

Ep #120: Meditation Series Part 2: Zen Disease



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hatley

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatley.

Welcome and welcome back. I am so delighted to be interviewing Kat Kelly. Kat Kelly is a graduate of my yoga therapy certification program and she is a long time meditator. Has taught meditation, has been a meditator, like all things meditation. Which is why I wanted to bring her onto the show because meditation can be a tremendous tool for pain management as well as pain reduction and pain eradication in that process.

And something that Kat and I had a few conversations about during her time inside of certification is this notion of Zen Disease. And so I wanted to bring her in to talk about it because when people get into a meditation practice, sometimes I think there can be this idea the brain has got to be totally quiet. Let there has got to be nothing in the brain and that means that there's success. And so I wanted her to chat about that.

And then what can happen when we, like utilizing meditation perhaps in a way that might not serve us. And so I might reframe the way I say that as Kat and I get into the conversation but I really wanted to open the door a little bit on what meditation can be for you and what it can do with and for you and then some of the hang ups that can sort of show up. And Kat will guide us through.

So it was so interesting before we actually got into this episode is our recording app completely F-bombed. So when we finally got back in I'm like, "Hey, how was that for Zen?" So anyway, welcome, Kat. If you want to share a little bit about yourself before we get going please do.

Kat: Okay, great. Hi, hello everybody, hi Susi. Happy to be here. Yeah, let's say a little bit about myself. I've been a longtime yoga practitioner, I've been practicing for about 40 years. And I've been having my toes in the Zen community, so I am a Zen yogi, basically. I'm a hybrid. And I've been practicing Zen mindfulness for about 30 years.

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And so what I've done is I've combined these two worlds together and I think the hybrid that I have works really great for me, it works well for a lot of other folks. And so that's pretty much just, I still can see myself as a beginner, right? Because you're never done and you just sit down and watch it all unfold. So that's the practice.

Susi: So what happens, like I find for me, and I do a little bit of meditation, nothing to the degree that you do. And in the years that I've taught yoga and provided yoga therapy, or shared yoga therapy with people, invariably people ask me about meditation. And one of the things that people will say is, it's about like, A, quieting, or not quieting the mind. It is about quieting the mind, but like they want their mind, like they want it to be like nothing in there.

And then sort of related to that, when people start a meditation practice they often will say, "God, it was way too noisy in there. Like there is so much mind chatter, I can't do it." So what do you say to those comments?

Kat: Well, I always have anytime anybody says that, years ago I was driving behind a car, and I don't know where I was going. And you know how you read the bumper stickers when you're just sitting there? And then I don't know if it was you that said, give me the bumper sticker, like just those few words to get it across. And the bumper sticker said, "Of course, I'm out of my mind. It's dark and scary in there."

And I just laughed, it made my whole day, right? Because everybody's head is dark and scary and full of chatter, right? So when we say, or someone will say to me, I can't meditate, my mind is too busy. I can't sit still, my body is too fidgety. And it's like, well, you and the rest of the 7 billion people that live on this planet are exactly the same.

Especially if you live in a culture like ours, the Western culture, the US or Canada where we're not really rewarded for sitting still. We're rewarded for being really busy, being productive, getting things done, buying stuff, consuming, consuming, consuming. So meditation is actually the opposite of everything we're always told, right?

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So then when you do sit down, all of that noise rises up and you've never actually, I personally, I'll talk from personal experience. When I first sat down I thought it was going to go insane. I thought it was going to go mad. I've never actually sat down and watched any of the stuff that came out of my head. And it was horrifying. The redundancy, the whininess, the busy busy going from one little thing to the next, to the next, to the next.

And then all of that spinning in my head created a lot of body tension. And then that body tension created things like my legs fell asleep, my neck got stiff, you know, my arm hurt me. And I was like I'm out of here. And then as soon as I got up and ran away from the session, my mind didn't seem so busy even though it was, I was just moving with my mind. And my body stopped resisting, because I was moving it, right?

