

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Episode 182:

Stillness, Meditation and the Brain with Ariel Garten

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J: You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast episode number 182. We're talking about meditation, how to do it and what happens in your brain when you do. Stay tuned.

Hey there, my friends, welcome back to Vibrant Happy Women, I am Dr. Jen Riday, your host and your friend, and I'm so glad you're here. You're showing up today because you want to invest in your happiness and in your energy and being a better mom and a better employee and a better wife and all the things you do, you want to show up as your most vibrant, energized, radiant, happy self. And if that's true for you, then you're in the right place because that's what this podcast is all about. I'm going to give a shout out to all of you who have left us a review on Apple podcasts and I hope that more of you will do so today. These reviews help us a lot, they determine our ranking in Apple podcasts (or at least they're a big factor) and it also shows me what you think about the show. So if you've never left one and you think it's going to be hard, all you have to do is type in a little link into your browser and that is jenriday.com/applepodcasts, all 1 word, jenriday.com/applepodcasts, and then you just enter 'leave a review'; so simple. I might even read yours on the air someday. Thank you so much for doing it, it means everything and it means the world and I appreciate it so much.

I want to share a review from Mrs. Sandra D who wrote, "My sister introduced me to your podcast several months ago and I've been listening ever since. As a busy wife and mom, it gives me something to look forward to as I work out, shower or wash dishes. Something specific happened to me involving you're tapping episode and I wanted to share. I suffer from chronic pain and have been seeing a physical therapist for a few months. This past week, she talked to me about emotional connection to physical pain and asked me if I've heard of EFT tapping. Having heard your episode on tapping the previous week, I knew exactly what my therapist was talking about. I'm grateful that I heard the tapping episode before my appointment, I believe it made me more open to the therapy, which is now leading me on the path of emotional healing. I want to thank you, Jen, for the broad knowledge base you offer on your podcast. I love listening and I'm constantly learning. You ask great questions and having inspiring interviews. Thank you for helping me on the journey to becoming a vibrant happy woman." Sandra D, thank you, I'm so excited tapping is working for you, I kind of love it. I've been doing it and I'll continue to do it, so I'll think of you now would I do it. Thank you for leaving that review. Again, everyone else, I want to hear your thoughts about episodes. What do you like, dislike? Leave yours at jenriday.com/applepodcasts, all 1 word.

Alright, today, I have an amazing guest for you, she's a smart cookie, a neuroscientist and a psychotherapist, and she knows the science of meditation. Now, if you haven't meditated before, you don't want to

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or you think it's lame, just listen because you can apply what you learn to your practice of stillness. Maybe you just sit outside on your porch and sit still, that counts, it doesn't have to be called meditation. I want you to learn about the science and what's happening in the brain when you get still, when you get meditative, when you get mindful; it's very healing. There are 1000, at least 1000, studies showing the benefits of such mindful meditative stillness, and we're going to talk about those in this interview. So hang on, buckle up, this is a good one, lots of juice, and I hope you love it as much as I do. Let's dive in.

Welcome to Vibrant Happy Women today I'm talking with Ariel Garten and she's probably one of the most interesting people you'll ever meet. She's a psychotherapist, neuroscientist, mom, former fashion designer, and the female founder and visionary of an amazing and highly successful tech startup called Muse. Muse tracks your brain during meditation to give you real-time feedback on your meditation, guiding you into the zone and solving the problem most of us have when starting a meditation practice. Muse lets you know when you're doing it right. When Ariel is not reading brains (literally) or investing in and advising other startups and women in business, you can find her on stages across the world from TED to MIT to XS... (oh, I can't say that) SXSW; whoo. She inspires...

A: South by Southwest.

J: Okay. She inspires people to understand that they can accomplish anything they want by learning what goes on in their own minds. I am so grateful that you're here, and Ariel, you are the host or a co-host of a podcast as well, right?

A: Indeed, called Untangle.

J: Now, what do you talk about on Untangle?

A: We help you untangle your mind.

J: Ooh.

A: So I have neuroscientists, psychotherapists, people skilled in the mental arts and who understand how the brain works and how we can all combat the crazy in all of our minds.

J: Excellent. The crazy being what exactly?

A: The crazy being in some ways the good part of life, you know, the emotional depth, the feeling the thoughts, but the crazy also being the stuff that holds us back, the negative feelings, the negative self-talk, the inner critic, the self-doubt, the stuff that keeps us from being the happy, healthy people we actually are.

J: Hmm, beautiful. So before we start talking about Muse (which I think is fascinating), tell us your favorite quote to start us out.



