

# SAM HARRIS

## THE BLOG

### Taming the Mind

A Conversation with Dan Harris

[Book News](#) | [Consciousness](#) | [Meditation](#) | [Publishing](#) | [Self](#) | September 17, 2014



(Photo via [h.koppdelaney](#))

**Dan Harris** is a co-anchor of *Nightline* and the weekend edition of *Good Morning America* on ABC News. He has reported from all over the world, covering wars in Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, and Iraq, and producing investigative reports in Haiti, Cambodia, and the Congo. He has also spent many years covering religion in America, despite the fact that he is agnostic.

Dan's new book, [\*10 Percent Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works—A True Story\*](#), hit #1 on the New York Times best-seller list.

Dan was kind enough to discuss the practice of meditation with me for this page.

\* \* \*

**Sam:** One thing I love about your book—admittedly, somewhat selfishly—is that it's exactly the book I would want people to read before *Waking Up* comes out in the fall. You approach the topic of meditation with serious skepticism—which, as you know, is an attitude that my readers share to an unusual degree. Perhaps you can say something about this. How did you view the practice in the beginning?

**Dan:** I was incredibly skeptical about meditation. I thought it was for people who lived in yurts or collected crystals or had too many Cat Stevens records. And I was bred for this kind of doubt. My parents are both physicians and scientists at academic hospitals in the Boston area, and my wife is also a scientist and a physician. I was raised in a very secular environment. I had a Bar Mitzvah, but that was mostly because I wanted the money and the social acceptance. My parents were also recovering hippies who made me go to a yoga class when I was a little kid. The teacher didn't like the jeans I was wearing, so she forced me to take them off and do Sun Salutations in my tights-whities in front of all the other kids.

**Sam:** Rarely has the connection between yoga and child abuse been illustrated so clearly.

**Dan:** No doubt. And the result was that not only was I skeptical about anything bordering on the metaphysical, which I assumed meditation involved, but I had a long-standing aversion to anything touchy-feely or New Agey. Meditation seemed like the quintessence of everything I was most wary of.

**Sam:** For those who are unfamiliar with meditation—in particular, the practice of mindfulness that we are discussing—I have described it in a [previous article](#) on my blog and also posted some [guided meditations](#) that many people have found helpful. But, in essence, we are talking about the practice of paying very careful, non-judgmental attention to the contents of consciousness in the present moment. Usually one begins by focusing on the sensation of breathing, but eventually the practice opens to include the full field of experience—other sensations in the body, sounds, emotions, even thoughts themselves. The trick, however, is not to spend one's time lost in thought.

How did you get started practicing mindfulness, and what was your first experience like?

**Dan:** Well, the thing that got me to open my mind just a crack was hearing about the science. I think that's true for a lot of people who have given it a try of late. You hear about the science that says it can do some pretty extraordinary things to your brain and your body: lowering your blood pressure, boosting your immune system, thickening the gray matter in parts of the brain that have to do with self-awareness and compassion, and decreasing the gray matter in the areas associated with stress. That's all really compelling. I work out because I want to take care of my health, and meditation seemed like it could

fall in the same bucket. But my first taste of it was miserable. I set an alarm for five minutes and had a full-on collision with the zoo that is my mind. It was really hard.

**Sam:** People who haven't tried to meditate have very little sense that their minds are noisy at all. And when you tell them that they're thinking every second of the day, it generally doesn't mean anything to them. It certainly doesn't strike most of them as pathological. When these people try to meditate, they have one of two reactions: Some are so restless and besieged by doubts that they can hardly attempt the exercise. "What am I doing sitting here with my eyes closed? What is the point of paying attention to the breath?" And, strangely, their resistance isn't remotely interesting to them. They come away, after only a few minutes, thinking that the act of paying close attention to their experience is pointless.

But then there are the people who have an epiphany similar to yours, where the unpleasant realization that their minds are lurching all over the place becomes a goad to further inquiry. Their inability to pay sustained attention—to *anything*—becomes interesting to them. And they recognize it as pathological, despite the fact that almost everyone is in the same condition.