And so that was my very first meditation session, I absolutely hated it. I was like, this is ridiculous, I can't do this day in and day out. And my first meditation was a seven day silent retreat, so there's nowhere for me to go. I was like, oh my God, I've got to go back. Either that or stay in the woods and get rained on. So I had to go back to the meditation hall and do it again.

But there was something about it that called to me. Like I think that something here will happen if I sit still long enough. And, of course, I had a good teacher that was telling me don't worry about it. It'll all unfold, it'll all unfold. And it did. So that's what I would say to people who say they can't meditate. Like of course you can.

Susi: And then if they are finding that place where it's almost frightening to start to hear what's there, then what?

Kat: Well, that's why it's good to sit with a teacher, with a group of people. So like I run Zen retreats, I have a Zen center here that we sit and we come together in community. And so then when you're sitting, you're sitting with support, so there's a lot of other people around you. Everybody's sitting quietly, everybody's going through the same thing. And then you can talk to someone, you can ask questions.

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And when you start to ask questions, you realize that inside that community, no one is really any different. We all have the same neurotic mind, we all have the same contracted body around our thoughts and all of our expectations, our appointments and disappointments.

And so then when you're in a community, even if it's a cyber community, where you just hook up and you find a group of people that meditate once or twice a week and then you have a cup of tea and talk about it, it just really helps you understand that you're not as complicated as you think you are, you're not as broken as you think you are. And there's a lot of people that are going through the same thing that you are.

The thing about that is that sitting can be extremely unpleasant at first because we're just not used to it. And then after a while it's easy. But at first it just seems so complicated. When we make things complicated, we make things hard, they will be complicated and they will be hard. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Susi: So something that I've noticed amongst some longtime meditators that I have either taught or that I know, is I've met them when they're long time. And it seems like what can happen, like many things, is that the practice has become, and this is where the Zen Disease piece comes in, the practice becomes almost an escape.

So now they're doing the practice, but they're not necessarily being with the practice. I don't know if I'm actually saying this correctly because this is me on the outside looking in. So say more about Zen Disease. And I remember something that you had said to me during training is, you know, people will just like there's a problem, okay, I'm going to go and sit. And they're not actually dealing with the problem.

And before we got into the recording of this you talked about the little bubble that we can be in. And then we actually have the conversations with the outside world. So say more about this act of Zen Disease and how people can sometimes utilize meditation, which may be serving, may be not serving.

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Kat: So when you look at something like Zen Disease, its place of birth is inside of monastic settings. And I love monasteries, they're amazing. Like even going into a Christian monastery or a mosque or anything. When you get into these long standing places they've had a lot of time to iron out all the wrinkles. And so when you step into these worlds they are just so polished and so primed for what it is that you're trying to do.

So whether it's in a Zen hall where you're lined up, the cushions are perfect, everything's spotless, the floor shines like a mirror, you have the smell of incense, you have bells, you know, the lighting is perfect. The design of the building is all about awakening and all about enlightenment. Or you go into a beautiful cathedral and you have the stained glass shining down on you and it's just amazing. It's almost, I don't know, it's just like an ethereal blissful kind of a thing that can happen. The experience itself is visceral just from every aspect of the body. So it's very well designed.

Now, can you imagine you're in these places and you're learning the practices. So let's come in to just the Zen world, where people are sitting in a meditation hall and everything is laid out for you. So there's a container, there's the form that you follow. And every single day it's exactly the same, because what they do is the container is created so you can drop in and you can let go of having to make decisions.

Even left and right is chosen for you, right? But the container holds you and so then you can sit inside and you can let go and wake up, right? You can let go of all of the things that distract you from really being able to just sit and be 100% present. You slow way down, everything is quiet, right?

So imagine you're doing this day after day, week after week, month after month, and then it becomes year after year after year. You go back and you do your retreats, you do your meditations, maybe you sign on and you become a resident and you stay in one of these communities or ashrams for months or even years, right?