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A: (Laughs) Okay, this is a pretty heavy quote to start with. So I think my favorite quote is... at the moment, because it really resonates with me for where I'm at in my life, and that's, "Your ability to sit with discomfort probably predicts your success in life." And I think that's an incredible quote for anybody, but particularly for a woman or a mother, you know, you go through so much in motherhood, it's like, "Oh my god, I haven't slept for days on end, how do I have to do these 50 other things, and I have to show up for work and I have to show up for everybody and I feel like I'm so at the end of my abilities." But somehow, you deal with it and you get through it. "Your ability to sit with discomfort probably predicts your success in life." And we have 2 options when we're faced with discomfort. We can say, "Oh my god, this is scary, I need to back away, I need to like go to someplace safe now and shut down," or just, "This is life, this is what it feels like, this is what it is, I can exist with it and I can move through it and move to the other side." So your ability to sit with discomfort probably predicts your success in life.

J: Wow, I think that's so true. As I've been raising my own kids, I don't know when the schools are going to catch up, I mean, but seriously, I think success is 90% your ability to read the room and to engage in constructive conversation and to kind of manipulate a situation the way you need it to go. And so I hate that word 'manipulate', but all of that requires exactly what you're talking about, being able to sit with discomfort, having emotional intelligence and, you know, social skills really.

A: Yeah, and having your intrapersonal social skills. So we have the social skills of being able to read someone else, understand what they need, give them what they need at that time and like move them to the next place. "My kid is crying. What do they need? How do I deal with it?" Then we also have our intra-social skills, our ability to actually read ourselves, feel what's going on and say, "Hey, what do I need right now and how can I move myself from where I am to where I need to be?" And that can be the recognition that you have a whole lot of inner critic at the moment and recognizing, "Hey, that's just my inner critic. I know I have skills and tools that I can use to move her/him aside." It can be feeling, you know, the depth of an emotional experience and being able to comfortably be with it and move through it, you know, like loss, grieving, frustration. It can be knowing that you have tools to bring joy into your body and be like, "I'm feeling kind of flat right now, why don't I focus on my heart? Why don't I feel, you know, the sensation of love? Why don't I imagine my kid and how much I love him right now?" There are all of these things that we can, once we begin to understand our internal states, begin to move with and work with to keep ourselves saying happy and buoyed every day.

J: Mm. And what's your favorite tool for, you know, dealing with interpersonal feelings, moving through the inner critic, moving through an emotional experience of grief for example?

A: So meditation is, for me, the easiest go-to in the world (Laughs) for all of these things.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: So meditation teaches you how to change the relationship to the thoughts in your mind and the feelings in your body.

J: Mm-hmm. And how did you get introduced to meditation?

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A: So my own background, I'm one of those people who I've always wanted to do everything and I've always been like, "And I totally can." I was a fashion designer and had a little real estate business and a psychotherapy practice, and like we can do all these things at once. And in the course of my therapy practice, meditation was a skill that I would be teaching to my patients, but I wasn't doing myself..

J: Mm-hmm.

A: ... because I was somebody whose brain was bouncing all over the place, was, you know, overwhelmed with all the possibility, opportunity and excitement, and I just could not sit still. And I started working with this early EEG system, a brain computer interface, I also did a degree in neuroscience and started working in a research lab with this amazing early tool where we could actually get real-time feedback on our brain. So I was creating concerts where people could make music by attaching the lecture to the back of their head and shifting their brain state.

J: Mm.

A: And I stood back and said, "Oh my god! Like, this is incredible! We're like literally able to hear the process of our own mind." And so I got together, I formed a start-up with my co-founders, Chris and Trevor, 2 colleagues of mine at the time, and we started to create this incredible device that could give you real-time feedback on your brain and recognized that the most important thing that we could apply it to is helping people meditate to solve that problem of, "What's going on in my mind during meditation? How do I know what I'm supposed to do? How do I know if I'm doing it right?" And so we recognized that we could give people real-time feedback during their meditation to solve that.

J: Beautiful; and I want to go really deep there. Really quick though first, why should people meditate? I would say half of my listeners are believers half are like, "Nah," so why should people meditate in the first place?

A: There are over 1000 published scientific studies of the benefits of meditation to help you become more focused, increase your productivity at work, have better interpersonal relationships, do better on your GRE scores, improve your healthcare outcomes, reduce the signs of cellular aging, improve your brain function, and like on and on and on. The evidence around meditation is pretty dramatic at this point. So, you know, I think for a lot of people, if you bought in, it's not like, "Should I be meditating?" it's, "How do I build it into my daily life?" If you haven't bought in, you know, you can look at any number of studies that demonstrate meditation's ability to hone your mind and hone your body and hone your relationships in really meaningful ways.

J: Okay. Now, I'm going to do the devil's advocate thing because I've heard this before. I love meditation, but let's say someone says, "Okay, if meditation is so important, why didn't nature create in us the desire to actually do it?" you know?

