waiting for appointments (perhaps arrive a little bit early)
- On the bus on your way to see friends, or to a date (saves you getting nervous)
- Waiting for a train
- On the loo (not the most comfortable but great if you're at work, need to quickly de-stress, and can't find anywhere else!)
- Waiting for a long download or software update
- Waiting for HMRC to pick up the phone
- Waiting for the bride to arrive at a wedding or in between ceremony and dinner
- At the cinema while you're waiting for the movie to start
- While you're waiting for dinner to cook (it'll stop you snacking before the food's ready!)
- During the time between ordering a takeaway and it arriving at your door – turning a time of hungry anticipation into something useful

- In the departure lounge waiting to board a plane
- On the plane
- If you're stuck in a lift and you're waiting for help (keeps the boredom or anxiety at bay)
- Waiting for colour to take at the hairdressers
- In the car (after work or a gym session, etc.)
- Waiting to pick the kids up from school
- Nipping into a local library or church on the way home from work

One student told me she had once meditated on the back of a scooter in Vietnam! (Although I'm not entirely sure how safe that might have been . . . !)

Common Issues that Meditation Can Help With

This form of meditation is known to relieve many stress- and nervous-system-related disorders. Those with more obviously physical facets include:

- Digestive problems
- Cardiovascular issues
- High blood pressure
- Chronic pain
- Chronic fatigue
- Headaches
- Immune disorders

The most common mental health issues that people come to see me about are:

- Anxiety (as well as related disorders like OCD, PTSD or panic attacks)
- Depression (and related disorders like SAD or mood swings)
- Anger

And then there are issues more related to lifestyle, including:

- Insomnia
- Weight management
- Relationship challenges
- Problems in the workplace
- Addiction (alcohol, drugs, smoking)

We'll be looking at some of these in our case studies that follow, along with tips on how to use meditation to help overcome them. Before we do, however, I'd like to tell you my own story, so you can understand how I came to meditation, and what led me to become a teacher.

I numbed myself with booze and drugs, trying to suppress the pain. I couldn't understand what was happening to me.

Then, come September, things lifted. My friends could see I was in trouble, and some of them took me on a surprise weekend away for my birthday, which brought the first smile to my face in months. Soon after, a big record deal for one of our bands paid me enough to extricate myself from the business, my life in London and the toxic relationship, and I could temporarily clean up the mess. I decided to go to South America to have a good time.

I did go to South America, but instead of partying, I ended up getting together with Primrose. I'd known her since I was nineteen, and she was the girl of my dreams. Five months later, I came back, in love and refreshed. But I was still a reckless, relentless party animal and a chronic insomniac. It was so debilitating to wake up every day with no energy and so little motivation. I'd always been a high achiever, but now it was impossible to get even the smallest things done. It was no good for our new relationship, either, because when we'd spend the night together, the smallest movement from Primrose meant I was awake until dawn.

I tried really hard to find solutions for my anxiety-fuelled sleep issues, which, now I thought about it, had been plaguing me for about seven years. I tried hypnotherapy, which I actually quite enjoyed, but it didn't help me sleep. I went to acupuncture and had one really great night's sleep afterwards, but then fell back into the same old groove of nocturnal despair. I went to reflexology and yoga, and although I always felt a spike of relaxation, I was still left buzzing at night. I got to such a point of desperation that when my friends told me they'd read an article that claimed

colonic irrigation helped to cure insomnia, I went and had a hosepipe stuck up my bum a couple of times to 'clear myself out'. It turned out they were just winding me up! They obviously knew I'd go for it – I'd have done anything to get a good night's sleep.

It wasn't that I was particularly into complementary medicine, but I was very open-minded about finding solutions. When I was nineteen, I had been travelling through Asia when I badly injured my knee. A medicine man on a remote island managed to fix me up in a way that totally blew my mind. He pointed this cigar-like thing at the area of injury, did some chanting, and wrapped a bandage infused with herbs around it. Within twenty-four hours, I was playing football and volleyball without any problems. I didn't understand how he'd done it, but I was so grateful that he had.

I'd obviously tried herbal sleeping tablets, but they made me feel awful the next day. Instinctively I was reluctant to go down the pharmaceutical route, which was somewhat ironic, because I was more than happy to pump myself with industrial quantities of illegal substances in the name of a good time. I tried all the earplugs and eye masks that I could find, but none really made a difference.

Instead of inducing sleep with external solutions, I realised I needed to find a way to make it come naturally. It was as if I was plugging the holes on a sinking ship with my fingers, when what I really needed to do was repair them – and understand why the holes were appearing in the first place. It felt wrong to be in my twenties and so beholden to all of these workarounds. I wanted to be able to sleep next to my

girlfriend and be free to lay my head down however, and wherever, I wanted.

Nothing I tried worked. It felt like I'd explored every avenue, and was left wondering if I'd simply have to surrender and live with it.