**Dan:** I love your description. Interestingly enough, the door had opened for me before I tried meditation, in the most unexpected way. One of my assignments at ABC News had been to cover basic spirituality. So I had picked up a book by a self-help guru by the name of Eckhart Tolle, who has sold millions of books and is beloved by Oprah. I had read his book not because I thought it would be personally useful to me but because I was considering doing a story on him. Nestled within all his grandiloquent writing and pseudoscientific claims—and just overall weirdness—was a diagnosis of the human condition, which you just articulated quite well, that kind of blew my mind.

It's this thunderous truism: We all know on some level that we are thinking all the time, that we have this voice in our heads, and the nature of this voice is mostly negative. It's also repetitive and ceaselessly self-referential. We walk around in this fog of memory about the past and anticipation of a future that may or may not arrive in the form in which we imagine it. This observation seemed to describe me. I realized that the things I'd done in my life that I was most ashamed of had been as a result of having thoughts, impulses, urges, and emotions that I didn't have the wherewithal to resist. So when I sat down and had that first confrontation with the voice in my head, I knew from having read Eckhart Tolle that it wasn't going to be pretty, and I was motivated to do something about it.

**Sam:** Why didn't you just become a student of Tolle's?

**Dan:** I think that Eckhart Tolle is correct, but not useful. I'm stealing that distinction from the meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg. I think his diagnosis is correct, but he doesn't give you anything to do about it, at least that I could ascertain. He has sold millions of books about "spiritual awakening." If he were truly useful, we should have a reasonable population of awakened people walking around, and I'm just not seeing them. I found Tolle to be both extraordinarily interesting and extraordinarily frustrating. The lack of any concrete advice was really the source of my frustration, alongside the aforementioned weirdness. I think Tolle deserves credit for articulating a truth of the human condition extremely well. But I also think that it's a legitimate criticism to say he doesn't give you anything to do about it.

**Sam:** It's interesting that you mention Tolle, because when someone asks me for the two-second summary of my new book, I'm often tempted to say, "It's Eckhart Tolle for smart people"—that is, people who suspect that something important can be discovered about consciousness through introspection, but who are allergic to the pseudoscience and irrationality that

generally creeps into every New Age discussion of this truth. I haven't read much of Tolle, but I suspect that I largely agree with his view of the subjective insights that come once we recognize the nature of consciousness prior to thought. The self that we all think we have riding around inside our heads is an illusion—and one that can disappear when examined closely. What's more, we're much better off psychologically when it does. But from the little reading I've done of Tolle, I can see that he also makes some embarrassing claims about the nature of the cosmos—claims that are unjustified both scientifically and philosophically.

However, in the man's defense, this lack of usefulness you mention is not unique to him. It's hard to talk about the illusoriness of the self or the non-dual nature of consciousness in a way that makes sense to people.

**Dan:** You know, I've read a little bit about non-duality, but I still don't fully understand the distinction you're making. I know you're supposed to be interviewing me, but I would love to hear more about this from you. I've wanted to ask you this question for a long time. What is the non-dual critique of gradual approaches like mindfulness?

**Sam:** I think the best way to communicate this is by analogy. Everyone has had the experience of looking through a window and suddenly catching sight of his own reflection staring back at him from the glass. At that point, he can use the glass as a window, to see the world outside, or as a mirror, but he can't do both at the same time.

Sometimes your reflection in the glass is pretty subtle, and you could easily stand there for ten minutes, looking outside while staring right through the image of your own face without seeing it.

For the purposes of this analogy, imagine that the goal of meditation is to see your own reflection clearly in each moment. Most spiritual traditions don't realize that this can be done directly, and they articulate their paths of practice in ways that suggest that if you only paid more attention to everything beyond the glass—trees, sky, traffic—eventually your face would come into view. Looking out the window is arguably better than closing your eyes or leaving the room entirely—at least you are facing in the right direction—but the practice is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. You don't realize that you are looking through the very thing you are trying to find in every moment. Given better information, you could just walk up to the window and see your face in the first instant.