[Laughter]

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J: What would you say to that?

A: I would say that nature probably did create the desire to do that. We all have the desire to go inside, to go inward, we all have the desire to seek silence and seek stillness, you know, we find those intrinsically very rewarding states.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: And in our incredibly overstimulated world, it can be harder and harder to get there so it requires more structure or scaffolding to help to achieve that. But, you know, just sit in nature for 10 minutes and feel how amazing you feel when you are in that state, in that beautiful, you know, silent, brilliant state, I think we all understand the inherent reward of it.

J: Thank you, I appreciate that. I was recently at one of my kids' piano recitals and let's just say that I had a hard time sitting still, and I realized in that moment just how negatively perhaps technology, my phone has affected me over time because that used to be really easy for me just a decade ago (Laughs). So I've upped my meditation game and putting away my phone game so I can get back into that blissful state. But can you tell us more about what's happening in the brain when we do achieve that stillness and we're able to be calm and sit still? What's happening there?

A: Sure. This is one of my favorite topics of, the brain on meditation. So there's a bunch of incredible research that demonstrates that meditation actually can change the physical structure of your brain. So I should sort of jump back and talk about exactly what a meditation practice is because a lot of people have misconceptions. So people think, "Oh, meditation's just when my mind goes blank," but your mind never goes blank, and nor should it, we're, you know, alive human beings. There's lots of different forms of meditation and the most basic form that most people learn is a focused attention practice. And in a focused attention practice, you're focusing on a single point, it's usually your breath because your breath is always there, so you focus your attention on your breath, your mind begins to wander eventually, because all our minds do; just like you're sitting at that rehearsal and your mind begins to wander at that recital. Your job then is to notice that your mind has wandered and then choose to take your mind off of that wandering thought and put it back on to the neutral object, your breath. So focus on your breath for as long as you can, eventually distraction takes over, notice the distraction, come on back to your breath.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: And this very simple loop that's called the attentional loop, this is really the core of the foundation of a focused attention meditation practice. Now, when you do this, what's going on in the brain is a really fascinating process. So your prefrontal cortex, which is basically behind your forehead, it's your attentional control center for your brain, it's also responsible for our higher-order processing, our ability to think, plan, see, have metacognition. Your brain, your prefrontal cortex is now noticing that your mind is wandering (so you're engaging your prefrontal cortex), you're honing this process called metacognition (the ability to see your own thinking), and then you're making the choice to take your mind off of your

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wandering thought and put it back on your breath, and you're strengthening your attention. So, again, you're strengthening your prefrontal cortex, your attentional control center.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: You might have fears, anxieties, stuff that comes up, which is the amygdala speaking; that's your amygdala is searching, always scanning for danger. And when this arousal happens in your mind and in your body, your prefrontal cortex again kicks in and says, "Hey, I can notice that our body's becoming aroused, but actually there's nothing wrong. I can notice that this thought might have caused us, you know, arousal and sensation, but actually everything's okay. Hey, amygdala, calm down, it's all good. Prefrontal cortex has got this inter control, we don't need to follow that scary thought, we can just come back to something neutral and calm again."

J: Mm-hmm.

A: So it's kind of like you've got this dance between your prefrontal cortex and your amygdala in some forms of meditation. And it's kind of like the prefrontal cortex is the parent, the one who can see that everything's cool and just tell you that, "It's all good, we can stay calm now, we can stay focused, we can stay engaged," and your amygdala, which is a little child that just wants to look for danger and freaked out when it thinks that something might be going wrong, when typically nothing ever is.

J: Mm, that's fascinating. So you said meditation actually changes the structure of your brain, where is that changing, the amygdala? The prefrontal cortex?

A: So it can be both. So in one study of long-term meditators by Dr. Sara Lazar, she looked at people who in their 50s who had meditated and they had a very thick prefrontal cortex. So as you age, your prefrontal cortex actually thins, and if you're able to maintain a long-term meditation practice, you may be able to maintain the thickness of your prefrontal cortex as you age. And in her study, she had a 50-year-old who had the prefrontal cortex thickness of about a 25-year-old.

J: Mm.

A: And you can also see decrease both in the activity of the amygdala, and in a long-term meditator, you can even see decrease in this size potentially of the amygdala; so you see changes in those structures. When you look at the brain in an MRI of a meditator, you can also potentially see an increase in the volume of the left hippocampus; so that's the learning and memory area of the brain. You often see increase in the corpus callosum; so that's the connections between the left and the right hemispheres, so you're actually (according to the work of Dr. Dan Siegel) seeing more integration in the brain, the parts of your brain are communicating more often. You can see an increase in the density of your gray matter. It's like this is super cool. So in another study by Dr. Sara Lazar, they taught a group of average individuals meditation for 8 weeks. And after just 8 weeks of meditation, they saw an increase in the density of their gray matter just in an average brain. And so the amount of gray matter you have refers to the number of connections that you have, the volume of your cellular material. And so for example,

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Einstein had more gray matter than the average individual. So if you think about what an 8-week meditation course might be doing in your brain, it's pretty cool.

