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**MBSR Retreat Readings**

Be like the ocean that refuses no river—**Mandaza Kandemwa**

As you embark on your own journey of self-development and discovery of your inner resources for healing and for working with the full catastrophe, all you need to remember is to suspend judgment for the time being -- including any strong attachment you might have to a desired outcome, however worthy and desirable and important it may be – and simply commit yourself to practice in a disciplined way observing for yourself what is happening as you go along what you will be learning will be coming primarily from inside you, from your own experience as your life unfolds from moment to moment, Rather than from some external authority, teacher, or belief system. Our philosophy is that you are the world expert on your life, your body, and your mind, or at least you were in the best position to become that expert if you observe carefully.

JKZ Full Catastrophe Living, ixv

**If The Path Could Speak**

**Rhonda V. Magee, author of *The Inner Work of Racial Justice***

Beneath these words rests the awareness of generations.

And of generations.

And generations that have come before.

The awareness that each one of us is a vital part of the earth that we call home,

is of the wind, the rain, the fire.

And so inherently belongs.

If the path could speak, it would say:

"We must assert that which exists deep within us,

namely, a sense of kinship with all those with whom we share the earth."

On repeat.

In every language.

Unceasingly.

**Dear You x**

**Kaveri Patel**

Dear you,
You who always have
so many things to do
so many places to be
your mind spinning like
fan blades at high speed
each moment always a blur
because you’re never still.

I know you’re tired.
I also know it’s not your fault.
The constant brain-buzz is like
a swarm of bees threatening
to sting if you close your eyes.
You’ve forgotten something again.
You need to prepare for that or else.
You should have done that differently.

What if you closed your eyes?
Would the world fall
apart without you?
Or would your mind
become the open sky
flock of thoughts
flying across the sunrise
as you just watched and smiled.

**The Guest House**
Rumi
Translation by Coleman Barks

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.
Because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

**Allow x**

**Danna Faulds**

There is no controlling life.
Try corralling a lightning bolt,
containing a tornado. Dam a
stream and it will create a new
channel. Resist, and the tide
will sweep you off your feet.
Allow, and grace will carry
you to higher ground. The only
safety lies in letting it all in –
the wild and the weak; fear,
fantasies, failures and success.
When loss rips off the doors of
the heart, or sadness veils your
vision with despair, practice
becomes simply bearing the truth.
In the choice to let go of your
known way of being, the whole
world is revealed to your new eyes

**Enough**

**David Whyte**

 Enough. These few words are enough.
If not these words, this breath.
If not this breath, this sitting here.
This opening to the life
we have refused
again and again
until now.
Until now.

## **Accepting This**

**Mark Nepo**

Yes, it is true. I confess,
I have thought great thoughts,
and sung great songs—all of it
rehearsal for the majesty
of being held.

The dream is awakened
when thinking I love you
and life begins
when saying I love you
and joy moves like blood
when embracing others with love.

My efforts now turn
from trying to outrun suffering
to accepting love wherever
I can find it.

Stripped of causes and plans
and things to strive for,
I have discovered everything
I could need or ask for
is right here—
in flawed abundance.

We cannot eliminate hunger,
but we can feed each other.
We cannot eliminate loneliness,
but we can hold each other.
We cannot eliminate pain,
but we can live a life
of compassion.

Ultimately,
we are small living things
awakened in the stream,
not gods who carve out rivers.

Like human fish,
we are asked to experience
meaning in the life that moves
through the gill of our heart.

There is nothing to do
and nowhere to go.
Accepting this,
we can do everything
and go anywhere.

**From *The Inner Work of Racial Justice***

**Rhonda V. Magee**

Slow down and listen for and listen to your truth. . .. We become a space for truth telling. A space where the truth can be heard and told. Facing each new day and each new trauma without the baggage of the last days. Research has shown that we will be able to sit in the fire and feel the heat of our own emotions and even let the suffering of others in. We have to be willing to turn toward the suffering in our midst, not turn away in fear and guilt. . .. Mindfulness can heal our old wounded places and increases our capacity in our mind and body to deal with stress in our interactions with others. It can help us cultivate the will to decrease the bias inside us. Beneath the aggression is a wounded human being. We’ve all heard the phrase hurt people hurt people. Being with the feelings you are experiencing after someone has said something, and letting go of the idea that you should be deciding what to do or know: what to do or have a plan or say anything.

