

# Meditation Gym - 2025/01/29 07:53 PST – Transcript

## Attendees

Adam Breen, Cameron Aggs

## Transcript

**Adam Breen:** Welcome to meditation gym episode two. In episode one, we explored Cameron's unique mindfulness model, including the captain metaphor, and how it helps us lead ourselves with awareness and kindness. Today we're shifting gears to dive into the practical side of things, meditation. So, what is meditation really about? How can it transform the way we handle our emotions, thoughts, and relationships? Cameron will break it all down for us, sharing simple but powerful techniques like his three-point meditation, and explaining how meditation helps us build inner resilience and self-compassion.

**Adam Breen:** Along the way, we'll touch on some of his innovative concepts, including the studio,...

**Adam Breen:** the infirmary, and even a little bit about his exciting upcoming project, the meditation gym. So whether you're a beginner or whether you've struggled with meditation in the past, this episode will give you practical tools to make mindfulness a part of your daily life. So let's dive in. Hi Cameron, welcome back.

**Cameron Aggs:** Hi, Adam.

**Cameron Aggs:** Thank you for having me. Yes. Yeah,...

**Adam Breen:**

**Adam Breen:** My pleasure. so Cam in episode one we explored the captain metaphor and how mindfulness helps us lead ourselves. Today we're focusing on something practical meditation. So let's start with a simple question. What exactly is meditation and why is it such a powerful tool for transformation?

**Cameron Aggs:** great question. for me,...

**Cameron Aggs:** meditation is a couple of different things.

**Cameron Aggs:** The first thing that it Yes.

**Adam Breen:** Mate.

**Adam Breen:** So I actually forgot to start my local recording. I'm sorry. We're going to have to start again.

**Cameron Aggs:** Okay.

**Adam Breen:** Sorry, buddy.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. No,...

**Adam Breen:** Okay. ...

**Cameron Aggs:** no sweat.

**Adam Breen:** yeah, we'll just have to deal with that in the Starting recording. Welcome back to the Meditation Gym Podcast. In episode 1, we explored Cameron's unique mindfulness model, including the captain metaphor, and how it helps us lead ourselves with awareness and kindness. Today, we're shifting gears to dive into the practical side of things, meditation. So, what is meditation really about? How can it transform the way we handle our emotions, thoughts, and relationships?

**Adam Breen:** Cameron's going to break it all down for us, sharing simple but powerful techniques like his three-point meditation and explaining how meditation helps us build inner resilience and self-compassion. Along the way, we'll touch on some of his innovative concepts, including the studio and my personal favorite, the studio gangster, the infirmary, and even a bit about his exciting upcoming project, the meditation gym. Whether you're a beginner or have struggled with meditation in the past, or even if you're an old hand at this, this episode is still going to give you practical tools to make mindfulness a part of your daily life.

**Adam Breen:** So, let's dive in. Hi, Cam. Welcome back.

**Cameron Aggs:** Hey, Adam.

**Cameron Aggs:** Thank Good to be back.

**Adam Breen:** right, so in episode one, we explored the captain metaphor and how mindfulness helps us lead ourselves. Today we're focusing on something practical,...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** meditation. So let's start with this. What exactly is meditation and why is it such a powerful tool for transformation?

**Cameron Aggs:** So, meditation is a number of different things, depending on why we're doing it and what we want from the very kind of deep spiritual kind of aims that meditation will be a different thing.

**Cameron Aggs:** to somebody who's just practicing for 10 minutes a day. And for me as somebody who has roughly a 15 to 30 minute practice daily, meditation for me is principally a space where I get to sit with myself. and kind of check in with myself. which is such a cool practice it's kind of like this time in practice I guess where I get to you referred earlier to the infirmary concept infirmary studio but also observatory and as it relates to the infirmary for me it's a place where I can kind of come time in where I can reflect as well so a reflective time in

**Cameron Aggs:** space where I can heal hurts and heartaches because they just naturally come out in meditation. often initially is rumination, and an emotional kind of upheaval. but the more I sit with it and tend to it it becomes this more reflective space where I can also do what I call my emotional laundry which is a really fascinating way to look at this and it's the same then with journaling as well both are places where we can do our emotional laundry make sense of our experience

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**Cameron Aggs:** And so the time in element, the infirmity element is really key for me. and inside of that infirmity of course is a space where I get to experience just the quietness. Yeah. So once I've kind of been with myself and soothe the hurts and heartaches, etc., if there are any. It's also just a place where I can come and kind of unhook from the identification I've got with my role and the busyiness and the drama and those parts that are unsatisfied or anxious about this or that.

**Cameron Aggs:** and all of that can kind of start to slow and soften and kind of I can get more space around that as I come to identify with the more being component of who I am who's not so identified with all of that. and that's a wonderful gift that I get to give myself. and then of course, it's an observatory as well. it really is a place where I can come to check out what's the nature of this human mind I'm driving what's the nature of thoughts that seem to dominate my internal landscape what's the nature of the mind and where is it and what's the nature of this self that I seem to be so preoccupied with itation as an infirmity meditation as an observatory

**Cameron Aggs:** And then also mindfulness as a studio where I'm working on developing better skills. Yeah. in how I treat myself, how I relate to inner experience, a place where I can develop skills in acceptance in limit setting where I can set and I can also cultivate virtuous states of mind, loving kindness, compassion, forgiveness and in that way meditation is like a studio where we're trying out new

**Cameron Aggs:** stuff and building new skills.

**Adam Breen:** studio or a dance studio.

**Cameron Aggs:** Exactly. Yeah. It's like our own little mental health workshop. which is just great,...

**Adam Breen:** Okay. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** right? Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah, I like that metaphor. And it's nice to think that it's okay to burn some recording time in the studio and not be a problem, Anybody who's a musician might feel otherwise, but I guess it's our own private studio that doesn't cost by the day, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** That's exactly and I really wish more people knew that about meditation. because there are these preconceived ideas that every recording has to be great. when we sit down on in meditation, we just have to be this bastion of focused awareness. and it's just not true.