J: Mm, that's amazing. Well, let's shift this. We know meditation is amazing, let's say someone has an unruly teenager who's thick in the world of their cell phone, or maybe a school-age child who has attention and focus issues, both kind of similar but different ages, how would meditation be helpful for them or how might a parent help their kids apply what we're learning here to increase focus?

A: Sure. So meditation can offer amazing benefits to help you improve your attention. That's one of the things that you're doing, you're focusing on something, you're taught to notice when your mind is wandering, and then you're taught to bring yourself back to the object that's important to you. Whether it's the conversation that you're having with somebody, making eye contact, your homework, whatever it is, it's literally a strengthening attention. So if you have a teenager who's often distracted by their cell phone, what a meditation practice can help them do is, one, you know, you've got the cognitive distraction, two, you have the emotional distraction. So the distraction from a cell phone, yes, there's a cognitive element to it, but it's really like physiological often, it's in your body. You're like, "There's that thing vibrating, and god, do I want it, you know, I want the thing. It's binging and I just feel like I need to go there and do it..."

J: Mm-hmm.

A: "... to answer it." So one of the things that for me I noticed when I began a serious meditation practice is my desire to check my cell phone decreased dramatically because I would have this...

J: Really?

A: ... urge... yeah, yeah, yeah. I'd have this urge that would begin to rise up in my body and I would recognize that urge is a distraction. I would recognize that I didn't need to follow it in the same way that I didn't need to follow my distracting thoughts.

J: Mm.

A: So the urge would come up, I'd be like, "Oh, okay, that's an urge," if I didn't answer it, it would fall back down. And then it might come up again and again and again, but over time, it would diminish. And in meditation, what we learn is to experience what happens in our body as sensation. So rather than being like... so first of all, we make these things conscious. So most of the time, you know, we're pulled by our phone and we don't even realize it, we don't realize our body is having an urge that we're just following.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: As soon as you bring attention to this, you can be like, "Oh, the reason I want to answer my phone now is because my body is feeling that's really strong." So first of all, that's incredibly empowering to even just know what's going on inside of you, two, you can then sit there and say, "Okay, I feel like I'm having

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sensation in my body and I can now just observe the sensation."

J: Mm-hmm.

A: Rather than following it to what used to be its natural conclusion, which was answer the phone, you can just be like, "I'm watching the urges in my body, I'm watching the sensation, I'm watching the tightening in my chest, and this is a thing that's happening. It doesn't mean I need to follow it." So this is where meditation becomes really powerful for things like emotional eating or binging or cravings, you can be like, "Oh, the craving used to just being, 'I have a sensation, therefore I have to do what my body tells me to.'"

J: Mm-hmm.

A: But instead, you can say, "My body is having an experience, but it doesn't mean I need to follow it to what used to be its logical end."

J: Mm-hmm.

A: And that's where you start to break habits and you break cycles and you actually are able to be empowered and have control over your body and how it drives you in the world.

J: Mm, that's fantastic, I love that.

A: Yeah, it's a dramatically changed relationship.

J: Well, tell us how we can begin a meditation practice if we've tried in the past but we don't exactly stick with it, and how Muse (the thing you develop; that's so cool!) could help us with that.

A: Sure. So the most important thing about a meditation practice is to just start. Like, most people, a lot of people don't know what meditation really is or how you're supposed to do it, and it's really not hard. And a basic focused attention, you sit there, you focus your attention on your breath, your mind wanders, you notice and you return. And when I tell most people that, they're like, "Oh, I didn't actually know what I was supposed to even be doing." So if you want to start a meditation practice, that's literally all you need to do. You sit down, you focus, your mind wanders, you notice, you return, and you do that for a period of time; 1, 3, 5, 9 minutes. Most people think, "Oh my god, I need to meditate for 20 minutes, and if I did anything less, I failed," not true. You can literally set your watch for 5 minutes and just do it for 5 minutes. And as you do it, the key is to be non-judgmental. Because you might start and you're like, "Oh my god, my mind wanders all the time," of course it does, all of our minds wander, it's awesome, we're human, we're alive, this is a really good thing. The question is just how do you start to notice that relationship and what do you allow yourself to do to shift those relationships? So you do it in a non-judgmental way. How Muse can really help is by making all this process straightforward and showing you what your brain is doing. So it actually... the metaphor use is, "Your mind is like the weather," so when you're thinking, distracted, you actually hear it as stormy, we're actually interpreting your

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brain activity into sound. So you hear your brain as stormy and that becomes your guide in your cue to bring yourself back to quiet focused attention on your breath. And then when you get into that focused attention, you actually hear the storm quiet. When your mind begins to wander again, the storm picks up, that's your cue to be like, "Oh, okay, bring myself back to my breath," and it quiets.

