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Episode 168 - Mindfulness for All by Angie Corogin

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Joni Jones: Okay, here we go. It looks like everybody got in. And I'll keep an eye on that and make sure I let anybody in as they pop in. And I just have to say really quickly, I see some familiar names in my little list over here, and I want to congratulate you because that's fantastic. Very proud of you. Every week, coming in here to get your learn on, that's beautiful.

Joni Jones: So welcome back everybody. We're glad you're here. I'm Joni, the producer of the Organixx podcast, Empowering You Organically. And here at Organixx, we're passionate about vibrant health. So we created this Live It Challenge for you. We did it as a team and we created it for you so that you could get the fabulous experience that we did. We also offer squeaky clean supplements, engaging education on our podcast episodes, or in-depth articles in our inspired library. So we're a resource for you. So I want you to think of it that way and take advantage of it.

Joni Jones: This week, you were challenged to 7,000 steps, getting those up every week, and you were also challenged to write down three things each day that you're grateful for. I really, really sincerely hope you did that. It is amazing the shift that it can create in your mind. And especially with everything that's going on in the world right now, especially in the United States, I think it's very good to tap into that gratitude muscle and use it.

Joni Jones: Last week, we had Ruth Cummings on here and she was with us again so that she could give us a little bit more awareness into the connection between our emotional pain and where that resides as disease in our bodies if we do not address it. So today's guest is going to give you some additional tools to help relieve that stuck stress that we all have inside of us. And after this week of news, who couldn't use that little bit of loveliness?

Joni Jones: So I want you to get comfy and let's gather some more tools for our health journey with Angie. Angie is a heartfelt yoga and mindfulness instructor, a yoga studio owner, a mindset coach, and a certified integrative wellness consultant. She supports communities, corporations, and individuals to integrate functional wellness practices into their modern lives. Angie is committed to an earth conscious

lifestyle, I love that, from what she eats and drinks, to all the things that she consumes. And she's inspired to share this way of life with everyone.

Joni Jones: She's earned degrees in environmental education and intervention services, master's of education. Beautiful. You can find Angie on Insight Timer too also. There's an ever-growing catalog of meditations, free meditations there. So if you go to insighttimer.com/angiecorogin, and you can find her great stuff there. But now I'm going to turn it over to Angie so she can help us get deeper into mindfulness this week.

Joni Jones: Hey Angie, thanks for being here.

Angie Corogin: Hi, it's really nice to be back. Thanks for having me. So, today, I want to continue our discussion around stress and mindfulness. And the last time we met, and I encourage you to zip back to catch that episode if you're wanting the further details, but it'll give you the 10,000 foot fly by. We talked about in the last time I was here the history of mindfulness and how it relates to stress reduction. I totally bug out on this.

Angie Corogin: The science is cool and it does continue to show that as we practice mindfulness, we can change our physical brain, our actual brain parts change. Our amygdala, which is our stress detector in the center of our brain, can shrink. And through the practices of mindfulness, our prefrontal cortex, and if you remember, this is our smart parts, our wisdom and our good decision-making parts, this can grow. And we've been charting this in brain scans.

Angie Corogin: So today I want to offer both a brief seated practice and also a story. So I want also to review what mindfulness is. So I should probably give that definition, and it really is just paying attention to right now, what's going on right now. And the second part of that is to not judge it. And that's a little tricky, the not judging part. We tend to have a lot of opinions and our minds are made to produce thinking thoughts, but we don't always need to get so involved with them. And that's where mindfulness comes in.

Angie Corogin: And again, the practices of mindfulness, we can use all these words to point out what mindfulness is. We can define it as best possible, and again, I'm going to attempt to do that, but the direct experience of mindfulness is so unique to each of us, and our learning is so different as we transition from how we perceive what the world around us is, to how we're experiencing it through hearing, seeing, tasting, and even through whatever body sensations might be going on.

Angie Corogin: So there are formal practices in mindfulness, formal ways to bring our focus and attention to the present moment, and that's typically what we find in classes that we're learning about, but there's informal mindfulness as well, where we start finding it in our life. And it starts appearing in spaces, we start noticing new behaviors in ourselves that we never thought possible, things we didn't know how to unprogrammed.

Angie Corogin: So I want to start with just a practice again like we did last time together. So sitting, standing, getting comfortable, knowing where you're at in your space. So you might sit a little taller or uncross your feet. You might minimize your distractions, put down your phone, gather yourself all right

here. And you have the option to close your eyes if you like. You could look down. These are both ways just to simplify all the information that you're gathering, eyes gathering so much info. And just know that you're right here.

