

The Wandering Mind

I was once fortunate enough to attend an evening talk given by a man who continues to inspire me, Jon Kabat-Zinn. He stopped over in London briefly on his way home to America after a one month European tour of speaking engagements and book signings for “Coming to Our Senses” published in 2006. He was clearly tired and had a croaky voice, but he was on tremendous form. Also, we were in awe of the venue, which was in Piccadilly at St James’ church, designed by Sir Christopher Wren and boasting the font at which William Blake had been baptized.

The church was full to bursting and Jon gave an eloquent and engaging talk about Mindfulness. At the end, people were invited to ask questions, and one person said, “Thank you so much for being here, and for such an enlightening evening. I’ve been meditating for 25 years now, and I still can’t stop my mind from wandering. My question is, with all your experience and wisdom, could you please tell us what we should do to stop our mind from wandering?”

Jon closed his eyes, and rocked back and forth a little. A faint smile grew into a broad grin and he opened his eyes, leaned towards the person and said in his soft spoken American accent, “Well.....”, he said, “I suppose I’ve been practicing for 40 years now, and do you know what..... I can’t get my mind to stop f*****g wandering either!”

It was quite a shock to hear Jon say that, but the point was so well made.....

After what seemed like an age of deathly silence, everyone fell about laughing as the church erupted in echoes of hilarity and disbelief. Clearly the person who asked the question, and who had said he’d been meditating all those years, did not really ‘get it’.

As Jon went on to say, “Wandering, is what minds *do*, *don’t they!?*”

Other questions that people asked that evening, also made it clear to me (if it wasn’t clear already) that Mindfulness is easily misunderstood – even by those who profess to being dedicated practitioners.

If we can’t get it right on the cushion, what hope is there of getting it right in everyday life?