**Cameron Aggs:** so much time in meditation is spent not on point, and that's perfectly fine.

**Cameron Aggs:** And very much a part of the practice.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah, there are obviously a lot of misconceptions or...

**Adam Breen:** maybe meditation of the dummies ideas out there where a lot of people seem to think that meditation is about clearing the mind or...

**Adam Breen:** finding instant peace and obviously instant peace would be wonderful if achievable. But what's your perspective on these myths?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, I think they're really unfortunate.

**Cameron Aggs:** Because particularly this idea that we should just be able to clear the mind, go from kind of doing mode into being mode.

**Cameron Aggs:** and even if we use the metaphor of a car or the example of a car it takes a while to stop a car doesn't once you start applying the brakes. and if we apply the same thing to meditation you've just been in the world all day. all sorts of things have happened and then you sit in meditation. It's going to take a while for that stream of busyness and so on and so forth to start to settle. And that's a really key point is that you need to stay with it as the mind settles, as it inevitably will, but certainly straight away. and this idea that it could somehow just go blank or what have you, that's just really not the point.

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**Cameron Aggs:** and certainly for beginners, if anyone who has never really successfully meditated in terms of sustained it or feels like they can't do it, if they think of meditation like an observatory, that's a great start because in an observatory, you don't care what is happening. Your job is just to observe what is happening, and that's very much the same with meditation. as I sit here trying to focus on my breath, isn't it interesting how my inner dialogue can't shut up, And it's constantly nagging at me saying, "Hey, You got to shut up. Why can't shut up? Why can't you" And it's like, " wow. That's interesting."

**Cameron Aggs:** it's really fascinating to start to develop an interest in how my mind works which of course I think people overly pathize because they think that their mind is unique and the fact that they can't shut up is unique and so they're like I can't meditate my mind's so crazy busy blah blah blah blah and it's like no actually that's what

**Cameron Aggs:** human minds are like and if I could help people to just get that sense of this is not so much a personal failing but this is what it's like to inhabit a human mind then I think people would depersonalize that kind of the failure of the mind to just sit quietly and would allow people to take a more genuine interest in wow this is fascinating how I'm operating this system of consciousness,...

**Adam Breen:** Mhm. So actually actually the more we start paying attention the more there seems to pay attention rather than the other way around.

**Cameron Aggs:** in terms of how, in light, we're operating a vehicle of consciousness, ostensibly in a human form. how does all that work, what are the nature of thoughts, and what's the nature of what preoccupies me?

**Cameron Aggs:** And Absolutely. And so if people just thought of meditation initially as an observatory where they get to observe the busyness they get to observe the catastrophes and calamities or the disassociations or the self-criticisms and find that all interesting that would be the perfect place to start I

**Cameron Aggs:** Think yeah.

**Adam Breen:** but may not be as familiar to every listener. Could you just explain what you mean by rumination?

**Cameron Aggs:** Stewing lost in thoughts. thinking without knowing that we're thinking which most of us are doing most of the In meditation,...

**Adam Breen:** And so then when we sit down and the dust of the mind settles and we start practicing the skill of meditation, how does that relate to rumination?

**Cameron Aggs:** it's this transition from rumination to reflection. and observation. So, reflection is that part where I know that I'm thinking.

**Cameron Aggs:** So, and I know that I'm thinking and I'm also interested in and nonp prejudicial to what it is that I'm thinking about. I'm not lost in the story of it. And that transition from being lost in our thoughts and ruminating and stewing, which often has at its emotional core this kind of judgmental sense of this shouldn't be happening. my mind shouldn't be like this. This person shouldn't have acted like that. should. And we're get very fixated and lost in all of that. As opposed to finding it all interesting. And as we make this transition from rumination to reflection, what we find is that there's more space.

**Cameron Aggs:** and we start to notice that how I'm thinking about whatever it is that's happened is the key thing that determines my experience of it. and that's where kind of reflection and observation start to really work together. We're observing our mind at the same time as we're providing a more accepting space to process whatever it is that I'm ruminating about. Yeah. Yeah.

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**Adam Breen:** we're actually paying attention to what's showing up. And maybe the more we pay attention, as I said earlier, the more stuff starts to become apparent to us. that might be thoughts, it might be feelings, it might be feeling uncomfortable in the body even or pain, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** and observing how it is that I react to all of that as well. which of course is one of the great things about mindfulness as an observatory and mindfulness more generally because it's infused with the attitude of acceptance and the discipline of a more bellybased breathing we get what Shauna Shapiro and colleagues call the expansion of attentional space. In meditation, the space expands. So, we've got not only the thing that's ailing us, but then our reactivity to it. as well as even at a third level, we can then become aware of ourselves as the space and the observer that's checking out and relating to both the pain that's ailing us and our reactivity. And that really does require an open space.