Angie Corogin: Sense yourself, your seat, your feet. Anything that connects and touches, these are good places to start, to start to drop out of thinking and into our body. Where we live, many of us, our lives involve a lot of thinking and we can get sort of stuck up here. And there's so much more. So for this moment, notice what it's like to bring your focus again and again to your hands and to your feet, both or one or the other.

Angie Corogin: This is a practice. So we just do it again and again. And it's normal and typical to have a lot of thoughts. This mindful meditation is really about focus, about directed focus, about mental training, and the ability to hold our attention. And it's not so much about getting calm. I think that's a bit of a myth around meditation and mindfulness, that it's about getting calm or about emptying your mind. But perhaps it's more about just noticing how things are, how your body is.

Angie Corogin: Begin to shift your attention to your breathing, just noticing breathing. You might feel the breath in and out your nose, down the back of your throat. You might feel your clothing moving, but notice that you can, like a camera lens, you can focus your attention and narrow your attention to focus on one thing like the breathing or like our feet or our hands.

Angie Corogin: But then we also have this ability to widen our awareness and start to take in more, noticing breathing and hearing sounds and feeling coolness or warmth.

Angie Corogin: And so widen this lens and just notice whatever's coming up. Notice if you're thinking a lot, planning, remembering. Notice if there's ability to feel your feet again. Experience the breath or notice your hands. And feeling all of this at once as possible with a very wide lens of awareness.

Angie Corogin: And then let's narrow it again, so focusing in that lens to listening, just listening, taking in the soundscape of your room, what's around you. What's going on, close sounds, far sounds. You might notice persisting sounds, random sounds. And just listening. And each time you're distracted, just coming back to listen again. Just a break from thinking, just listening, letting the sounds meet your ears, noticing that it's somewhat difficult to predict what the next sound might be.

Angie Corogin: Thinking's a lot like this too. If we really watch the nature of thinking, it's hard to predict what the next thought might be. And so listening, letting the sound meet your ear. And take a couple more breath, listening, taking in the sound, and then start to widen this lens again and take it more. You might again feel hands, feet, breathing. These are great places to return to.

Angie Corogin: And eventually, if your eyes are lowered or closed, you might begin to blink open your eyes. And just start to take in your room. You might look around, not needing to name things, just seeing, noticing what meets your eye. And then let's take a deep breath in, just a big, a fuller breath, maybe through the nose. And open your mouth, breathing out your mouth, a cleansing breath out. It could be a sigh.

Angie Corogin: And just do that again, a deep breath in, and again, you could sigh audibly. Ah. This is good for the throat. It vibrates and there's a nerve there that actually is relative to the nervous system helping you calm down. We do this naturally.

Angie Corogin: So, notice how you are just taking that two or three minute pause to notice your body, your hands, your feet, your breathing, and to listen. There's something really scientific and sort of magical at the same time that's happening inside of our mind when we take these breaks.

Angie Corogin: So how do you get out of your head when there's so much going on? How do you get out of your head? One possibility truly is to get into your body. There's ways to do that too. It's not always possible that you can get up and go for a jog, although there's many of us, I'm sure, that relate to this when there's too much going on and you say, "I'm going to go for a walk," or, "I'm going to go for a jog," or, "I'm going to go burn off some steam at the gym," right?

Angie Corogin: But we also have this ability to sort of just drop in and do these momentary checks throughout the day. "How am I doing? How am I breathing? Where's my breath? What's my mind like? What's the traffic like?" Is it like five o'clock rush hour up there, or are you driving in the country with the windows down and the breeze blowing?

Angie Corogin: So just knowing how you are gives you so much information. And that's really a lot of what this mindful practice is about is just getting in touch with yourself, but your life as well, everything going on in your life.

Angie Corogin: So I want to tell a story and I'm really quite excited about telling the story. It's from this really fantastic book. This'll be in the show notes, and it is called Rewilding by Micah Mortali. And it comes from the middle of the book. And I'm just going to jump right in and then we'll have a bit of a chat about this afterwards.

Angie Corogin: "Many years ago, a bear sat down next to me while I was meditating in the woods. It was an afternoon in mid-October in Massachusetts and I'd been mountain biking in my favorite preserve. I took a break from writing to enjoy this perfect fall afternoon. I was overflowing with gratitude. My life was going well. I sat under a strong oak tree and closed my eyes. I asked spirit to come and sit with me to share in my heartfelt thanksgiving. I spoke the words aloud and immediately heard footsteps in the woods. They got closer, but I continued with my meditation until directly behind me I heard a twig snap and a loud exhalation through a very big nose.

Angie Corogin: "I knew in that moment in every cell of my body that a bear was behind me. My heart pounded. An adrenaline surge through my body. I was totally alert and aware. I very slowly turned my head to look behind me and saw shining black fur from shoulder to rump close enough to reach out and touch. It was a large black bear. Immediately, my mind provided options for survival. 'Get up and run away. Get up and yell to scare the bear away. Climb a tree.' Those ideas seemed bad. 'Sit still. Do nothing and breathe.' Yeah, that made sense.