When I was in South America, I'd come across a guy called Davide, who told me I should meet his friend Dan when I got back to London, and so I did. He was a really nice, cool, normal guy, and halfway through the night he started talking about meditation. It turned out he and all his friends were doing it, and it had cured three of them of their terrible insomnia. So, I thought: *That's a pretty decent statistic, maybe I should give it a whirl.*

For whatever reason, I sat on it for a couple of months. After all the failures, I felt disheartened to the point that I almost couldn't face yet another disappointment. And then, one night, I rocked up to an introductory meditation talk, did a beginner's course soon after, and got my personalised sound. During the first session, the teacher left me to meditate – and it was like nothing I'd ever known. I was floating in this lovely, dreamy state. Walking down the street afterwards I felt happy, energised, blissful – almost euphoric. And I thought: *If this is what it's going to make me feel like, I'm all in!*

Over the next couple of weeks, my sleep improved massively. That would have been enough for me, but I noticed other benefits, too. I was less stressed, and considerably more productive. Before I started meditation, I'd only work my way through about 60 or 70 per cent of my daily to-do list even on a good day, despite working until 8 p.m. each night. After that beginner's course, I managed to tick every item off by 6 p.m. –

it was immense! What I found especially gratifying was that there had always been these tasks that I hadn't wanted to take on, which I'd keep pushing on to the next day to avoid having to face them. Now, all of sudden, I just got them done, and it felt so good. There was a hugely liberating sense of relief, because it meant I didn't have anything to sweat about when I woke up the next day. I could start afresh every morning, and I felt fresh, too.

I also noticed that I was becoming a nicer person. Much nicer. I began to chat to my local shopkeeper whenever I visited, and was really enjoying interacting with him at a human level. Before meditating, I'd never spoken to him; lost in my own little world of dramas and to-do lists. Now I felt connected – to myself, to others, even random strangers. It felt human, and I liked it.

At that point, I was running a business that was very successful but soul-destroying. I'd been thinking about becoming a maths or a physics teacher, but I was put off by the bureaucracy and lack of freedom to teach as you want. I've always wanted to do things in a way that makes sense to me, as opposed to trying to fit into a rigid system of others' making. Perhaps the idea of teaching meditation was already in the back of my mind, but I knew I was just at the beginning of this journey; I wanted to see how it went first, and what would unfold for me as time went on.

I spent that first year of meditating partying very hard, for the simple reason that I could. This amazing new tool of mine gave me a lot more energy; I could sleep with ease, and it also transpired that it was the best hangover cure ever (more on that later)! I was also kicking ass at work like never before. I

felt like I was living the dream – getting the best of both worlds.

But something was changing in me. By now I was living with Primrose in Brighton, and she noticed the changes too. I decided that instead of using the meditation to simply work harder, and party harder, maybe I could do something a bit more constructive with this new life skill I had stumbled across and that was giving me so much more drive. I decided to go on a weekend retreat in Norfolk. I got on the train, feeling more than a little nervous about the kind of people I might meet, my rucksack full of snacks in case they were going to try and feed me any ‘hippy shit’. I’d spent most of my life eating ready-made noodles, crisp sandwiches and other kinds of crap. The only vegetables I could even contemplate were ones that you’d find on a pizza.

I don’t know why I felt such apprehension. The beginner’s course I had taken nine months previously had been full of ordinary people, and the teacher didn’t wear robes or wave crystals; he was just a guy looking to help those who needed it. It turned out that the weekend retreat was also full of normal people – actually pretty cool people; folks I’d happily go to the pub with. And I needn’t have worried about the food either – it was absolutely delicious!

We were taught an add-on to our meditation practice that combined a very special, ancient form of yoga with some breathing techniques. When fused with the meditation, it had spectacular results. I could feel myself physically responding in weird and wonderful ways. By the final afternoon, I started to do my meditation and soon began to feel like I was floating in the middle of the room. Meanwhile, a very calm, very beautiful wave of love started building up inside of me. It

individual, and I wanted to help others do the same, both because of the difference it would make to their own lives and the contribution that it could make on a wider scale, to the world.

By now Primrose had learned to meditate too, and even though we (as well as all the people we'd met along the way) were different in so many ways, it had had all sorts of great effects on her as well. We couldn't help but conclude that the brilliant thing about this sort of meditation was that it didn't just deliver one set of identical benefits to everyone; it had a unique effect on each individual. I didn't yet understand how and why, but the anecdotal evidence was undeniable.

As we both felt this growing sense of connection with the world, we realised that there were a lot of places we wanted to explore. I'd been increasingly intrigued by India ever since we'd started 'zinging' (our pet term for meditation). I'd also been doing a lot of reading on cutting-edge physics, and was amazed to discover that most of what theoretical physicists were only now beginning to uncover had been understood by the sages of ancient India many thousands of years ago. I was itching to find out more.