**Cameron Aggs:** And that's what meditation provides us with.

**Adam Breen:** circumstance. it feels like there is no space. It feels like everything's up close and...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. M yeah.

**Adam Breen:** personal and it's hard to get out of and that's often I find why I have that emotional reaction which might be anger for example try to push it away or as you said in episode one term to avoidance. I might go down to the pub and have a drink. but what we're looking for is a feeling of more spaciousness around that so that we have more options anymore.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, that's exactly right.

**Cameron Aggs:** And then that willingness to start in that crowded space, that rumorative space, the studio gangster space, which we touched on last week, that angry part of myself, or the part of myself that's a bit depressed, or anxious. But it's this willingness to start wherever we are crowded up close fused with whatever drama is going on and giving it time for the spaciousness to emerge so that this more reflective mode of awareness can come and do its thing.

**Adam Breen:** So, we've got the observatory, we've got the studio, and we'll get to that in a sec,...

**Adam Breen:** which is practicing new ways of relating to yourself, I think, and the inner infirmary or...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** the place of emotional healing. are they the three spaces if I got them right?

**Cameron Aggs:** And so maybe it's like the space can be one or a combination of those things depending on where we are in the meditation, So that sometimes the meditation is acting more as observatory and...

**Adam Breen:** Okay.

**Cameron Aggs:** then at other times more as infirmary and then at other times more studio. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:**

**Adam Breen:** Let's do in episode one you mentioned the studio gangster which is an interesting metaphor to bring into what people might otherwise see as a spiritual practice. tell me how the gangster fits into this meditation studio space idea.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, it's the reality that we do absolutely get angry in our life and we carry that anger into our meditation which is great. We should do that because we want to resolve it. anger is not going to magically disappear. even though sometimes we just try to push it out of our minds and look if they're the small niggles, frustrations, irritations, yeah, sure we can just bounce over the top of them and it doesn't leave a lot of residue.

**Cameron Aggs:** but this is where meditation becomes kind of like the house cleaning of our own mind as well is as the more we're sitting with ourselves the more the unresolved stuff from our day is naturally just going to spring forward. very few people living an engaged way of life will just kind of come into the meditation and very quickly just dovetail into their breath and find the mind just rests. it's typically not what minds do. our minds replaying the stuff of the day, the stuff that feels unresolved for us and we carry that into our meditation where thankfully we get to now look at it with a more reflective lens. because when we don't have this practice or another way of doing this is really good relationships.

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**Cameron Aggs:** Journaling's another one, where we do get to talk through and express and feel into and untangle the different parts of the hurts and the heartaches of the day. and so meditation is just a very good way of being able to do this where we're kind of sitting in our own company where a kinder and wiser state of mind can be in attendance to, I guess, the

more childlike mind of experience. what in our last episode I referred to as the crew on board of our ship.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** The different parts of us and the hurts and the heartaches that we picked up.

**Cameron Aggs:** And it just gives us this space initially to express the frustrations of our day or the fears of our day or the disappointments of our day and increasingly bring a mindful lens to that in the service of hopefully resolving it which of course doesn't necessarily happen in the first meditation. it's always a process of time and just to bend your ear a little further on this idea it was over 10 years ago when I had an interaction with a supervisor that I just found completely off the reservation in terms of what I thought was appropriate practice by him in relation to me.

**Cameron Aggs:** And so I go home and my meditation is filled with nothing but just rage and...

**Cameron Aggs:** bugger this guy, and just full of all of that. And I didn't try to make that first meditation anything other than that. I just allowed myself to just play all of that violence out really. And that guy's such an idiot and what I'd love to do to that guy and...

**Adam Breen:** Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** You got gangster on him.

**Cameron Aggs:** so on and so forth. Real gangster. But inside of the studio of my meditation,...

**Adam Breen:** Right.

**Cameron Aggs:** right, which is this pivotal point. It's like trying to suppress the inner gangster is a bad idea. That just goes underground and creates all sorts of other problems. And yet overly expressing our inner gangster is a recipe for destruction in our relationships and in our lives. Right?

**Cameron Aggs:** So it's this kind of great combination of expressing the thing but allowing it to be in the play pen of our individual practice and so that's exactly right and allowing that the thoughts the feelings the expression of that initially and so I did that evening I then slept on it and then the next morning there was more charity, I had more acceptance about the experience, more charity towards him as a person, maybe doing the best that he could with how he sees things and his demands so on and so forth. But I wouldn't have been able to get to that if I have just tried to bludgeon myself into acceptance or what have you.

**Cameron Aggs:** I really did have to start where I was, which was seriously agrieved and then I was able to naturally bring more compassion, more reflection, more charity to that experience and then I was able to go back into the placement that I was at at the time and I was much better resolved about that experience than if I hadn't have meditated at all.

**Adam Breen:** That's a really great example,...

**Adam Breen:** Cam. I'd like to dive into that a little bit more with you in terms of ...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** what was your experience from the gangster moment at the start? how did that lead to the next morning feeling more charity and compassion and so on? why was that inaccessible in the first meditation? And how did that first meditation naturally lead to ...

**Adam Breen:** what might seem to be a more positive outcome?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, I think...

**Cameron Aggs:** because that sense of being agrieved and the very human part of my biology and my evolutionary circuitry is something that is also true, I've got primate circuitry that has an evolutionary past in our closest relatives in the animal kingdom are chimpanzees,...