J: Mm.

A: So you're getting this amazing real-time feedback of your actual brain while you meditate during your meditation experience. And then after the fact, you can also see your graphs, you see scores and data, there's points and rewards and motivation and stuff that actually keeps you meditating day in and day out and really attaches you to this practice. There are reminder notices that pop up in your phone and say like, "Hey, didn't you think that you wanted to be meditating now?" things that really create the structure to build your meditation practice in your life.

J: Mm, that's beautiful. So I know that we all have different brain waves beta, alpha, theta, gamma, delta, I think like it goes in that order...

A: Mm-hmm.

J: ... something like that. (Laughs)

A: You got it.

J: Wow, I'm so impressed with myself. So does Muse let people know when they've shifted out of beta like into alpha or theta or you just know it by hearing it?

A: So it's an EEG so it's tracking your brain waves, so it's tracking your whole brain activity throughout all of these waves, and we let you know when you've come from the brain activity of distraction to the brain activity of focused attention.

J: Mm.

A: And so the old-school way is to say like, "Oh, you're going from theta to alpha," it actually turns out it's a lot more complex than that. Everybody's brain is different, everybody's brain is different every day. So we don't use those simple measures now that we've looked at literally hundreds of thousands of brains, from experts sitting on top of a mountain meditating to complete novices, we have a much more nuanced understanding of what focused attention versus mind-wandering looks like.

J: Mm, okay, okay. So let's say someone had Muse, tell us how it works. Does it plug into your phone? What does it look like when you put it on? Let's say no one... somebody doesn't know anything about it.

A: Cool. So it's a slim little wearable, so it's kind of like a Fitbit that sits on your wrist, but this one just slips on like a pair of glasses onto your forehead. It's slim, it looks cool, you slip it on, it connects wirelessly

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to your smartphone or your tablet and it sends your brain data to your phone. And then from there, you plug in a pair of headphones and it lets you hear the sound of your mind. So the feedback loop just comes through your phone, it's super simple. You can have multiple accounts on your phone. So lots of people use... you know, a Muse will come into the family, mom will bring it home, dad will use it, the teenage kids start using it and competing with one another, and then everybody's meditating with the 1 device with their own accounts and their own phones.

J: Mm.

A: We also have lots of content that goes along with it. So there's subscription with the library of content for meditation for moms, meditation for travel, and meditation for helping you sleep. So there's a ton of content to help you in whatever comes up in your life.

J: Mm, does it record and track your progress over time?

A: Yes.

J: Ooh, that's good.

A: Yes, the Muse track your meditation, so every time you meditate, it tracks it so you're actually able to see your own progress, see how your brain has improved with meditation, you know, day in and day out; it's really cool.

J: Mm, that's awesome. And I think that it's cool that it gives you a way to know you're doing it right (Laughs), you know? It's... a lot of people really worry about doing things wrong or that they're not good enough to be able to learn that new skill, but this makes it easy, I think.

A: Yeah. And we have just sort of put aside the whole conversation of doing it wrong.

J: Right.

A: I think, you know, particularly as women, that is the worst thing that plagues us in our life...

J: Mm-hmm.

A: ... that little voice in my head telling me that I'm not doing it well enough, I'm not doing it right. Oh no, you know, am I allowed to do this? Am I allowed to be? Ah!

J: Right.

A: And so if I could wave a magic wand, it would... all of a sudden, everybody in the world know that that voice in their head is wrong (Laughs).

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J: Mm-hmm.

A: It's not you that's wrong, it's the voice that's wrong.

J: Exactly.

A: You don't need to listen to the... yeah. Like, let's repeat that, "It's not you that's wrong..."

J: Yeah. (Laughs)

A: "... it's just the voice that's wrong."

J: Yeah.

A: You don't need to listen to it, you don't need to buy into it."

J: Exactly.

A: You know, for me, that's why a meditation practice is so powerful because it's something that lets, you know, that you can take your brain off of that voice and shift your relationship to it.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: Like, most of us just kind of go through the world with thoughts in our head and assuming that that's the way it's supposed to be, like, "The thoughts are just what's happening, and that's just what my brain is doing now and that's just what I'm living." And with meditation, what you learn is, "You can have a thought, you can take your mind off that thought and put it somewhere else. You don't need to be at the mercy of the thoughts in your head, you can change that relationship."