The same is true for the illusoriness of the self. Consciousness is already free of the feeling that we call "I." However, a person must change his plane of focus to realize this. Some practices can facilitate this shift in awareness, but there is no truly gradual path that leads there. Many longtime meditators seem completely unaware that these two planes of focus exist, and they spend their lives looking out the window, as it were. I used to be one of them. I'd stay on retreat for a few weeks or months at a time, being mindful of the breath and other sense objects, thinking that if I just got *closer* to the raw data of experience, a breakthrough would occur. Occasionally, a breakthrough did occur: In a moment of seeing, for instance, there would be pure seeing, and consciousness would appear momentarily free of any feeling to which the notion of a "self" could be attached. But then the experience would fade, and I couldn't get back there at will. There was nothing to do but return to meditating dualistically on contents of consciousness, with self-transcendence as a distant goal.

However, from the non-dual side, ordinary consciousness—the very awareness that you and I are experiencing in this conversation—is already free of self. And this can be pointed out directly, and recognized again and again, as one's only form of practice. So gradual approaches are, almost by definition, misleading. And yet this is where everyone starts.

In criticizing this kind of practice, someone like Eckhart Tolle is echoing the non-dualistic teachings one finds in traditions

such as Advaita Vedanta, Zen (sometimes), and Dzogchen. Many of these teachings can sound paradoxical: *You* can't get there from here. The self that you think you are isn't going to meditate itself into a new condition. This is true, but as Sharon says, it's not always useful. The path is too steep.

Of course, this non-dual teaching, too, can be misleading—because even after one recognizes the intrinsic selflessness of consciousness, one still has to practice that recognition. So there is a point to meditation after all—but it isn't a goal-oriented one. In each moment of real meditation, the self is already transcended.

**Dan:** So should I stop doing my mindfulness meditation?

**Sam:** Not at all. Though I think you could be well served if you ever had the opportunity to study the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Dzogchen.

**Dan:** Joseph Goldstein, who's a friend to both of us, recently put out this [supplement to daily practice](#) where he says, "Listen to all the sounds that arise in your consciousness and then try to find who or what is hearing them." I find that when I do that, I'm directed into a space completely different from the one I arrive at when I'm sitting there watching my breath. I'm wondering if that is the kind of shift in attention you're talking about. Is that what you would recommend as a way to bridge the gap you've just described?

**Sam:** Yes. Looking for the mind, or the thinker, or the one who is looking, is often taught as a preliminary exercise in Dzogchen, and it gets your attention pointed in the right direction. It's different from focusing on the sensation of breathing. You're simply turning attention upon itself—and this can provoke the insight I'm talking about. It's possible to look for the one who is looking and to find, conclusively, that no one is there to be found.

People who have done a lot of meditation practice, who know what it's like to concentrate deeply on an object like the breath, often develop a misconception that the truth is somewhere deep within. But non-duality is not deep. It's right on the surface. This is another way the window analogy works well: Your reflection is not far away. You just need to know where to look for it. It's not a matter of going deeper and deeper into subtlety until your face finally reveals itself. It is literally right before your eyes in every moment. When you turn attention upon itself and look for the thinker of your thoughts, the absence of any center to consciousness can be glimpsed immediately. It can't be found by going deeper. To go deep—into the breath or any other phenomenon you can notice—is to start looking out the window at the trees.

The trick is to become sensitive to what consciousness is like the instant you try to turn it upon itself. In that first instant, there's a gap between thoughts that can grow wider and become more salient. The more it opens, the more you can notice the character of consciousness prior to thought. This is true whether it's ordinary consciousness—you standing bleary-eyed in line at Starbucks—or you're in the middle of a three-month retreat and your body feels like it's made of light. It simply doesn't matter what the contents of consciousness are. The self is an illusion in any case.