**Adam Breen:** Mhm.

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**Cameron Aggs:** and they're very high on both group and outgroup violence and I share that same circuitry and for good evolutionary reasons too. And so it's important that I don't pretend that that's not true as my evolutionary basis. and so it's almost like that circuitry is at the front of the line, so to speak, the part of me that's agrieved.

**Cameron Aggs:** And that part of me has a very real basis socially as well and so that has to be tended to the part that's waving the flag and saying hey what he did said etc isn't right by me and...

**Adam Breen:** Try some bananas. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** I have a distinct urge to anger throw some bananas yeah and make him pay as a form of justice so that part has to be dealt with and allowed and recognized and seen in a non-pathological light, And that's the beautiful thing about having an inner studio. And again, whether that's meditation or maybe an art studio, but meditation's particularly good because we're kind of bringing this purposefully reflectful reflective state of attention to stuff.

**Cameron Aggs:** But, whatever your studio is, kind of make sure you have one including the studio of very good relationships where they're available. And so, it really was only once I let that stuff through that a more charitable thing was able to be brought. And it's a very similar thing, to parenting. And in fact, our relationships in general, if a child or if someone's distressed, we want to kind of start with where they are and kind of mirroring back to them at least part of that distress. And the more that person or child feels held and known and accompanied and accurately kind of mirrored, then the more they will start to regulate and feel better. And the same is true

**Adam Breen:** It's like telling an angry person or...

**Adam Breen:** an angry child to calm down isn't always so effective in the first minute.

**Cameron Aggs:** That's exactly right.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. Yeah. I think we've all been there. and so would you say that through I guess matching where you're at then in the first instance in the primate circuitry of the body and dealing with the gangster stuff up front in a non-judgmental way because it's in the studio and that's the place for doing this. that gives you the space the next morning to be able to be



more compassionate because you've addressed the hurts and the concerns in the studio the night before. is that the way that you think about this

**Cameron Aggs:** paying attention on purpose and...

**Adam Breen:** Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** non-judgmentally. And that on purpose part's really important. that meditation and mindfulness both is an intentional practice. first and foremost and what I've noticed is meditation if we're not careful could just be a place of rumination. And for me sometimes I have to be on the lookout for the charitable nature of my own failing or the other person's shortcoming. I have to presume that for that person with the limits of their knowledge, their pressures, their personality, that interaction that their behavior will have made sense from their perspective.

**Cameron Aggs:** even if I think it's deeply flawed and disagree with it, it's still that person trying to do their thing. just as I'm doing my best to do my thing. And when I have that intentional stance towards my experience, and I'm purposefully on the lookout to become more charitable. I'm ruminating maybe about, what my wife did or didn't do, for example, this thing or that. It's important for me to kind of be with it, but be really intentionally open to breaks in the clouds. he didn't meet my need there, she didn't meet my need here, but she's also great at that. And that's not me forcibly pushing that in.

**Cameron Aggs:** but rather if I'm on the lookout for it and I'm charitable and really cultivating the field inwardly of what this all means in terms of acceptance and charitable interpretations it becomes much much easier for this more charitable set of interpretations and feeling to emerge. because the angry part of myself, it doesn't have a vested interest in staying, once it's waved the flag and protested some and it's being seen and all that stuff. in life and in internal life as well is this process of constant change.

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**Cameron Aggs:** And so if I'm just attentive to the change in the weather,...

**Cameron Aggs:** we will naturally hit this space of greater acceptance and more charity.

**Adam Breen:** Okay.

**Adam Breen:** Something we could all benefit from, I'm sure, myself included.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** So, let's shift focus a little bit back towards I guess your theory of meditation for lack of a better word. I know that there are some foundational concepts that are important for us to cover today. and you use the word change in that last response to me there as well which is a helpful segue. I know that you like to talk about the three mechanisms of change...

**Cameron Aggs:** Mhm.

**Adam Breen:** which might be related for example to somebody's trying to meditate and they feel restless or Thoughts keep coming or... they're struggling to focus. In terms of your mechanisms of change approach, what's actually happening during the meditation?

**Adam Breen:**

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. ...

**Cameron Aggs:** I think at one level and I guess this is where we can do this distinction between clean and muddy pain, that's surfacing in consciousness, So, the clean pain is the unavoidable hurts and heartaches of life, wanted unwanted things happening. and so our natural proclivity as human beings is to solve problems relating to all of that. And so we tend to fixate on that stuff. But then the muddy pain is the degree to which we catastrophize it or ruminate on it, when we're just too close to it.

**Cameron Aggs:** And so somebody who's just starting out quite often and particularly if they haven't been doing their emotional laundry, if they don't have great relationships, or they're experiencing trauma or depression or high levels of pain, they're going to sit in this internal landscape and be confronted the self that encounter because they're constantly avoiding themselves and the, attention's always pointed outwardly or it's inwardly but it's of this ruminative nature. and there might well be a backlog of stuff and negative self-t talk in particular which is a kind of element of the muddy pain and the thing probably that most people struggle with is because we're not really a wisdom culture. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** we've really forwarded technological and intellect over spiritual progress as a general rule and emotional literacy I think that's pretty fair to say most people don't know how to talk to themselves they don't know how to hold mental and emotional content they overly personalize their dramas and most people have no idea that thoughts themselves are

**Cameron Aggs:** have a holographic nature to them, that they're not intrinsically bad, it's that we overidentify with them. and so, ...