J: Mm-hmm.

A: And when you change that relationship, it's extraordinarily powerful because you no longer need to listen to those voices. And you eventually come to the realization that those voices are not true, that they are not you, and you can have control over the narrative about yourself and your own life.

J: Cool, that sounds like what we all need. Then we won't need therapists, they'll be put out of business (Laughs). I know you're...

A: Please put me out of business. (Laughs)

J: Yes, exactly, exactly. Okay, let's take a quick break for a sponsor and then we'll come back and talk about some of your favorite things.

Alright, so welcome back, Ariel, I appreciate everything you do. And if someone wanted to get their

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own Muse, where would they go?

A: You can go to choosemuse.com.

J: Beautiful, thank you. I'm going to do it. I remember when you guys were first doing your... I think you did a GoFundMe, is that right?

A: We did an Indiegogo long ago.

J: Indiegogo. I was like so excited and then you had so much interest that you had a backorder and then I forgot about it. So I'm totally going to do this, and then maybe I'll report about it on a later Happy Bit. But, okay, so choosemuse.com, perfect.

A: Awesome.

J: Yeah, let's shift and talk about time management a little bit. You know, you're busy, you have a tech startup, you are a psychotherapist, you're a mom; is that right, you are a mom?

A: I am a mom.

J: Okay.

A: I'm actually not a psychotherapist anymore, I'm a former psychotherapist, and definitely a card-carrying mother.

J: (Laughs) Card-carrying.

A: ... of a 3-year-old.

J: (Laughs) That's awesome. Well, tell us how you prioritize your time and balance all of the things you're doing, just inspire us because I know it's going to be good.

A: It is good because I feel really great about my life, it's... I feel so incredibly blessed. Part of balance is something that we've all heard a million times, and that's saying no. So, for me, that was actually taking a real maternity leave and saying, "No, I actually don't even want to be the CEO of my company anymore now that I'm a mother."

J: Mm-hmm.

A: This is kind of controversial. So when I was getting pregnant, I had been the CEO of my company for 7 years, I was 3 months pregnant, and I actually stepped down as CEO because I didn't want to be Marissa Mayer with a baby crying in my office and like that was going to be the pinnacle of my life that I could do it all.

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J: Mm-hmm.

A: To me, the pinnacle of my life is to be able to say I can actually take the time for myself and not feel bad about it. I don't need to be the supermom CEO, that actually makes me feel not good rather than, you know, empowered and awesome. I don't want to be stretched in every direction, I want to really make choices to be with the things that I'm with, even if it means making less money, even if it means having less glory, that's totally fine with me.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: So, yeah, that's... that was one of my superpower secrets.

J: Well done, well done.

A: Yeah.

J: So you're not the CEO still, you just still... you're connected with the company though?

A: Yeah. So I'm now actually an employee of my own company; as funny as that feels.

J: (Laughs).

A: I report in to the CEO, and like I thought that would be terrible, you know, my ego was screaming being like, "How could that possibly be?" And now that I'm here and working within this team for someone else, it's actually great, I love it. I'm so proud of what everybody is building, you know...

J: Yeah.

A: ... with me around me, above me, everywhere, it's awesome.

J: Aww, that's beautiful. Well, what does your morning routine look like?

A: So my morning routine, when I wake up, the first thing that I do is I lie in bed and I do a little morning practice that I have that includes a bit of gratitude, asking my higher-self for who or what I want to be, imagining good things in the world for everybody, imagining the outcome at the end of my day being wonderful, so I sort of fast-forward to the end of the day, and then I roll over, hold hands with my husband and snuggle a little, whether or not he's awake.

J: (Laughs) That's great.

A: So, to me, that's the right way to start the day.

J: You know, I have to say I've asked this question I guess 183 times because your episode 182, no one

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has had their spouse or partner as of their morning routines, so I'm impressed.

[Laughter]

J: You should feel very special, you know?

A: It's very funny. He or she is right there, I mean, if you're not starting the day with that moment of connection, then you've missed... if you're not getting your free hug (Laughs), you totally miss out.

J: Yeah, totally, totally.

A: Take it.

J: (Laughs)

A: Or maybe they're just afraid to have, you know, talked about that moment in bed on air.

J: Mm-hmm, totally.

A: So hopefully everybody is getting there... is getting their cuddles in the morning still.

J: Yeah.

A: They just haven't told you.

J: Mm-hmm, that's awesome. What's your favorite book, Ariel?