So what you find is that you become very quiet and you start to become very nuanced and very learned and other people start to look up to you and

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you become the old gear in the machine, right? And then what will start to happen is that instead of really dropping into a meditation practice, which is about complete acceptance of the moment, and inside of that moment there's the constant change.

All right, so one day you get up, you're not in a happy mood. One day the sun is shining, the next day there's snow coming through the side door and the wind is blowing, right? And the idea of an enlightenment practice, or becoming awake, or being present with what is is understanding that no matter what is in your hands at the moment, it's going to leave and be replaced by something else.

And what will start to happen with this thing we call it Zen Disease is also bliss disease, is that instead of being able to be with the flow of things changing, the individual can get so stuck in things being the status quo where nothing changes.

So it's like I get up in the morning, my whole world is exactly the way I want it. And as long as I don't answer the phone, turn on my computer, go outside and talk to my neighbor, I'm blissed out because everything is just perfect. But it is not in relationship, it's not in any connection, or any compassionate interaction with anything else, right?

And so that's where the Zen Disease can start to put people above all of that. So there's also a saying where you say it's easy to be a saint on the mountain. But come down off the mountain and live in the valley for a while where people are born, people die, people are sick, people are happy, people are sad, and people will beat you up and steal your shoes, right?

And then how present are you when all of the real life is happening instead of this very structured, very polished, very bliss-y place? So it's easy to be blissed when you're in bliss, right? And so then Zen Disease puts people above it. You know, they think that I'm above all of this, I'm above the body, I'm above all of these things.

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And so then, when things get really bad, well, I'm just going to go off and meditate, you know, but the house is on fire. You've got to put the fire out. It's like, no, I'm going to go meditate. I'm going to get really calm and then I'm going to come back and deal with this, right? It's like that's not being in anything.

And so when you have that kind of a state where you might be very awake and you might be very calm, but if you can't translate that into the real world, what starts to happen is you can become repressed, you can become a control freak. So that means you have to control everything around you, everything that comes into you, every interaction that you have. Things have to stay predictable and safe or you lose your bliss, right?

And then you just start to become, like my teacher used to say, denial ain't a river in Egypt, right? People sit and you deny things like how you feel, what you're thinking. You deny your body, you don't take care of it anymore because it's insignificant, it's not part of your enlightenment experience.

And then when you end up in that world of denial, then you're taking a slippery slope away from enlightenment, away from a waking up and being useful. I mean, my group that's like, what's the point of being awake if you're not being useful? You know, doing something other than taking care of yourself.

Susi: So just for fun, when you talk about being awake, or waking up, say more about that.

Kat: Well, enlightenment or self-realization, so if you go into the yoga land it's self-realization, right? And the big thing is, what actually is the self?

So in our culture, the Western culture is the only I can speak about, we're very ego inflated, right? So when you're looking at, in the Zen practice or Buddhist philosophy, there's three marks of existence, and one is life has suffering, and life has suffering because everything is impermanent. There's nothing that you can look at right now that is going to be here in any length of time.

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I'm looking at a beautiful orchid and I know when just a matter of a day or two those flowers, one by one of them falling off. That's impermanence. I could look at a concrete wall and know in maybe 200 years, if no one takes care of it, it's just going to be a pile of rubble. I look at my body, I look in the mirror, every day something's changed and at some point I will be worm food, right? Everything is impermanent, including my notion of myself.

And then the third thing is that this notion of myself, which is an ego, I'm here, I'm Kat talking to Susi. Like I got all this stuff coming out of my mouth, I sound so enlightened, and so awake, and so full of information, right? But this actually is not who I am. So all I am right now in engaging with you, Susi, is a collection of memories, thoughts, feelings, past, everything that's formulated, right?

And this is constantly in flux. So the person who got up this morning is not the person that's going to wake up tomorrow, okay? And so I understand that even this thing I call Kat, this person I call Kat, from the Zen perspective or from the Buddha Dharma or what Siddhartha said is that you actually don't exist. And if I try to pinpoint who I am, all it is is going to be a list of functions that I do.