It's also useful to do this practice with your eyes open, because vision seems to anchor the feeling of subject/object duality more than any other sense. Most of us feel quite strongly that we are behind our eyes, looking out at a world that is *over there*. But the truth—subjectively speaking; I'm not making a claim about physics—is that everything is just appearing in consciousness. Losing the sense of subject/object duality with your eyes open can be the most vivid way to experience this shift in perception. That's why Dzogchen practitioners tend to meditate with their eyes open.

**Dan:** So I would look at something and ask myself who is seeing it?

**Sam:** Yes—but it's not a matter of verbally asking yourself the question. The crucial gesture is to attempt to turn attention upon itself and notice what changes in that first instant. Again, it's not a matter of going deep within. You don't have to work up to this thing. It's a matter of looking for the looker and in that first moment noticing what consciousness is like. Once you notice that it is wide open and unencumbered by the feeling of self, that very insight becomes the basis of your mindfulness.

**Dan:** The way you describe it, it's a practice. I get it. Tolle and the other non-dual thinkers I've heard talk aren't telling us what to do. You're actually giving me something clear and easy to understand. I think you could use that as a complement to and perhaps even a replacement for the mindfulness practice that stabilizes your attention and helps you recognize that you have an inner life worth focusing on in the first place.

**Sam:** That's right. Mindfulness is necessary for any form of meditation. So there's no contradiction. But there remains something paradoxical about non-dual teachings, because the thing you're glimpsing is already true of consciousness. Consciousness is already without the sense of self.

Most people feel that the self is real and that they're going to somehow unravel it—or, if it's an illusion, it is one that requires a protracted process of meditation to dispel. One gets the sense in every dualistic approach that there's nothing to notice in the beginning but the evidence of one's own unenlightenment. Your mind is a mess that must be cleaned up. You're at the base of the mountain, and there's nothing to do but schlep to the top.

The non-dual truth is that consciousness is already free of this thing we think we have in our heads—the ego, the thinker of thoughts, the grumpy homunculus. And the intrinsic selflessness of consciousness can be recognized, right now, before you make any effort to be free of the self through goal-oriented practice. Once you have recognized the way consciousness already is, there is still practice to do, but it's not the same as just logging your miles of mindfulness on the breath or any other object of perception.

**Dan:** I appreciate what you're saying, but it seems to present a communication challenge or PR problem. I think most people will buy the basic argument for mindfulness. We all know that we eat when we're not hungry, check our email when we're supposed to be listening to our kids, or lose our temper, and then we regret these things later. We all know that we're yanked around by our emotions. So most people will readily see the value of having more self-awareness so that they can have more—for lack of a better term—emotional intelligence. However, I don't know that it will be readily apparent to most people why it would be desirable to see the self as an illusion. I don't even know that most people have considered the nature of the self at all, because I certainly hadn't. So to ask them to take the further step of considering whether it is an illusion—that requires a lot of work to even wrap your head around. That seems to me to be one of the big issues for non-dualists.

**Sam:** I agree. It's a more esoteric concern, almost by definition—but it's a more fundamental one as well. It's the distinction between teaching mindfulness in a clinical or self-help context—whether to the Marines, to enhance their performance, or as a form of stress reduction in a hospital or a psychotherapy practice—and going on silent retreat for months in the hope of recapitulating the insights of a great contemplative like the Buddha. Some people really want to get to the root of the problem. But most just want to feel better and achieve more in their lives. There's nothing wrong with that—until one

realizes that there is something wrong with it. The wolf never quite leaves the door.

Ultimately, no matter how much you improve your game, you still have a problem that seems to be structured around this feeling you call “I”—which, strangely, is not quite identical to this body of yours that is growing older and less reliable by the hour. You still feel that you are this always-ready-to-be-miserable center of consciousness that is perpetually driven to do things in the hope of feeling better.

And if you’re practicing mindfulness or some other form of meditation as a remedy for this discomfort, you are bound to approach it in the same dilemma-based way that you approach everything else in life. You’re out of shape, so you go to the gym. You feel a little run down, so you go to the doctor. You didn’t get enough sleep, so you drink an extra cup of coffee. We’re constantly bailing water in this way. Mindfulness becomes a very useful tool to help yourself feel better, but it isn’t fundamentally different from any of these other strategies when we use it that way.