**From *The Well of Being***

**Jean-Pierre Weill**

Well-being is generated not from the outside but from the inside.

We organize our circumstances into stories, stories we pick up along the way and carry within us.

Stories that declare, *I’m lacking*.

*Why me?* stories.

*I’m alone,* stories.

*What will I amount to?* stories.

Stories about who we should be.

Or think we are.

They are interior maps whose familiar roads we travel.

Over and over.

Yet when we apprehend these maps, these, stories, these patterns, when we become aware of our own thinking, we awaken, and arise, as it were, to a new perspective, to new possibilities.

We see that our misery had only been us looking through the stories with which we had defined the world; and our difficult feelings simply our body’s responses to those narratives.

From here, Oh, you can hold yourself, you can laugh.

Free to explore all manner of things.

When you’re here, an i in the O-cean, you’re no longer waiting for something to happen or to change.

When you’re here you have what you seek.

Your heart opens to the gift you receive, that you are.

You are drinking at the well of being.

**From *Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of Inclusivity and Community***

**Larry Yang x**

In receiving what life has to teach us it helps not to be distracted by the multitude of pressures, obligations, information, and activities that all of us in our current society tend to multitask. Filling the mind does not allow the subtle nuances of life‘s teaching to reach us. Preoccupied with how we think we should live our lives and how life should be, we deny attention to how our life is already being lived. Often we are so compulsive and obsessive about finding answers rather than *learning from* the questions that we missed the reality: the answers we seek or not provided by any definitive resolution but by how we are asking the questions and by how we are relating to the questions themselves.

Rainer Maria Rilke describes this gracefully:

*Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. 12-13*

As we strengthen our human ability to be aware by returning over and over to the direct sensations of an experience like the breath, we begin to expand to a larger landscape that Mindfulness can also hold. We exercise awareness, just like we would exercise any muscle of the body through physical activity, or the mind through intellectual activity, with a heart through emotional connection. As we increase the capacity of our Mindfulness, we open the field from the physical sensations of the body to sensations of the mind and heart -- the terrain of our thoughts and emotions. And we begin to include both easy and difficult experiences: those things that are pleasant for us and unpleasant for us.

 We value and hold you tenderly all the infinite joys and sorrows of our life and not overlook any moment – including our last. 23

When we use our awareness practice in our lives, we are invited to pay attention – but not *just* to pay attention. We must also bring intention and purpose to bear. We can be mindful of anything that happens in life: we can be mindful when we are willingly hurting someone’s feelings as much as when we are offering them our love. What we do must be done with intention of being mindful primarily of what will lead to less suffering and more freedom and all our lives. This is the crucial choice point awareness offers us: diminished suffering or amplify it. Once we are aware, we must apply this to everything that arises. The purpose of becoming aware of our breath, bodily sensations, or even our thoughts, emotions, worries, and fantasies is not to fixate incessantly upon them, but to strengthen our capacity to be aware in all aspects of our lives, especially

when we really need it to reduce suffering in this world. 137

**From *Living Beautifully: With Uncertainty and Change***

**Pema Chodron**

It’s important to realize that interrupting thoughts isn’t the same as repressing them. Repression is denial of what’s happening, which only sends the thoughts underground where they can fester. At the same time, we don’t want to keep chasing after the thoughts and getting hooked by them. Interrupting thoughts is somewhere between clinging to them and pushing them away. It’s a way of allowing the thoughts to come and go, to arise and pass, to not be such a big deal.

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The practice is to train in not following the thoughts, not in getting rid of thought altogether. That would be impossible. You may have thought-free moments and, as your meditation practice deepens, longer expanses of time that are thought free, but thoughts always come back. That’s the nature of mind. You don’t have to make thoughts the villain, however. You can just train in interrupting their momentum. The basic instruction is to let the thoughts go—or to label them “thinking”—and stay with the immediacy of your experience.

Everything in you will want to do the habitual thing, will want to pursue the story line. The story line is associated with certainty and comfort. It bolsters your very limited, static sense of self and holds out the promise of safety and happiness. But the promise is a false one; any happiness it brings is only temporary. The more you practice not escaping into the fantasy world of your thoughts and instead contacting the felt sense of groundlessness, the more accustomed you’ll become to experiencing emotions as simply sensation—free of concept, free of story line, free of fixed ideas of bad and good.