And so you look at those three marks, life has suffering, everything is impermanent, nothing is here for any more than just a blink, including myself. And this thing that I call a self actually isn't a separate self, right? That's usually where people get really bogged up right there because my whole life somebody keeps calling my name. So Kat, Kat, Kat, and then I say, well, Kat doesn't exist. But when you say Kat, I turn around, right?

But what turns around, it's a lot of conditioning. So my teacher would say we're wholly conditioned beings. And all that conditioning can be constantly changed and it is, right? I'm not a 10 year old anymore, you know, but was I who I am now when I was 10? Of course not. I constantly change, yet we think that we're permanent. It causes a lot of suffering.

So then when you're looking at what is enlightenment, I think about more like, what does enlightenment meant look like? So I think about the

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individuals that I might consider to be closer to being awake. I've met some. I'm not enlightened, I do my best. I do better and worse sometimes.

But I think about people who are unconditionally full of love, compassionate, feeling beings with patience, connection to everything around them. The ability to listen from a heart space and not just about what the next words are going to come out of your mouth. Someone who has purpose, clarity, direction, that doesn't step over the top of everybody else. To me, these are like the beginning points of a fully engaged person who's working towards enlightenment.

And just the ability to accept change, you know? So like today when the computer didn't work and I was like, "Well, we'll figure this out." And, you know, I washed a dish, and I fed my dog and I kept checking and putzing with things knowing that eventually something was going to happen. But there was no contraction, there was no anxiety around it because I feel if this is going to happen, it's going to happen. And it did and it's lovely.

But the ability to be able to move with the fact that things change. And my expectations are not really the concern of whatever is happening. So no appointment, no disappointment, right? So does that help?

Susi: Yeah, it does. And it's also really easy, I find, for people to get really locked in an intellectual bantering about that, as opposed to really feeling and experiencing that. And that's something like you and I had conversations about during certification where, you know, in the process that I bring people through, I'm a body girl.

I start with the body, there's a lot of becoming aware of the objective nature of how a body is moving. How that relates to how someone might be thinking about their pain. How that then shifts the beliefs that they have, and becoming aware of even what the beliefs are. And then shifting those beliefs by the nature of connecting to the evidence that their body is now showing them.

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And so there is a process of coming into their body. And I find that sometimes when I know longtime meditators, they can be talking a lot about the process of meditation, but there seems to be something disconnected between them being in their body and talking about the process of waking up. And when you're saying enlightenment, you're talking about waking up, you're talking about, like those words you're using together, right?

Kat: Yeah.

Susi: So I'm curious about this distinction. Because meditation, I don't want to get too far off of this, I think this is an important piece because there are people listening to this podcast who are long term meditators who do want to come more into their body, who recognize there's this disconnect but aren't quite sure how to navigate it. Then there's people who are brand new to meditation, but I also don't want them to be like, "Oh my gosh, this is a big mountain to climb." Right?

And so I think the first part of this is, through the process that you're speaking about what are ideas to share with people to notice if, and it's not a bad thing to be caught up into your head about it. It's more from where I come from is that there's just a possibility for when there's a connection to oneself, like one's physical body and process, in addition to the clarity of mind that comes from the meditation practice.

Kat: Well when you're looking at something like being in two camps has always been really interesting for me because there was always the yogi's and the Zen, right? Okay. And me being both is kind of an odd thing. There's a good handful of people out there more and more that are starting to become more serious about meditation practice that are inside the embodiment world of yoga, right?

And it's interesting because yoga is actually about enlightenment, self-realization, right? And it's become such a physical practice. And that's actually where I came in with yoga because I had a lot of injuries and I had a very unhappy body that I was trying to live in. But I really realized that a

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lot of my pain in my body was really very much directly connected to how I felt about and how I thought about my body and what that pain meant, and my desire not to want it, right?