**Adam Breen:** Right. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** depending on what you mean there. Yeah. in terms of the holographic thing being the form of thoughts, what are thoughts made of? as opposed to say the content, what they're referring to. and when we really think about what thoughts are made of, they're holographic,...

**Cameron Aggs:** they appear but are without substance. what we're talking about, what we're referring to, the content of the thought might be very real and might have happened, but the thought that we're having about it, when we go to look for that, when we go to find that thought, if we were to go looking, where is it?

**Cameron Aggs:** And a nice way to introduce this idea is to think of a blue basketball, for example, a blue basketball.

**Adam Breen:** Okay. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** And most people can generate an image of a blue basketball,...

**Cameron Aggs:** maybe being spun around by a person who's a person on top of an elephant spinning a blue basketball. one or any of those images will have presented in your mind. Did you get an image then, Adam? Yeah.

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**Adam Breen:** Yeah, it was pretty trippy.

**Adam Breen:** There was a dude standing on an elephant with a blue basketball. Yeah. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** The thing is so that content existed and you can tell me about it. He was standing as opposed to sitting. So something happened that you saw, right? And yet what was that image comprised of?

**Cameron Aggs:** If my desk is made out of wood, what was your image comprised of?

**Adam Breen:** Just thought, I guess.

**Cameron Aggs:** That's right. It appeared,...

**Cameron Aggs:** didn't it? It appeared in your mind, but a cloud. No substance to it. and into...

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. ...

**Adam Breen:** I hope the elephant's not going to come clambering through my office. Right.

**Cameron Aggs:** what did it appear? Come back in your dreams, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** and into what did that elephant the man with the blue basketball into what it appears in the space of the mind but where's that and what is that comprised of and did the image come from the left or from the right where did it appear from and where has it gone now right and what we find is that thoughts are holographic

**Cameron Aggs:** they appear but they don't actually have substance when we go looking for them which is just wonderful because once we really grasp this central truth by dint of observation we realize that I can have any thought that I want and this isn't always true mind you the more it hooks us emotionally the harder it is to do this but the thoughts that we think when we realize that they're holographic we start to experience more

**Cameron Aggs:** base with them. And they don't even need to disappear in order for us to experience more quietude with them because we're no longer so identified and treating them as the real things that often afflict us.

**Cameron Aggs:** And most Yeah,...

**Adam Breen:** So it's like all thoughts are made of the same stuff and...

**Adam Breen:** so it doesn't really matter what the hologram is a picture of. we can treat them with equanimity,...

**Cameron Aggs:** that's it.

**Adam Breen:** I guess you would say, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** That's it.

**Cameron Aggs:** And so in the Buddhist tradition for example from the viewpoint of wisdom looking at the form of it it's an empty hologram appearing and...

**Adam Breen:** Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** disappearing in the space of the mind but because it's pointing to something that we care about and trauma being the best example of this but just normal stuff goals hopes fears aspirations that we care about then we need to treat them with a relative as

relatively true compassion for the way in which our thoughts are real and true and pointing to things that we care about, but then wisdom in that they're ultimately holographic. And it really is bringing wisdom and compassion together. that is, a huge part of the healing transformative elements of mindfulness and meditation practice.

**Adam Breen:** which is so many people are afraid of flying, So many people sitting on the plane when you're getting ready to take off are sitting there afraid in some way or shape or...

**Cameron Aggs:** Mhm.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yep.

**Adam Breen:** So most of those people are probably imagining that the plane's going to crash. That's probably the reason why you're afraid of flying. So imagine let's say we've got 300 people on the plane and there's at least 60 of them sitting there imagining the plane crashing. Most planes don't crash, right? In fact, you're more likely to have a car crash than you are to have a plane crash even...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** if you do the stats on both. So...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** what that tells us is that the thought itself has no power to cause reality except to the extent that we allow it to.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** So, it's causing the reality of that person's anxiety,...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yep.

**Adam Breen:** but it ain't causing the plane to crash. observably even, right? So, I like that example because it's something that, people do get very emotive and caught up about if they have a fear of flying, but actually the plane's not going to crash.

**Cameron Aggs:** And the only caveat to that is sometimes in our relationships in particular, we can have cause these self-fulfilling prophecies.

**Cameron Aggs:** If I believe I am unlovable, if I believe that my partner doesn't love me and just wants to leave me and blah blah blah, I can end up pushing that partner away with the psychological benefit that the thing that I fear has finally come to pass.

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**Adam Breen:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** And in so doing, it's an anxiety reduction strategy with a very high price tag.

**Adam Breen:** It's a bit like deciding to get up on the plane and...

**Cameron Aggs:** And so those self-fulfill that's it.

**Adam Breen:** go and open the emergency door.

**Cameron Aggs:** That's it. Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** Maybe not the best idea. so I guess that brings it back to the inner spaces idea,...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** doesn't it? Where it's safe to have any of these thoughts, including a plane crashing or our loved one leaving us.

**Adam Breen:** It's safe to have any of these thoughts in that studio environment and let them play out and create some more spaciousness for ourselves around them. I know you talk about exposure, Which is facing the inner thoughts and...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Ideally that is Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** sensations and then diagnosing the problem and then that leads to insight.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yep. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** Could you take us through those mechanisms of change a little bit more?

**Cameron Aggs:** So I mean that is in a very technical way that's one of the wonderful ways that meditation leads to transformation is through exposure where we're exposed to our different thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories etc.