Angie Corogin: "And so I did, I slowed my breathing and meditated on the intensity of my body's response to this perceived threat. In my yoga, I had learned that strong sensations and emotions,

including fear can be powerful doorways into meditation. Rather than turning away from the uncomfortable experience, I had learned to breathe into what I was feeling. And in this case, the fight or flight response was a huge wave washing over my mind, my body and my soul.

Angie Corogin: "Instead of making a big story about what was happening, I remembered to face the experience in all of its raw power. I had the thought, 'This is the coolest thing that has ever happened to me.' I had another thought too. 'This might be the worst thing that has ever happened to me.' Many hundreds of hours I had practiced breathing through the intense sensations of yoga postures, watching my experience without reaction and allowing things to be as they are. All that training on the mat was now being put to test the test in a pose I had never tried before, bear pose.

Angie Corogin: "For a moment, I wondered how it might feel to be bitten by a bear. That was not helpful thought. So I returned to my breathing. Moments stretched into hours, it felt, but the bear walked out from behind that tree and then it sat next to me. It was smelling me. Still, I remained motionless. And in time, the bear walked away. I turned to look at it as it walked away. It turned and looked back at me. Our eyes met and then it disappeared down the hill. I stood up and I fell down again. My legs were weak and wobbly. I stood again and got to my bike. I climbed on board and I peddled out of those woods like a bat out of hell."

Angie Corogin: He goes on in the book to talk about the next days and what happened for him, what that was like to be with this, this aliveness that we like. We all want to feel alive, right? What a story though. I think this bear, it could be anything in our life. It could be any challenge, literally, any challenge. Sometimes things are big and a big response is warranted. We need to run. We need to climb. Yeah, sure. If it's a real bear, for sure.

Angie Corogin: But what's interesting about brain science, about the way our brain perceives stress is that it doesn't differentiate between a bear and a jammed printer. Our physical brain actually responds the same. The exact same reaction happens. Now, the intensity can vary, but the program runs. And it's for each of us like this. No one's outside of this programming because it's what allowed you to be here. And in fact, your ancestors did a really good job of this. They did a good job of responding to stress. It made your life possible. Your life is proof. So our nervous systems are brilliant. They will keep us safe at any cost.

Angie Corogin: So we can use mindfulness, and we saw that in the story here. And we saw it in a quite potent way, actually, because the author of the story, Micah, he says that he practiced yoga. Much of yoga is about bringing awareness to the body, to your breathing, to your thinking, and you do that through various postures. Sometimes they are hard. They're difficult and they're meant to be difficult so that we can see what we act like when things are hard. And here you are on a yoga mat and you can take it on. You can quit. You can walk out. You can call the teacher awful. You can blame it on anything you want and it was a yoga class.

Angie Corogin: And yet people that desire to change come back to these practices because you start to notice that you have patterns that you react certain ways when things are hard or unexpected, when the bear shows up when you're on a bike ride and meditating doing something great under the oak tree.

Angie Corogin: But this thing happened for Micah where instead of getting up and reacting into the fight/flight response, he didn't run, he didn't climb. And I'd even suggest that he didn't freeze because he had cognitive thinking happening. And I'm putting my hand up because his prefrontal cortex, the smart parts of his brain, were online. He was thinking about this. He was remembering that I'm experiencing this state of panic. And in my body, it feels like a beating heart, arrhythmia perhaps, or shallow breathing or scattered sinking, or like just the desire to straight up run or hide. And these are all sort of reactions, but he stopped and he processed it.

Angie Corogin: So I teach a course called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. It's an eight week group course. And in that course, we take a deep dive into the science of stress, but also the direct experience of mindfulness and how those two things sort of melt and meet when we allow that. We teach something called STOP, S-T-O-P, an MBSR.

Angie Corogin: The S, STOP, the S stands for stop. Like actually stop. Just stop for a second and take a breath. T, take a breath. Just observe what's happening. O, observe. Just take a moment. So you've stopped, you took a breath, you looked around, what's going on? And P, proceed in a way that supports you. In this case, this bear, Micah sat. And from that, that pause, a new possibility opened, that there existed the possibility to encounter this great danger even close up and remain safe and remain in control.

Angie Corogin: I'm not that you sit with the bear, but if it is the printer jammed, or you're forgotten burnt toast, or your lost car keys, is it possible to know that your body doesn't know the difference between a bear sneaking up and sitting down beside you and the severity of the situation you're facing?