For instance, many of us hate to be late and find ourselves rushing at various points in the day. This is a common pattern for me: I get uptight about being late, and I can feel the cortisol just dump into my bloodstream. It’s possible to practice mindfulness as a kind of remedy for this problem—to notice the feeling of stress dispassionately, and to disengage from one’s thoughts about it—but it is very hard to escape the sense that one is using mindfulness as an antidote and trying to meditate the unpleasant feelings away. Technically, it’s not true mindfulness at that point, but even when one is really balanced with one’s attention, there is still the feeling that one is patiently contemplating one’s own neurosis. It is another thing entirely to recognize that there is no self at the center of this storm in the first place.

The illusoriness of the self is potentially of great interest to everyone, because this false construct really is our most basic problem in every moment. But there is no question that this truth is harder to communicate than the benefits of simply being more self-aware, less reactive, more concentrated, and so forth.

**Dan:** This is exactly why my book is a great prologue to yours.

**Sam:** Absolutely. And you’ve written a book that I could never have written. I became interested in meditation relatively early in life. I was a skeptical person, but I was only 19, so I didn’t have all the reasons you had to be skeptical when you first approached the practice. Nor did I have a career, so I wasn’t coming from the same fascinating context in which you recognized that something was wrong with your approach to life. I think your book will be incredibly useful to people.

Can you say something about what it was like to go on retreat for the first time? What sort of resistance did you have? And what was it like to punch through it?

**Dan:** I blame the entire experience on you. It was largely your idea, and you got me into the retreat—which, to my surprise, was hard to get into. I had no idea that so many people wanted to sign up for ten days of no talking, vegetarian food, and 12 hours a day of meditation, which sounded like a perfect description of one of the inner circles of Dante’s *Inferno* to me.

As you can gather from the previous sentences, I did not look forward to the experience at all. However, I knew as a budding meditator that this was the next step to take. When we met backstage at the [debate](#) you and Michael Shermer did with Deepak Chopra and Jean Houston, which I moderated for *Nightline*, I realized for the first time that you were a meditator. You recommended that I go on this retreat, and it was almost as if I’d received a dare from a cool kid I admired. I felt like I really needed to do this. It was as horrible as I’d thought it would be for a couple of days. On day four or five I

thought I might quit, but then I had a breakthrough.

**Sam:** Describe that breakthrough. What shifted?

**Dan:** As I say in the book, it felt as if I had been dragged by my head by a motorboat for a few days, and then, all of the sudden, I got up on water skis. When you're hauled kicking and screaming into the present moment, you arrive at an experience of the mind that is, at least for me, totally new. I could see very clearly the ferocious rapidity of the mind—how fast we're hearing, seeing, smelling, feeling, wanting—and that *this is our life*. We are on the receiving end of this fire hose of mental noise. That glimpse ushered in the happiest 36 hours of my life. But, as the Buddha liked to point out, nothing lasts—and that did not last.

**Sam:** It's amazing to realize for the first time that your life doesn't get any better than your mind is: You might have wonderful friends, perfect health, a great career, and everything else you want, and you can still be miserable. The converse is also true: There are people who basically have nothing—who live in circumstances that you and I would do more or less anything to avoid—who are happier than we tend to be because of the character of their minds. Unfortunately, one glimpse of this truth is never enough. We have to be continually reminded of it.

**Dan:** This reminds me of the Buddhist concept of suffering. The term “suffering” has certain connotations in English and, as you know, it's a poor translation of the original Pali term *dukkha*. The Buddhist concept describes the truth of our existence, which is that nothing is ever ultimately satisfying.

As you said, you can have great friends and live pretty high on the socioeconomic ladder—your life can be a long string of pleasurable meals, vacations, and encounters with books and interesting people—and, yes, you can still have what Eckhart Tolle describes as a background static of perpetual discontent. This is why we see rock stars with drug problems and lottery winners who kill themselves. There is something very powerful about that realization.