A: Oh, so in the course of having a podcast, I get to read a lot of incredible books from the authors who come on my podcast, and probably the most exciting one I read lately, it was called The Finders Course, 'The Finders' by Dr. Jeffrey Martin. And 'The Finders' was such an amazing book because at the same time, I took a course offered by Dr. Martin called The Finders Course where you literally find fundamental well-being.

J: Hmm.

A: And so you do a set of exercises and practices every day that get you to a place where you fundamentally feel okay with the world and okay with life, you literally end up in fundamental well-being, and it is extraordinary. They've taken thousands of people through this course, and at the end of it, 70% of them say that they have just persistent ongoing fundamental well-being.

J: Hmm. So what kinds of things are they doing in the course; just a couple examples?

A: So some of them are classic meditation practices like body scans, some of them are practices meant to increase your awareness. So you might sit in the room, and rather than observing the room, you ob-

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serve your awareness observing.

J: Mm.

A: So you'll say 'Awareness is'. Right now, I'm looking at a green wall, so for me, awareness is green...

J: Mm-hmm.

A: ... awareness is spacious...

J: Mm.

A: ... awareness is never-ending. So you actually experience your own act of experiencing; it's super cool.

J: Meta. (Laughs)

A: Yeah, super meta.

J: (Laughs)

A: And you expand literally your consciousness, your ability to understand being conscious.

J: Mm.

A: There's another activity called unprovoked happiness where you look in very small detail at something, and it could be like the lines on your hand, and as you start to look at these intense details, you feel the sensations that become provoked with them, and they often are sensations extreme joy just in the pure act of looking or the pure act of hearing. So you really come down to these very fine sense experiences. And what you're doing is you're getting yourself to be so dialed into the current moment that nothing else matters, and that voice in your head quiets and the chatter goes away and it is just the pure experience and sensation of being.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: It's super cool.

J: Mm, I love that. When you mentioned that that state of just, mm, calm, it reminds me of the word 'bliss'. Can you tell us just a teeny bit about what's happening in the brain when people describe that bliss that often comes when we calm ourselves enough in meditation?

A: Oh, I don't know the answer to that.

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J: Oh, that's okay, cool.

A: I don't know the neuroscience of bliss.

J: (Laughs)

A: That's interesting.

J: Well, when people describe that euphoric feeling of meditation, I assume they're getting like serotonin and dopamine, but that's fine, we don't have to go there. But, I mean, a cascade of good hormones like you get when you have sex, right, after an orgasm, I just wondered what was happening with meditation when some people hit that state of, "Ah, this feels so good," you know? So... but...

A: Yeah, I don't know the research, so I... I always hate speaking when I don't know the actual research because then you can start conjuring, and once you start conjuring, you're now like putting out bad science. (Laughs)

J: Oh yeah, no problem.

A: You're like, "Well, I heard this neuroscientist talking who didn't really say that at the moment she knew exactly what she was speaking about, but this is what she said, therefore it must be true."

[Laughter]

J: Yes, oh, I appreciate that.

A: Yeah.

J: The areas you do know, it's like flawless, so I just assume you know everything, Ariel. (Laughs)

A: Nope, not yet.

J: That's great, that's great. Okay, well, my favorite question, Ariel, what does it mean for you to be a vibrant and happy woman, if you had to...

A: Oh my god, it means...

J: ... have a formula? Yeah.

A: ... it means everything. So what's a formula to being a vibrant and happy woman?

J: Yeah, what helps you be a vibrant and happy woman?

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A: I am just so blessed, I just love living. I don't feel like this at all moments in time, but there are moments when it just overwhelms me how lucky I am to be alive. And whether I'm enjoying my life or not enjoying my life, it actually doesn't matter in either case, I am so unbelievably blessed to be alive.

J: Ooh.

A: And so the things that allow me to feel joy are just stopping and just tapping into that moment of being. And even when I'm like in a really difficult situation and feeling kind of crappy, it is still... I will stop and I will just feel gratitude for being alive, for the ability to feel all of these feelings, even if they're not positive.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: You know, for the ability to feel the sadness, for the ability to go through existence knowing that it's highs, it's lows, it's intricacies are part of our act of living.

J: Mm-hmm. Do you feel like that attitude slowly was created through meditation and just being so aware over and over and over again?

A: So I think I was born with this attitude or, you know, nature or nurture, I don't know. My mother has extraordinary joy for life as well and so that was definitely inculcated in me as a child. I think meditation has given me the tools to really be in the moment. So meditation builds the skill of mindfulness, and mindfulness is present moment awareness of your thoughts, feelings, experiences. And once you do that, it's like the aperture of the lens of what you can experience widens.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: You're not afraid of experiencing things, your eyes are wider, you're present, you're in the moment, and when you do that, like man, just being alive feels juicy...

J: Mm-hmm.

A: ... it feels so good to just be alive.