**Cameron Aggs:** And we learn how to habituate to them in terms of our reactivity. and the degree to which we let that push us into disassociation or endless circles of worry or...

**Cameron Aggs:** rumination. And that ability to just come back and tolerate until the space emerges. So it's not just habituation but it's mastery. It's seeing the change unfold and realizing that just because that was true for me at time one doesn't mean that it's true for me indefinitely here at time two.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. What's cool?

**Cameron Aggs:** Know that I do get catastrophic but if I can just outlast that initial impulse and set of thoughts I can find more freedom with them.

**Cameron Aggs:** And it's just that this too will pass. And it's just that I'm so used to stirring the pot and staying up in it that I never get to learn that holy crap, I'm the one that's stirring it. And I've got to kind of trace that back to the action of stirring it and play around with putting the stirring stick down in meditation, which we do for these brief moments initially, And then boom, we pick it back up. And what's brilliant over time is that we see how we pick the stirring stick back up, whether that's in the direction of self recrimination and kind of meanness in a relationship and judgment and so on so forth, or whether it's, picking the stirring stick up in the direction of depressive rumination or anxious worry.

**Adam Breen:** This two shall pass.

**Cameron Aggs:** when we see how we can actually put the stirring stick down and how that changes things and then we see our tendency to habitually pick it back up and then how that engages the drama. Being able to capture that in consciousness is such a powerful moment

in a person's psychological life to start disentangling this automaticity between my reality and my experience. hang on. how I'm stirring this is shaping my reality. Let's just allow it to be whatever it is at the moment, catastrophic or angry or whatever it is, depressed, anxious, and let me just give it time and continue to come back to come back to come back.

**Cameron Aggs:** which perfectionists have a bit of a hard time with initially because meditation ostensibly is to fail a thousand times as one of my friends said to me once but to know that one is not a failure and perfectionists think that they should be good at this straight away and that can be really tough on them actually but the more we're willing to fail in meditation here I am stirring it again but then I see myself and

**Cameron Aggs:** For these brief moments, I put the stirring stick down, kind of release, relax, and then return, back to the breath or my object. The more I can see and enable this process of transformation.

**Adam Breen:** meditation is failing a thousand times...

**Adam Breen:** but not actually being a failure.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Knowing one is not a failure. this is the mind We do not inhabit these zenlike minds, nor these lives. Most of us have massive amounts of responsibilities and stimulations and worries and all of that's going to play out in meditation. And yet we have these very unrealistic ideas of both the practice but also just for ourselves,

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**Cameron Aggs:** and so this kind of forgiving when I talk about meditation as a studio then cultivating virtuous states of mind is what it is cultivating virtuous states of consciousness forgiveness compassion like non-judgment. These are all ways that we in the studio become a better friend to ourselves, a better neighbor to ourselves, a better captain to ourselves. And as much as meditation at one level is training skills. the mind is we play sustain and then return our attention to our chosen object.

**Cameron Aggs:** we try to sustain it as far as we can and get distracted and we bring it back, so we're kind of training our attention in this way through meditation. We're all absolutely and that's where that interaction...

**Adam Breen:** Mhm. H.

**Cameron Aggs:** then is between attention training and emotion training is in order to start again I have to have a forgiving attitude to myself. which is not an attention thing although I guess it's forged in paying attention across time but fundamentally that's an emotional competency. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** the willingness to put two and two together emotionally and to grant ourselves pardon, for these perceived failings in this case of losing, awareness of where the breath is, And so this gradual process of training the mind and softening the heart is an essential part of mindfulness just as bringing wisdom and compassion together are an essential part of mindfulness. meditation. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** So you've got the front end practice which is the focus, the breath work etc. I think you call that shamata sometimes and...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** the back end of the practice is the emotional processing and any healing or giving myself forgiveness for the perceived failing of stopping paying attention for a while. could you just talk about that word?

**Cameron Aggs:** and all the things that we shamata.

**Adam Breen:** Sorry. Here you go.

**Cameron Aggs:** So shamata or meditative equipoise in the Buddhist tradition.

**Adam Breen:** Wow, that's a mouthful.

**Cameron Aggs:** Say again mate.

**Adam Breen:** That's a mouthful. Meditative equip.

**Cameron Aggs:** It is isn't it? Yeah. Equipoise.

**Adam Breen:** Okay.

**Cameron Aggs:** Or one focused attention. meditation or sorry, mindfulness, the technical part, in the Pali tradition of sati, is kind of to keep your attention on your chosen object without forgetting. sati means to recollect or to remember.

**Cameron Aggs:** So it's this constant flow of remembering your breath with this kind of one-pointed awareness and kind of once we can get the mind from all over the place into this just one focus spot in the Buddhist tradition of meditation then we can use that for vipasha which is penetrative insight into the nature of the mind into the nature of the holographic nature of the mind and the nature of the self as having no fixed address and the spaciousness and being that comes from that. And so in Buddhist practice there's kind of three levels. There's samadei, pa. So sila is basically ethical living.

**Cameron Aggs:** it's very hard to have a concentrated mind, a mind that's easy to inhabit if we're not living in accordance with our values. Yeah. So, initially with meditation, let's get our ethical house in order. and then from there, let's create a serviceable mind. which I think of in a similar way to breaking in a horse, or training a puppy. you kind of bring it in and then it goes and then you kind of bring it in and it goes and you're always training your own mind in a way that's kind of accepting that my mind is like a unbroken horse a puppy. It's just going to scamper everywhere or it's going to buck wildly. It's not going to be serviceable straight away.

