

What about this moment is not enough?

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Tagged as : [Full Catastrophe Living](#), [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#), [stadiumWisdom 2.0](#)

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In the fall of 2011 I made an unconventional decision: taking a sabbatical from a job as a management consultant to explore the emerging phenomenon of a thing called "mindfulness".

To kick-start this exploration I signed up for a conference titled "Creating a Mindful Society" held in New York. The name seemed fitting enough and the conference featured some super-stars in the field of mindfulness. The keynote speaker was Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and widely considered one of the most influential people in bringing mindfulness into mainstream western life. I had recently read his first book, [Full Catastrophe Living](#), and I resonated deeply with how he articulated mindfulness and its potential for healing our world. Through my own first-hand experience I had seen the transformative beauty of mindfulness, and I was stoked to learn there was a whole "movement" dedicated to the cause.

When I arrived at the conference I was disappointed to see only about 300 people. It seemed crystal clear to me that mindfulness was the answer to so much personal and societal suffering; why weren't more people catching on?

After Jon's talk there was a rousing applause and you could feel the high energy of inspiration. There was time for a public Q&A; I felt a question alive in me and mustered up the courage to ask:

"I recently finished reading Full Catastrophe Living, and when I looked at the front page and saw

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*it was written over 20 years ago I was shocked. If I had read the book when it was published in 1990, I would have thought that 20 years later there would be a **stadium** of people coming to a conference like this. What's preventing us from filling a stadium and how do we get there?!"*

My heart was racing; I was essentially asking for a pep talk from one of my idols on how to bring this to the next level. His face scrunched a little as he brought the microphone up slowly. He looked straight at me and calmly uttered words I'll never forget:

"Why do you want a stadium? What about this moment is not enough?"

I was dumbfounded. I stood there, mic in my hand, jaw on the floor, as he expounded about how stadium-crowds tend to have a fervor to them that lacks individual and collective awareness, and that usually such events are focused around a very small group of individuals in a devotional worship context. He said that if a stadium gathered to rally about mindfulness he probably wouldn't show up.

I felt like a fool. I had read his 300-page book and realized I had pretty much missed the whole point.

While I was initially quite embarrassed by this transmission, today I can say with confidence it is one of the most helpful transmissions I've ever received. In my naïveté I believed bigger was better and that strength in numbers would unequivocally support the cause...but I now realize that without being grounding in the present moment I was at risk for losing touch with the whole reason for doing this work.

Ultimately, mindfulness is not about getting somewhere else. It's not about making yourself, or the world, better, bigger, faster, stronger. It may facilitate that, but binding happiness to a specific idea of how things could/should be better in the future is precisely the kind of distorted perception that leads to suffering, as well as unskillful action in the present.

Mindfulness is about being fully awake to the conditions in the here and now, inhabiting the present moment with a compassionate awareness that bears fruit in the form of wise action.

In that moment of asking the question to Jon I was unsatisfied with how things were because I thought it would be better if there were more people there. Jon picked up on this perception and shared his view: not only would more people at a mindfulness conference not necessarily be better, it may be worse! *This coming, by the way, from a guy who has dedicated his life to healing the world through mindfulness.*

In the years that followed that conferences I spent a lot more time actually practicing mindfulness (rather than just reading about it), and my appreciation for Jon's transmission has grown immensely. During this time mindfulness has in fact grown to be much more mainstream than it was then. A couple months ago I attended the [Wisdom 2.0 conference](#) which had over 2,500 people! Jon was also at this conference and I gathered up the courage to ask him a question again. This question (and response) had a much different effect. I'll share about it

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someday. For now, this is enough.