We decided to move out, put our stuff in storage, and go to India. We bought one-way tickets to Delhi and resolved to make it up as we went along. And so began a two-and-a-half-year adventure around the world, during which we met many great meditation masters from across the continents. I spent six months learning the ancient secrets of Ayurveda at the world-renowned Raju family practice in Hyderabad, India, and learned the ancient language of Sanskrit in Sri Lanka. I left trails of blood climbing barefoot up the most sacred mountain in India to pour oblations onto a sacred fire, and

was taken in by mountain-dwelling yogis to learn from them. Primrose and I trekked for three days through the Amazonian jungle to take part in ceremonies with its most revered shaman and, to my very great honour, received an invitation to go on pilgrimage with the Dalai Lama.

Along the way, we had many hugely profound spiritual experiences. I'm not generally in the habit of talking about them too much, because everyone's journey is different, and I'd rather let people experience it as it comes, free of expectation. They are also quite challenging to describe to those who haven't had such experiences themselves – they can seem rather fantastical unless you've been there yourself. Suffice to say, their sheer profundity changed me for ever.

During our time away, we'd sought out the very best teachers all over the world, learning all sorts of methods of meditation. It was fascinating to understand just how many approaches had been developed over the past 5,000 years. There are many forms of meditation that are all about denial, or that stem from monastic practices, like sitting still for twelve hours a day with flies on your face, not being able to brush them off, and I did them all. It was useful knowledge and valuable experience, but while I'm glad to have had the opportunity to see them first hand, they didn't strike me as being wholly relevant for people today. Beeja meditation, because of its simplicity, did, and so I decided to study and practise and learn to be a teacher.

I received my training from one of the most renowned masters in India, considered a Great Seer by those in the know. He was incredibly knowledgeable and generous with his teachings. After that, I went to Bali for a three-month intensive course to complete my training with other leading

gurus. It was the most eye-opening and awe-inspiring experience of my life, and also the most challenging.

By the end of the training, I was champing at the bit to get teaching. I still remember the first person I taught like it was yesterday. I had put posters up all over the Balinese town of Ubud for a course the following week, and it was not long before a woman called Mariko made an appointment with me via text message. All I knew about her was her name, but the night before our appointment I went to bed with a sound persistently flowing through my mind. When I woke up, it was still there. As I heard Mariko's footsteps come up the garden path, I looked up to see her walking towards the door and I smiled. The sound I'd been hearing was hers. I was a teacher.

It was a pretty arduous journey from hedonism to happiness, but I got there. I'd come a long way from that time at my exgirlfriend's flat when I'd nearly ended it all. Back then, I felt desperate, bleak and out of control. By the time I became a teacher, I felt connected to myself, and to the world. I knew what I was about; I knew what other people were about; I knew what life was about. I was finally at ease with myself.

In the seven years since then I've taught thousands of people meditation. While reaching out to such a high number of people feels like the best way I can help with some of the problems that we as a planet face today, the *quality* of what I'm teaching is also hugely important. Every year I go back to India for eight weeks to hang out with some of the most accomplished and inspiring masters, immersing myself in the most expansive experiences that this ancient knowledge base can provide.

I'm still learning, still growing. I'm not perfect and I'm not a saint. In fact, I don't even aspire to be a saint. I'm Will, a bloke from London who wants to share what I can with as many people as I can, because I know it works – I know it helps you be the best that you can be. Through this form of meditation, I learned how to help myself and find true happiness. In this book, I want to share with you my own insights on how to do just that, by showing you how to use meditation to cope much better with the stresses of everyday life, to heal yourself – body and mind – as well as to improve your relationships with others (and yourself). In doing all this, I will help you make reaching your personal best a reality.

MIND AND BODY

Your Nervous System – The Great Connector

So how do our bodies find that homeostatic balance?

Well, your body, mind and brain are all connected by the nervous system. Your spinal cord is part of this, running from your brain to your sacrum (at the base of your spine) to transmit information to every single part of your body via all of the nerve fibres that radiate outwards from the brain and the spine.

The only way the brain can communicate with the body is through the nervous system. All our senses come via this incredible network of nerve cells, as does the way we express ourselves. When we have an intention or an emotion that leads to a thought or to speech, it is mediated via the nervous system.

The nervous system is therefore the conduit through which we interact with and experience the world.

It is of vital importance, then, that we know whether or not this conduit is working properly. Are those messages getting through? Or are there blockages inside the nervous system that mean those signals aren't being accurately communicated, getting distorted along the way?

Here's an old wartime story to show you what I mean. The commander on the front line decides this is the moment to advance. The message can't be written down in case the enemy finds it, so it has to be verbally conveyed. The commander instructs the messenger, 'Tell them to send reinforcements, we're going to advance.' The messenger runs as fast as he can to pass on the message to the next runner; he does the same, and so on and so forth. But the message changes slightly with each retelling, and is delivered to the

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