J: Ooh, I love that.

A: And so... yeah. I wish the blessing of living upon everyone.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: You know, I know we... everyone listening to this by definition is alive, but I wish the blessing of you experiencing the joy of living. And you can just like stop what you're doing right now and just happen to that fact that, "I am alive," there's blood coursing through your body, there's air in your lungs, there's

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people that love you, even if it doesn't feel like it, there are people that love you and that you love so deeply.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: Like, we all get to be on the joy of this journey of living together.

J: Fantastic. Well, let's have a challenge to our listeners and then we'll say goodbye.

A: So my challenges are, number 1 (this one's going to be obvious), try meditation.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: So today, set your... the timer on your phone for even 3 minutes or 5 minutes, whatever you feel like it, focus your attention on your breath, let your mind wander, notice, and bring it back; that is your challenge. Challenge number 2 is notice your feelings through the day and notice something that you feel is uncomfortable or difficult and allow yourself to work through it or move through it. So maybe you're like trying to write, you know, a document, and that little voice comes in your head like, "Oh no, it's not going to be good enough," and you start to feel the discomfort of it, sit with that feeling and say, "You are just a feeling, I'm experiencing you. I'm going to let you rise, I'm going to let you fall, and I'm going to get back to the thing that I'm doing."

J: Mm. So we can't go get a brownie or... (Laughs) kidding. (Laughs)

A: So that's what we all do, we all pull ourselves out of the experience because we don't want to feel.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: When you discover that feelings are not actually dangerous in and of themselves...

J: Mm-hmm.

A: ... it's like a whole other ballgame. You can like just exist with the feeling and still have the feeling, it still exists, it is a feeling, its value, but it doesn't need to be the thing that pushes you out of your seat and back to the brownies.

J: Right.

A: You can sit with it and get to the other side.

J: I think a lot of people think if they pay attention to that feeling it will increase, so they want to run. Is it your experience that the feeling, they get through it faster maybe if they just notice it and ride the wave or, you know, how you...

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A: You ride the wave.

J: ... do you feel sure that you're going to be okay, you know?

A: Okay. So if you want to feel sure that you're going to be okay, take a cold shower; do the cold shower challenge. That's something that we can all agree is completely and totally safe, you're taking a cold shower.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: But all the stuff involved in taking that cold shower, there's the anticipation of the cold shower, like you're going to turn it on, "Oh no, it's going to be cold, it's going to feel out this way," you turn it on, and once you actually do it, you can allow it to be like just a 1 second cold shower, you turn it on, you turn it off.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: Once you do it, it's really no big deal. It's a bunch of sensations, you know, it sparks your body, the shower is off, you get out you feel awesome, maybe you feel cold for another minute or 2, maybe you feel really alive, and it's great, and you forget about it. What you don't forget is the empowerment that you get for having gotten through something difficult.

J: Mm-hmm, that's perfect. And now we can like in all this negative feelings to a cold shower, you gave us something tangible, I love that.

A: Totally, it comes, it goes, and you're better off at the end.

J: Mm-hmm.

A: So challenge number 3, you know, we had the meditation, just a thing, you had the dealing with difficult emotions, now let's throw some positive in there. So the last challenge is to feel loving connection in your heart. You can do that by imagining the people or things that you love, feel them deeply and start to focus on the sensations in your heart as you do, just feel the warmth, the beauty, the glow in your heart as you feel that loving connection.

J: Mm.

A: And then know that you can call this up anytime you need it. So anytime you're feeling disconnected, unhappy, unsure of yourself, you can stop and you can take the time to just call back up that feeling, that sense of loving connection in your heart, you can course it at your body, you can make it really big, you can make it bright, you can make it bold, you let the sensations fill every being of... every cell of your body, that beautiful feeling of love and connection from the ones that you love, and know that you have that with you all the time and you can go back to anytime you need it; that is yours and that is there.

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J: Wow, that's really great advice. I've never heard that before, but it makes perfect sense. We often think we want to be loved, but we don't realize it's all right there in us already. So then we don't need the brownie.

[Laughter]

A: Totally.

J: (Laughs) Oh, thank you so much, Ariel, I have enjoyed every minute of this. And where can people go to learn more about you and your podcast?

A: If you want to follow me for more inspirational tips, tricks, and fun, you can do so at [ariel's_musings](#), [a r i e l s _ m u s i n g s](#) on Instagram. On Facebook, I'm Ariel.Garten, and podcast is called Untangle.

J: Untangle, beautiful. Thank you so much for the work you're doing and making our planet a better place, changing lives, I appreciate you being on the show.

A: We're trying, I think succeeding, but we'll only find out.

J: (Laughs) Right.

A: Thank you.

J: Thank you.

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