**Cameron Aggs:** In the first part of the practice, there is this training of the puppy, so to speak, of the mind, where we're putting it like a puppy on the ground of the present moment,...

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**Adam Breen:** doesn't always stay.

**Cameron Aggs:** on the breath, and we're saying to it, stay. And of course, what happens to the puppy disappears, right? Yeah. the mind will just flee into the past, the future, disassociation, fantasy, but it will not just stay and rest on one-pointedly in the present moment. And again, it'll flee. And again, firmly, but non-judgmentally, firmly, but kindly, we bring the mind back and

we tell it to stay. And again, it runs off. And again, we locate it eventually, sometimes, 10 minutes later.

**Cameron Aggs:** And again, we bring it back to the ground of the present moment and we tell it to stay. And it's this process of training the puppy with the same kind of care and reasonable expectations that we would train a puppy with that we learn to train our own mind. And our mind will become trained.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** Though there are caveats to that. being on heavy psychiatric medications being chronically in pain or sleep disturbed makes it harder to meditate and to extract those benefits from it. so in those special circumstances more tolerance and a greater bandwidth is required and a greater sense of what's reasonable and realistic for me in my circumstances on my ship sailing on my seas.

**Cameron Aggs:** But outstand but outside of that, if people think about if my mind was a puppy, how would I treat it every time it ran off? I would have to return it, right? Because otherwise it's permissive and we're just, floating hither and thither and...

**Cameron Aggs:** not meditating at all. It's just a space to, ruminate or fantasize or to zone out. And yet, if we're too mean to it, come here, you little blah blah blah. go why do we even have a puppy in the first place under those circumstances, with kindness,...

**Adam Breen:** Mhm. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** We want to be calming the mind,...

**Cameron Aggs:** but right?

**Adam Breen:** I guess, right? Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** And calming means to be kind, and to create a platform of safety. Hey puppy, I am bringing you back, but you're not bad, you're just a puppy. so let me do this with love and tolerance for the fact that you're a puppy, so of course you're going to do this, but I'm going to keep you doing it.

**Cameron Aggs:** I'm going to keep doing it firmly and consistently and soon enough you're going to get the hang of sitting, and shaking and so on and so forth.

**Adam Breen:** we start talking through the phases of meditation and relating them to what we've talked about earlier as well, can you talk us through the four phases?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yes. So I think of meditation for most folks non Buddhist meditators or...

**Cameron Aggs:** people that aren't really doing this in a very retreat environment as consisting of four main phases. So this is people practicing 15 no

**Adam Breen:** And so sorry so just on that you don't have to be Buddhist you don't have to be religious you don't have to go to retreats you can just follow these steps and...

**Adam Breen:** meditate right you don't have to do any of the fancy

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, that's right.



**Cameron Aggs:** And what you get from that will be proportionate then to what you put into it. So it's like someone who go the difference between someone who does retreats is like a professional triathlete and the rest of us are kind of like people that go out and do a fun run or do their 5k jog or 1k jog, great for you. but it's a different outcome than if you're a triathlete. so that's an important point.

**Cameron Aggs:** But keep that's it isn't it?

**Adam Breen:** But my inner perfectionist is getting triggered here,...

**Adam Breen:** So it's like should I be the triathlete? Right? is it okay to not be the triathlete

**Cameron Aggs:** And to be the triathlete, then you got to make the sacrifices of a triathlete. And do you really want to do that? And does your life at this point in time allow you to do that? And if it doesn't, why not just be very real about that?

**Cameron Aggs:** If I'm practicing 15 to 30 minutes a day, meditation ostensibly will be an opportunity for me to check in with myself, get some space around my thoughts and feelings, experience some quietude, but I'm not necessarily going to plunge and see through the illusion of selfhood and enter into the nondual bliss of nana, or what h that's it. Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** But even 5 or 10 minutes a day can be really helpful, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** I find it incredibly helpful. and again, you have to judge this on your own merits, too, Because I'm here talking 20 years after my first meditation retreat. I've done a whole bunch of those.

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**Cameron Aggs:** So maybe what's true for me after 10 minutes may not be true for you this other person with the exception that I find my clients very frequently find that once I can guide them to just coming back into their breath and I can kind of hold their attention there's just this automaticity of lost in thoughts lost in this identification with Cameron and the solidness of my life, that automaticity is broken. and when that in itself is a powerful moment, even if it lasts just for these brief instances.

**Adam Breen:** So if somebody's doing that a few times a week or even every day,...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, it really is.

**Adam Breen:** even if it's for a short time, that's a real step change in the way they're living their life, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** It really is.

**Cameron Aggs:** they at that moment have this discipline and they're developing meditation gym developing the mental muscles to break the flow of automaticity with thoughts past and future and loss into all of that into reserving the right to let thoughts be for four breaths, eight breaths, 16 breaths. and that's a very powerful intentional move just on its own. but to come back to these phase again meditation gym right is the warm up phase right before you go and do your gym workout you do some stretching you do your warm up and the same is true for phase one in meditation where it's a phase of arriving showing up and transitioning from doing mode

**Cameron Aggs:** into being mode. it's a time when all of the scattered aspects of mind are going to start to come home where the glass of mighty water to use Sagya Rimpache's analogy will start to become clear. And so in phase one of the practice, we're really just coming in and saying hello to the space and kind of finding our posture and finding our breath, and kind of as a way of turning on the motor of mindfulness that needs to hum for a little while before the doing mode stuff starts to settle a bit for us to develop some kind of mindful presence.