**Sam:** And this is why training the mind through meditation makes sense—because it's the most direct way to influence the mechanics of your own experience. To remain unaware of this machinery—in particular, the automaticity of thought—is to simply be propelled by it into one situation after another in which you struggle to find lasting fulfillment amid conditions that can't provide it.

**Dan:** What's interesting is that so many people reflexively reject this—just as I would have five or six years ago—because of their misconceptions about meditation. I think there are two reasons why people don't meditate. Either they think it's complete baloney that involves wearing robes, lighting incense, and subscribing to some useless metaphysical program, or they accept the fact that it might be good for them, but they assume that they couldn't do it because their minds are too busy. I refer to this second reason as “the fallacy of uniqueness.” If you think that your mind is somehow busier than everyone else's—welcome to the human condition. Everyone's mind is busy. Meditation is hard for everybody.

**Sam:** The first source of resistance you mentioned is especially prevalent among smart, skeptical people. And I'm a little worried that the way in which many of us respond to this doubt ultimately sells the whole enterprise short. For instance, consider the comparison people often make between meditation and physical exercise—in fact, you drew this analogy already. At first glance, it's a good one, because nothing looks more ridiculous on its face than what most of us do for exercise. Take the practice of lifting weights: If you try to explain weightlifting to someone who has no understanding of fitness, the wisdom of repeatedly picking up heavy objects and putting them down again is very difficult to get across. And



until you've actually succeeded at building some muscle, it *feels* wrong too. So it is easy to see why a naïve person would say, "Why on earth would I want to waste my time and energy doing that?" Of course, most people understand that lifting weights is one of the best things they can do if they want to retain muscle mass, protect their joints from injury, feel better, etc. It's also extraordinarily satisfying, once a person gets into it.

Meditation presents a similar impasse at first. Everyone asks, "Why would I want to pay attention to my breath?" It seems like a shameful waste of time. So the analogy to exercise is inviting and probably useful, but it doesn't quite get at what is so revolutionary about finally paying attention to the character of one's own mental life in this way.

Truly learning to meditate is not like going to the gym and putting on some muscle because it's good for you and makes you feel better. There's more to it than that. Meditation—again, done correctly—puts into question more or less everything you tend to do in your search for happiness. But if you lose sight of this, it can become just another strategy for seeking happiness—a more refined version of the problem you already have.

**Dan:** I'm guilty of using the exercise analogy repeatedly. My feeling—and I think you'd agree with this—is that the analogy is good enough to get people in the door. It may be misleading, but I don't think in a harmful way. Obviously, when done correctly, meditation is much more transformative than ordinary exercise, but you need to meet people where they are. I think that mindfulness, and potentially even non-duality, has the potential to become the next public health revolution, or the spirituality of the future. In order for that to happen, you need to communicate with people in a way that they can understand. Not to keep whaling on Eckhart Tolle, but part of my problem with him is that I just don't know that anybody actually understands what he's saying, despite the fact that he has sold millions of books.

**Sam:** This raises the question of how to evaluate the results of a spiritual practice—and whether those results, however transformative they may be for someone, can be credible to others.

What constitutes evidence that there is a path to wisdom at all? From the outside, it's very difficult to judge—because there are charismatic charlatans who are probably lying about everything, and there are seemingly ordinary people who have had quite profound experiences. From the inside, however, the evidence is clear; so each person has to run the experiment in the laboratory of his own mind to know that there's anything to this.

The truth is that most of us are bound to appear like ordinary schmucks to others no matter how much we meditate. If you're lost in thought, as you will be most of the time, you become the mere puppet of whatever those thoughts are. If you're lost in worries about the future, you will seem to be an ordinary, anxious person—and the fact that you might be punctuating this experience with moments of mindfulness or moments of non-duality isn't necessarily going to change the way you appear in the world. But internally, the difference can be huge. This gap between first-person and third-person data is a real impediment to communicating the significance of meditation practice to people who haven't experienced it.

**Dan:** I agree, although, as we've already mentioned, there are some external manifestations that one can measure—changes in the brain, lowered blood pressure, boosted immune function, lowered cortisol, and so forth. People find these things compelling, and once they get in the door, they can experience the practice from the inside.