Angie Corogin: And so this for me has been a potent practice. And we can practice not in crisis. And that comes in these little bites, these little moments that we take throughout our day. It might just be one, three or five minutes. It doesn't have to be a 30 minute formal practice, although that does something too to our brain that's very different from these one, three, five minute breaks. But these short breaks, they're enough. They're enough to change the trajectory of how you're dealing with and meeting challenge.

Angie Corogin: So let's take a deep breath together. That was a lot. So take a deep breath in and just a long breath out. I invite you if you'd like to lower your eyes again or to blink your eyelids closed. And we'll just take a moment just to ground, to check in at how things are before we get onto whatever's next in your day, noticing sound, feeling your feet.

Angie Corogin: Whatever is the bear in your life, a hardship, a loss, a difficulty, a challenging relationship, a jammed printer, remember that you have choice. You can always STOP. And when we're able to insert this tiny wedge of awareness, new things emerge. We might not know what to do in that new space, but it's a new possibility and that's everything. That's being alive.

Angie Corogin: So then just take one more deep breath in and out, just sort of sealing this practice, this time, this work, this focus, and then blinking your eyes open or lifting your eyes back and up if they're closed.

Angie Corogin: I just want to thank you again for having me and for allowing me to open this conversation about stress that we're meeting and the bear, the bear pose and this idea that we have so much agency and how we meet challenges. And we didn't invite the bear. We didn't want the bear. We might not even like bears, and yet the bear is here. And so, remembering STOP, stop, take a breath, observe and proceed in a way that supports you.

Angie Corogin: If you want to learn more, more tools for your own mindfulness or stress reduction journey, I am starting a new MBSR course in November this month. And if you're catching this on replay, please have a look at the resources that'll be dropped in the links below to join the next course because this is information we should all have. And know that I also offer scholarships. So thank you for having me. Joni, I'll pass it on over to you.

Joni Jones: Oh, Angie, I love that. Thank you so much. The bear, I mean, how appropriate is that for right now? Seriously. And to understand, to intellectually understand that there's no difference between the bear and the printer jamming is big. I mean, it really is. So it takes the boogeyman out of it a little bit. It really does. And it puts the power back in you. It gives you more autonomy to understand that, yeah, I really can make these things happen. I can down-regulate. I can keep a clear head. The world is not going to come to an end.

Joni Jones: And these one, three, five minute little breaks, seriously, it's breaking the pattern of what we currently do because sometimes we know instinctively it's not working for us. I mean, nobody wakes up every day and says, "Hey, I want to be a ball of stress today." So now we can get Sherlock on it and we pay attention and we make a change. And it's so beautiful.

Joni Jones: I mean, I know for me personally, the breathing is amazing. I mean, just getting oxygen to the brain is a beautiful thing when it's going crazy. And I think the hardest thing for me was to learn to be gentle with me because I have high standards and I really hold myself higher than probably anybody in the free world. So I have to remember to be gentle and that I'm not defective. It is what it is. We're born to think. We think. But sometimes it gets a little chatter in there and having these tools to be able to STOP, right? I love that, S-T-O-P. That is something that we can all get behind.

Joni Jones: And your story, storytelling drives it into a place in us that you don't forget. You don't forget. It's not learning something from rote, right? I mean, we all felt what that felt like sitting there on that tree. And I'm not sure, I mean, maybe I need a little more work, but I'm not sure I would have been able to sit there. That is beautiful. That is a testament to the work that he's done for himself. So, to me, that means that we all have that ability if we choose to take it. So I'm choosing. I'm choosing because I'm tired of feeling stressed all the time. I really am, or most of the time. So that was fantastic. I really, really want to thank you for that.

Joni Jones: So we have one more week in our challenge, guys. So what's week six bring us? Well, it brings us 7,500 steps. And I don't know if you remember, but a couple of weeks ago, I kind of tried to plant a seed in your brain in terms of challenges are fantastic. They really are. You have a different ownership sometimes than just doing it for yourself. I know that can be hard because you have all these

other things that you want to do for people and you kind of fall at the bottom of the list. But when you do a challenge, there's an accountability with people. So you're able to elevate that up, right?

Joni Jones: This week, your emotional part of your challenge is to write down a plan for you that includes a physical and emotional goal to continue on beyond this challenge. And you can find yourself an accountability partner. I really encourage you to do that and put your wellbeing first.

Joni Jones: So that's your challenge for this week. And then on Saturday, we'll have our final class with Stacy and she'll get us to move our beautiful bodies.

Joni Jones: And I want you to know that the MBSR Program that Angie does is fantastic and we will have the links. We will have the links. Actually, I'm going to drop it in the chat here for those of you that are online, and then we will have the links in the episode.

Joni Jones: So I want to thank everybody for showing up for you today. I think that's beautiful and congratulations, and I hope everybody has a beautiful Saturday. And thank you again, Angie, for sharing with us. Bye everybody.

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