And so when I worked with the Zen people they were all about sit down, shut up, don't move, it doesn't matter how much pain you have in your body. And you just stuck it up and your body is this thing that you need to overcome, right?

And I didn't agree with that. And I always said that everybody in the Zen group that I was in, they all just loved to sit down and they cut themselves off at the neck, and only be a head. You know, focusing on just what your thoughts were. Quiet your thoughts, quiet your mind, do that.

And then there were the yoga practitioners that were all about their body. They didn't want to sit still, they didn't want to meditate, nothing. And then they were all about feeling, all about all that kind of stuff, right? But they weren't really thoughtful.

It was all about my feeling and everybody was, pardon my language, but puking all their feelings all over everybody else. It was all about how I felt and you needed to understand how I felt. And it's like, no, actually, I really don't. I mean, you can tell me how you feel but I don't have to do anything with your feelings, right?

And so it was really interesting to have these two groups in the same space at the same time tolerating each other. So the Zen people may be moving a little bit because I'm just really like forceful, right? And then the Zen people going, "Okay, we'll try sitting, but there's no guarantee I'm going to stay sitting for any longer than five minutes, trust me."

And so I had a lot of fun watching that. And at the same time I also had fun watching my own psychology around my resistance to sitting. Because I found that my yoga practice was much more of a meditation practice, a lot of vinyasa flow and I would practice for two, three hours at a time doing Ashtanga.

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And so I found that by the time I was done with my practice, I was pretty in a space of being blissed. But it was basically dehydration and nervous system overload. I didn't realize that's what I was doing, right? So then when I would sit in meditation then, of course, my mind is wired up because I'm not doing anything in my body. I can sit for hours because of my open hips and strong spine, right?

And so I started to see how you can't be in just one particular camp. It's not just your head and it's not just your body. So the group that I work with, we look about, one of the statements that we do with the meditative mind is we call it our clear, deep heart mind. And so we're not just moving from the space of the intellect, which is the ego driven overseer, or the overlord of the mind. We drop our mind down into the feeling body.

And so the feelings inform you just like if you have acid indigestion, or if you start getting heart palpitations, or you can't turn your head, okay? A big feeling that rises up is exactly the same thing as any of those sensations. A big smell, a big sound, a bright light shining in your eyes. So we look at feelings, which are in the physical body, you know, we're doing that right now a lot about trauma informed practice and there's a lot of trauma in the body, okay?

And so when we can drop into our heart space and we feel what's going on, we want the heart to inform our thought process. And then when we rise up, what we do is we're moving from a space of connection and compassion. So if you're in this feeling space all the time but you have no intelligence on how to look at how you move through the world with your feelings, and then it's not your feelings that you control, you choose your emotions.

And then you're not on a Zen cushion sitting there denying that you have any feeling, or any sadness, or any shame, or anger, or disassociation that we all come to. I mean how many of you really want to face some of the crap that's been going on in the world in the last few years, right? Moving and turning away might just be survival for some folks, right?

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So denying that that's all part of who you are is what feeds into the Zen Disease, right? And then actually thinking you can't control what you say and think and feel, and then you're lost in the body world. It's like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, both of those camps are beautiful, but they have very deep flaws that could be fixed if the two kind of created a relationship. That's what I do with my group.

Susi: Okay, so then you're blending the acknowledgment of what's going on in the body with blending the acknowledgment of what's going on in the mind, and helping people to actually see the relationship between the two. So I often call it thought feeling loops to begin with, and then the fuel of the feeling, meaning the emotion, can vibrate in the body. And then that can fuel the actions that we take which then lead us to the results that we get.

So when we can recognize this relationship between what's going on up in this intellectual cognitive space and how that actually lands out into both our body feeling and our behaviors and our habits, it becomes really, really curious when we relate it to the reduction of pain or the eradication of pain.

