

One Meditation #10, October 2025

“Can Jocks Meditate?” (Oct. 2, 2025, 591 w.)

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Welcome to this tenth meditation email and thank you for being here. Please consider sharing it with others. Monthly subjects range from modern to ancient, Western to Eastern, and scientific to spiritual. For more info, see below. – Richard

CAN JOCKS MEDITATE?

In 6th-8th grade, I was a major jock. I especially liked what happened in track during and after a mile run. A short story and movie later explained it to me: Alan Sillitoe’s “The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner” (*Internet Archive*). The rebellious teen hero discovers that during running, his “thoughts are better than any I’ve ever had.... I’ve had no time and peace in all my bandit life, and now my thoughts are coming pat....” During running, he becomes more infinitely aware of his body’s workings. Then he finds the Silence: “the quietness...was like opening my eyes underwater and looking at the pebbles on a stream bottom....”

A few years later, I read that this is “runner’s high.” The Mayo Clinic calls runner’s high “meditation in motion” (“Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress”). It is any physical activity, says Mayo, that “can increase feelings of happiness and reduce feelings of pain...with positive effects on the body—including the heart and blood vessels, digestive, and immune systems” and “can lower resting heart rate and blood pressure.” These, in fact, are precisely the results found in hundreds of other studies on meditation.

Exercise as Mindfulness

Exercise during training also is, in particular, a form of “mindfulness.” Mindfulness is observation of one’s inner or outer actions with little or no reaction to them except, as needed, to make often-slight adjustments. The Mayo Clinic points out that during exercise, you “may find that you focus only on your body’s movements and breathing” and “this focus on a single task helps you stay calm..., think clearly..., use your imagination and improve problem-solving skills..., ease your stress levels and help you better manage your body and your life.” When I ran regularly in my early teens, by the end of a run, my awareness would become as clear as a note from a bell.

Meditation and Health

The connections of meditation to exercise and health go far beyond runner’s high and mindfulness. According to Harvard University researchers, practicing spirituality in general helps establish and maintain better health. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health announced in July 2022 (“Spirituality linked with better health outcomes, patient care”) that community spiritual practices in particular “should be incorporated into care for both serious illness and overall health.”

The study was led by Harvard's School of Public Health and its Boston affiliate Brigham and Women's Hospital. A panel of 27 experts reviewed about 15,000 scientific articles on spirituality and health, and chose the approximate 600 best-conducted studies. They found that spirituality is associated with healthier lives. This includes "greater longevity, less depression and suicide, and less substance use" and also positively influences a person's "quality of life and medical care decisions."

Though the Harvard study looked primarily at community spiritual practices like group worship and prayer, it is likely the results also apply at some level to individual practitioners. The Harvard-Brigham panel came from "a diversity of spiritual/religious views, including spiritual-not-religious, atheist, Muslim, Catholic, various Christian denominations, and Hindu."

Later, in college, I read the first chapter of the ancient *Yoga Sutras*. It describes thirty methods for developing the "clear mind" of *samadhi*—a state of little or no thought, memory, emotion, or desire. One of these practices is "warming" or "heated exercise." *What?* I thought when I read it, *Jocks meditate?* Then I remembered my runner's highs. In exercise, can you find your "quiet mind"? Mindful observation may get you there. It is a base not only for health but also peace, greater awareness, and joy.

Next Month: "Do I have to get rid of my ego?"

Peace, Strength, Joy

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To see previous issues, go to <https://www.richardjewell.org/Meditation/default.htm>.

Sept. '25, #9: "**The Elephant in the Room.**" It fills our heads with constant thoughts, but there are quiet replacements for them. **Recommended:** Richard Rohr, *Silent Compassion*