I would also say—and perhaps you were just getting into this—it's hard to gauge whether some spiritual teachers are telling the truth. I've been privileged to meet many of these people, and I just go by my gut sense of whether they're full of crap or

not.

I have to say that with Eckhart Tolle, I did not get that feeling. I got the sense that he is for real. I don't understand a lot of what he's saying, but I didn't feel that he was lying to himself or to me. Obviously this isn't really data, but I found it personally convincing. To what end, I don't know.

**Sam:** As distinct, say, from our friend with the rhinestone glasses...

**Dan:** Correct. I think I say in the book that I had no questions about whether Tolle was authentic, although I had many questions about whether he was sane. It was the reverse with Deepak Chopra.

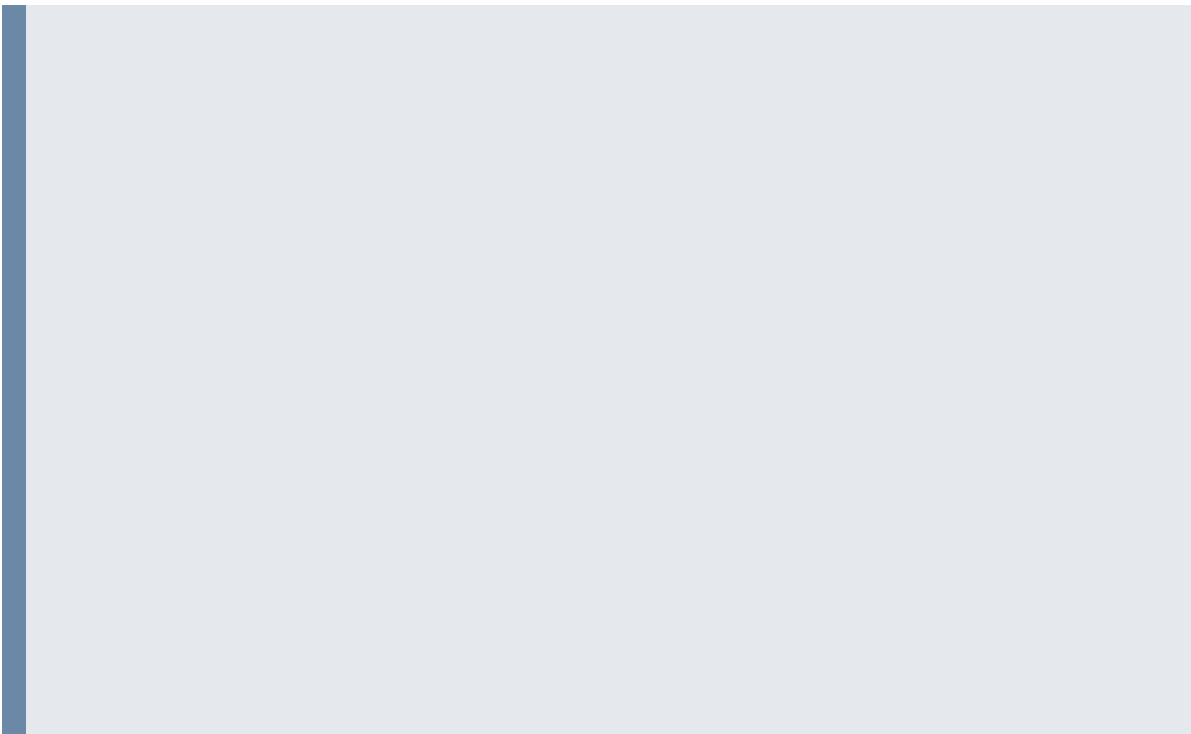
**Sam:** Now I find myself in the unusual position of rising to Deepak's defense—I think this happens once a decade, when the planets align just so. As I was saying before, a person like Deepak could have authentic and life-transforming experiences in meditation that nevertheless failed to smooth out the quirks in his personality. If he spends most of his time lost in thought, it will not be obvious to us that he enjoys those moments of real freedom. We will inevitably judge him by the silly things he says and the arrogance with which he says them.