Kat: Yeah, because a lot of mental, well, I find that sitting I've even had the experience where I've had a lot of physical pain. And it came from the mental contraction while I was meditating. And then I just allowed myself to drift away and go into fantasy land, start planning, you know, just not being on the cushion. And I came back and I had no pain. And then as soon as I started following my breath and I stayed focused, don't look away, you know, inhale, exhale, all the pain came back.

Susi: Sorry to interrupt you, that's really curious because people will then say meditation created the pain. So yeah, but let's unpack that a little bit. Because, I mean, as you were saying that I'm like, "Oh my gosh, is she giving me permission to like start to fade off and fade away?" No, no, I know. I know that.

Kat: You can do whatever you want, actually. You have permission to do anything.

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Susi: Right, and so then but as you're bringing it back, like provide a response to that, or answer that in terms of someone saying meditation caused me pain when that is an experience that's occurring.

Kat: Well, meditation doesn't cause pain, but you holding yourself in a very foreign position, like those people who will, oh, I'm going to go meditate. So they go sit flat on the floor, put their legs in lotus position and sit there perfectly still and don't move. I can guarantee you that you will have pain. There's no question about it. I mean, I've done lotus position for years and I had to really work hard to get into it with a lot of preparation and looking at rotation of the hips and loosening up the flesh, right?

So we can cause pain by the position that you put your body in in a meditation practice. But no one ever told anybody that you can't just sit in a chair, right? So people who think they have to have zabuton, which is the cushion you sit on, the little zafu, and you have to sit with your legs a particular way and you have to wear the particular clothing and everything has to be just right, that's really getting lost in the drappings.

And what we're looking to do is come into looking and witnessing the movements of your mind, right? And so when you come into pain can rise from meditation, and the reason it can is because we are wholly conditioned beings from the time you're born.

Like you have two five year olds, you can see their personalities shifting and they're two very different people, you are conditioning them. They're being conditioned by their father, they're being conditioned by caregivers, they're going to be going to school, things that people say and do to them. You cannot insulate your children from the societal conditioning that you're going to get, right?

You teach them to behave, they can't be rude out in the world and just do naughty stuff, there's going to be consequences, right? And so we are conditioned. And what people are not aware of is that we are 100% conditioned. There isn't a thing that you think about or do that hasn't been put in there, right?

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Then when you get your catalog of data, then you move out, you cherry pick what's okay, and you get rid of what you don't want. But I can guarantee you, my mom and dad are still in my head. I hear their voices every now and then and I'm like, whoa, where did that come from? Because it's never going to be gone. It's part of my conditioning, right?

And I can be aware of it and when something rises up I can choose to choose that conditioning, or I can go, that never worked then and it's not going to work now, but thanks for the input dad, right? And then I can make another choice which is much more informed, right?

So when we don't really look at what's going on in the head, and I have to admit I've done a little therapy in my day, and that therapy has really had the finger pointing at the moon, like look here, kiddo, look at what you're doing here. No one's doing this, you're doing this, right?

So when you understand that, when I sit in pain in my meditation practice, I'm creating that pain from what my mind is doing. So it's the pushing or the pulling. In yoga it's attachment and aversion, right? I'm always deciding if I want something closer, or if I want something farther away.

When I sit and something comes to me that I don't want, and I'm sitting perfectly still, my body is going to go into get it out of here. Maybe I want to leave and I can't, but my body's going, "Okay, let's leave," and it'll get all contracted, it'll get ready to get up and it will get ready to run away. And I'm like, "No, we're just going to sit here," but my body is ready. And so that's where the tension comes up the back, that's where the legs will get tight.

I mean, I've noticed where my rear end is almost hardly on the cushion because my butt cheeks got so tight because I don't want to be there anymore. But then I have to go through the inventory, relax my body. And that just comes from practice.

And I find that my yoga practice has like 100% helped me be able to sit in meditation and look at my mind. Because the physical body that you can't sit still in because you have knee pain or back pain or, I mean, it's really

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hard to focus on what's going on in your mind if you're just screaming for relief, you know?

