



meditation teacher

DARON LARSON

Story by JANE HAWES • Photo by WILL SHILLING

DARON LARSON doesn't see just a red light when he's stuck in traffic. Oh sure, he sees the signal. And he knows he's not going anywhere anytime soon. But Larson, who teaches mindfulness meditation classes, also sees an opportunity for personal growth.

"Mindfulness is about changing our relationship to discomfort," says Larson, 47.

"The reason for the discomfort is I catch myself subtly insisting that things should be different," he continues. "Well, what if we reframe it and ask ourselves, 'What if this is how it should be?'"

Larson, who also works as an instructional librarian at Franklin University, discovered mindfulness meditation 11 years ago at a four-day silent retreat. Now, he conducts workshops for area hospitals, corporations, community centers and private clients. He even had his brain scanned last year as

part of a Harvard study that is mapping the neurobiological benefits of meditation.

Mindfulness is an increasingly popular approach to meditation, though it's a concept found in every religious tradition in history, Larson says. The practice helps people define and understand reality; reduced suffering is often a byproduct. Larson calls this "attentional fitness" (in fact, that's the name his website goes by: Attentional-Fitness.com), and the people he works with have used it to make peace with challenges like cancer, divorce and grief.

Larson says the practice of mindfulness meditation uses the senses and our awareness of what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and even tasting to develop mental muscles of concentration and clarity.

The goal for this increased mental muscularity? Nothing more and nothing less than contentment, says Larson. Even when stuck at a red light.

LIVING BETTER 5 THINGS TO KNOW

Larson shares his thoughts

Understand that suffering is a function of discomfort multiplied by our resistance to it.

Try to drop the perspective of being the main character in your story a few times a day by directly noticing one sensory aspect of what you're doing for a few seconds or minutes.

Then, savor whatever you notice, while not judging it or needing it to be different.

Unlearn the blindness of familiarity by bringing extraordinary attention to ordinary experiences.

Find the rest—or peace—lurking everywhere in your mind, in your body and the world around you.

5 FAVES

Larson's personal favorites

SCENT
Bread baking, old books, new books, rain, mud, honeysuckle, the circus, mint, crayons. Don't make me choose.

SONG TO SING IN THE SHOWER
"The Book of Love," "Me by the Sea" or one of the Baptist hymns or church camp songs that are etched into my neurons.

ALL-TIME BIRTHDAY PRESENT
My partner, Matt, once planned a trip and kept all the details secret. All I had to do was request time off.

WAY TO REJUVENATE
Ten minutes of attention practice can feel like rebooting and provides a needed break.

PLACES TO TAKE OUT-OF-TOWN VISITORS
Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams. Who doesn't enjoy sharing delight?