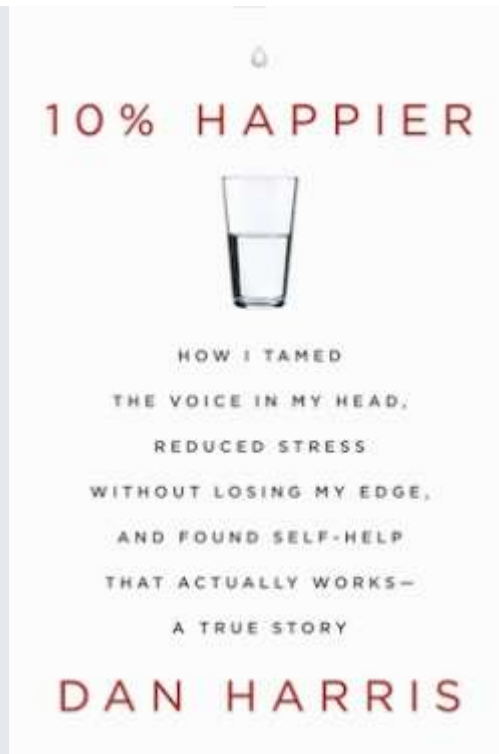
But I've learned, as a result of my humbling encounters with my own mind, to charitably discount everyone else's psychopathology. So if a spiritual teacher flies into a rage or even does something starkly unethical, that is not, from my point of view, proof that he or she is a total fraud. It's just evidence that he or she is spending some significant amount of time lost in thought. But that's to be expected of anybody who's not "fully enlightened," if such a rarefied state is even possible. I'm not saying that every guru is worth listening to—I think most aren't, and some are genuinely dangerous. But many talented contemplatives can appear quite ordinary. And, unfortunately, cutting through the illusion of the self doesn't guarantee that you won't say something stupid at the next opportunity.

**Dan:** I fully agree with you. I enjoy picking on Deepak, but the truth is that I like the guy.

**Sam:** Let's leave it there, Dan. It was great speaking with you, and I wish you continued success with your book.

**Dan:** Many thanks, Sam.





Startling, provocative, and often very funny . . . [10% HAPPIER] will convince even the most skeptical reader of meditation's potential.

Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*

10% HAPPIER is hands down the best book on meditation for the uninitiated, the skeptical, or the merely curious. . . . an insightful, engaging, and hilarious tour of the mind's darker corners and what we can do to find a bit of peace.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* and *Focus*

The science supporting the health benefits of meditation continues to grow as does the number of Americans who count themselves as practitioners but, it took reading 10% HAPPIER to make me actually want to give it a try.

Richard E. Besser, M.D., Chief Health and Medical Editor, ABC News

An enormously smart, clear-eyed, brave-hearted, and quite personal look at the benefits of meditation that offers new insights as to how this ancient practice can help modern lives while avoiding the pitfall of cliché. This is a book that will help people, simply put.

Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love*

This brilliant, humble, funny story shows how one man found a way to navigate the non-stop stresses and demands of modern life and back to humanity by finally learning to sit around doing nothing.

Colin Beavan, author of *No Impact Man*

In *10% Happier*, Dan Harris describes in fascinating detail the stresses of working as a news correspondent and the relief he has found through the practice of meditation. This is an extremely brave, funny, and insightful book. Every ambitious person should read it.

Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith*

A compellingly honest, delightfully interesting, and at times heart-warming story of one highly intelligent man's life-changing journey towards a deeper understanding of what makes us our very best selves. As Dan's meditation practice deepens, I look forward to him being at least 11% happier, or more.

Chade-Meng Tan, author of *Search Inside Yourself*

*10% Happier* is a spiritual adventure from a master storyteller. Mindfulness can make you happier. Read this to find out how.

George Stephanopoulos

## Notes

Find this article online at: <https://www.samharris.org/blog/item/taming-the-mind>