So I would recommend sit in a chair. Sit with your back up against something. Sit your head back, right? You don't have to suffer. Suffering is optional. Pain is inevitable, but suffering is a choice.

Susi: So if someone's listening to this and they're curious about meditation and they want to take like a first stab at the practice, what are the first recommendations that you suggest to them? Is it quite literally sit in a chair?

Kat: If you were going to say I just want to try meditation, the first thing I would say is that just a couple minutes, right? Seriously, two minutes. Take two minutes. When you're looking at trying to form a habit, and this might be some stuff that I picked up from you, Susi. So if I sound like I'm echoing you, well I did spend like over three or four years with you. So it really works well if you attach it to another habit.

So as an example, maybe you get up in the morning, you turn on your teapot. And while your water is boiling you sit down and you just simply follow your breath. Maybe you watch the teapot boil. That can be your concentration point, is just simply watching this pot go from cold water to whistle, right? That's all that's actually happening at that moment if that's what you're watching, right?

And you could do it for that whole period of time. Or maybe you just sit down for just a couple of minutes. You can actually do a timer and set it, like a little egg timer, it pings and you get up and you go. What you're doing in your physical body is simply sitting still. You feel your butt, you feel your feet on the floor, that's all you're doing.

Maybe you have your arms in your lap, your hands might be folded, your eyes, I sit with my eyes open because that's my Zen training. But a lot of meditation practice, especially in yoga, eyes are closed because there's a lot of imagery, there's mantra, mudra, malas, all those kinds of things that

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you can work with. And you're just simply being completely present to the body.

And you could also just simply do an awareness scan. So you sit in your chair, you put your feet on the floor, you put your butt on the cushion, or the seat, your hands are in your lap. And you can start at the bottom, and you start at the bottom of your feet and you slowly just move up through the legs to the hips, slowly move up your spine to your shoulders, move down, your arms, move back up, go up through the neck.

You know, look at all the sensory experience, eyes, ears, nose, listening, seeing, smelling, tasting. The skin, sensation on the skin, noticing your breath, the beating of your heart. And then once you've done this full scan, what you're doing is you're doing a concentration practice where you're checking in with your whole being for just a few minutes.

And you can imagine starting your day like that instead of an alarm clock going off, flying out of bed, doing everything five things at a time, starting your day out super stressed. And then you get to work or whatever it is you're doing and you wonder why you feel, you might wonder why you feel a little off. And it's because you started your whole day not being in your body. Like as soon as you woke up, you left your body. And so that's a really easy practice.

Susi: Are people that you work with, have they found any of the apps super helpful? Like are there certain meditation apps that you have found people recommending more than others?

Kat: There's actually different websites, like I have a group that I work with, it's mondoZen.org, and that's my hollow bones American Zen. And we're actually a cyber community, so even before COVID we were all over the world. So we did a lot of connections through the internet to begin with.

And we also have a program where we teach people this whole emotional concept. And so we do koans, look at dealing with anger, shame,

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disassociation. We help people really be able to unpack that, look at it, and then bring it back into actual practice.

There's a couple of groups out there, there's Mindful Heart I think it is. I might have it up here even because I'm always reading. Every day I read something. Sounds True has an amazing library. Shambhala has a good group. Sounds True does a lot of seminars, they do a lot of CDs, video, you know, programs and things like that that you can get a lot of good stuff on.

The podcasts are out there. The thing is, is what I find with that kind of stuff is that you can get caught in the personalities rather than just the content. And so look for the content not the charisma, even though, you know, Susi has got amazing charisma and you should follow her wherever you go.

Susi: I love you, Kat.

Kat: You know what I'm saying though.

Susi: Yeah. So you have Shambhala, and Sounds True, and what was the organization you said, the first one?

Kat: Mondo Zen.

Susi: Mondo Zen.

Kat: So it's Mondo, M-O-N-D-O, Mondo Zen, Z-E-N, .org.

Susi: Okay, we'll put those in the show notes for people who are listening so that you can find those. I think it was a really good point around watch for the, as you said, content versus the charisma. I think that's actually really great because that in and of itself can dissociate you from the actual experience of it, right?

Kat: Yeah, there's actually another one, it's called Heartfulness Magazine, that was the one that I was looking for.

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Susi: Okay, so if you can send me those links, we'll throw them into the show notes so that people can find those.

Okay, so then what about people who've been meditating for a little while, they're having pain. They love their practice but they're having pain. What's the recommendation you have for them?

Kat: Find a yoga therapist and see what happens with your body.

Susi: Fair enough. Fair enough.

Kat: So like, if people are meditation practitioners, they're probably very used to having different levels of discomfort in their body while they're sitting. And with my practice over the years, there's acceptable discomfort and then there's that red flag discomfort, right?

And like even when I started with you, Susi, you can see that I was in the camp that was hold it steady and don't move, don't blink, you know, you can get up and shake it out in 45 minutes, you're fine, right? But you can see how you can get a little bit of a rigidity around the body when you spend so much time sitting. So I've been really moving away from that.

And here's the thing about practice, because a lot of people and this is where I talk about the personality besides the content, is that I have no problems with changing anything. Especially if that change is then pointed out to me that it's going to make my life easier, softer, and just like happier. There's nothing wrong with feeling content and happy, right?

And so when I started to go through some phases in my own body where I had chronic pain that I'd never had before, and so I started to look not only at the physiology of injuries and, you know, car accidents and stuff that I've had, but also the turmoil that was going on in my mind. And that turmoil that was going on in my mind had a direct link to the holding patterns that I had in my body, the rigidity, a lot of the fire and the energy that I have.

And so the ability to see that and find a better way is really important. And that's really where a meditation practice comes in. Because you're able to, I

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think, a word that you use quite a bit, Susi, which I actually love is pivot. You know, the ability to pivot. It's like if you're going left and all you're finding is briars and misery, and you can see to the right that there's an open field that you can get to where you're going much faster, go right.

It's like, just because the roadmap says left doesn't mean that you can't change your course, right? And so for those who are practicing, and they might be getting too rigid possibly, I don't know, I'm not in your head so I don't know. And I wouldn't want to be there because it's dark and scary in there, remember?

But consider it's like are you clinging to something that doesn't serve you anymore? And maybe it's time to change up your practice, maybe you need a more physical movement. You know, maybe you need to look at finding something like yoga, Qigong, Tai Chi, different kinds of things that are more of an embodiment practice that might allow you to really connect more with your physical being, and then take that connection back onto your cushion.

Susi: Love it. Love it. All right, Kat, where can people find you so if they want to reach out to you and join your community or work with you online to support them in being able to get back to a meditation practice that, if I can dare say it, is more comfortably uncomfortable.

One that they can actually be with but their body's not in that like burning pain place, but they can distinguish between like the discomfort that can arise when you're in that meditation practice, which is wholly different than the persistent chronicity of pain. How can they find you? What's the best way?

Kat: So you can reach me on my, just email me. So it's Kat, K-A-T, @bayyoga, B-A-Y-Y-O-G-A, .com. And you can also text me on my phone, 920-265-2217. I live in the States, so if you're in Canada you'd have to do your, what is it, oh one or something like that for the code. I'm in Wisconsin, so if anybody is close by, you can bop over by me.

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You can also go to my website, which is bayyoga.com, B-A-Y-Y-O-G-A, .com. And I'm on Facebook and Twitter and all that kind of stuff, but I don't really do any of that, I have other people do it for me. So if you want to find me, those are the things to find me.

Susi: Perfect, so we will provide that website and the email on the show notes. So feel free to reach out to Kat. I mean she's got so much experience and history and has done all the things and of course I recommend her highly. So if you have meditation practice or even want to grow one, do you reach out to her.

Thank you, Kat, so much.

Kat: You're welcome.

Susi: Love you.

Kat: Love you too, it's been fun.

Susi: Take care.

Kat: Bye bye.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.