**Adam Breen:** And it's interesting when you're talking about that showing up and saying hello to yourself, it reminds me of more formal practices that I've been involved with in the past. For example, in a very structured tradition like Zen, there is a process that you go through to begin. you may sit in a specific way and you may put your hands together and...

**Adam Breen:** and bless the space or you may say namaste and some other tradition right but there's almost a ritualistic aspect that encourages that being here instead of being outside the gym or...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** outside of wherever it was that we were before that transitioning from doing mode as you said into being mode. do you think it's helpful for people to have their own little mini ritual or...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah,...

**Adam Breen:** habit that helps them to do phase one

**Cameron Aggs:** I mean I love that. I hadn't thought of it in that way before. but yeah, that is where meditating in the same place, the same room or on the same chair, the same cushion is great because you start to develop that kind of association between of that thing and the practice.

**Cameron Aggs:** and if there is anything in Buddhist practice there's a series of things outside of Zen that is done at the start of the practice which is taking refuge in Buddha Sana Dharma for example in my own practice I'm not myself doing that I probably should but if somebody does find anything that helps them make that transition Right? Because doing mode is such an intensely of the world kind of state of mind and in the world we've got so many things assailing our consciousness from the roles and responsibilities that we've got but then everything coming from social media and politics and our bodies. anything that helps us to shift from a mode of doing into a mode of being the sacred space of our own practice.

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**Cameron Aggs:** If you can do that, that's what would qualify as skillful means, I would think, and should be encouraged.

**Adam Breen:** And bringing it back to the everyday person's experience,...

**Adam Breen:** maybe that's as simple as the ritual of turning your phone off for 10 minutes, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. I mean, and to that point, I have to set my alarm and...

**Cameron Aggs:** I have to then throw my phone away from me. If I see it light up in the corner of my eye, I'm at danger of picking it up, So, keep your phone outside of arms length is a great tip for this. Yeah. Yes.

**Adam Breen:** and... give yourself that space. from the beginning. Mhm.

**Adam Breen:**

**Cameron Aggs:** A space where you'll feel comfortable and relaxed and in terms of this kind of starts to then edge on posture,

**Cameron Aggs:** so any way of sitting where the belly is open the back is straight and poor but not stiff. and so for me we talk about limit setting on one hand presence on one hand which is really for me it's the backbone of mindful awareness it's attentive it's present focus it's setting limits on distraction for me that's the backbone but then we have this soft belly and this open heart. And the breathing has to be in my opinion diaphragmatic in order for that space to open. And so sitting in any place that will allow the belly to be open is definitely to be encouraged. and there's a number of meditation postures to do that. Of course you could sit in a chair and do that as well.

**Cameron Aggs:** As long as this kind of thing of straight and tall but not stiff open and relaxed but not laxidascal again the meeting of these two things is space where mindful presence will emerge from.

**Adam Breen:** So you can sit in a chair. You don't have to sit cross-legged or in any fancy posture. sitting in a chair is totally valid for anyone, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** It really is. And for me, keeping my knees in line with or lower than my hips will tilt my pelvis in a way that has this more mindful posture to it, which I can absolutely do in a chair. So, as long as your knees are in line with or lower than your hip, your pelvis is tilted forward. Your back is straight and tall but not stiff, shoulders are relaxed, belly is open, the chest is open.

**Cameron Aggs:** to the extent to which that's possible for you given that some folks will have mobility issues and in which case you just do the best you can including there's a supine position. Yeah. So you lie down on your back the hands are at 45° the rest of the body is just pointed in a line. That's another very valid posture for meditation practice. some folks will sit in a comfy recliner chair. And look, the only thing to be aware of with that is in the recliner chair, you might get the relaxed element of mindfulness practice, but you might not get the alert part of the practice as well. So, you'll have to be very attentive to that and we should talk about that alert relax quality once more, the synthesis that leads to mindful awareness.

**Cameron Aggs:** But that's the watch out for if you're in a company chair.

**Adam Breen:** Okay. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** So the trick is to be able to allow the belly to expand, right? ...

**Cameron Aggs:** That's it. Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** I noticed the other day because I'm carrying a little bit of extra belly at the moment, when I was sitting cross-legged and I wasn't quite on the right angle,...

**Adam Breen:** I noticed that I was actually breathing from my chest and not so much from the belly, although I tend to think that I do breathe properly. And so, just even having that check and seeing where the breath is going to calibrate the way you're sitting, right? Mhm.

**Cameron Aggs:** Brilliant. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** And that's what one can bring awareness to. as a vehicle, the mind is wandered and we kind of bring it back and noticing I've spent the last five minutes in anxious preoccupation. 50 bucks says you've now started to chest breathe alongside of that.

**Cameron Aggs:** And noticing the degree to which that's true is super helpful because holy crap if I modify my breathing I can modify my mind. and that's a really wonderful insight. so most people have just a heap of muscle memory connected to chest breathing and bringing themselves down back into belly breathing takes a really long time. And so noticing your mind particularly if it's gone into rumination worry if it's connected to chest breathing is a great discipline and a wonderful technique for then just bringing the mind back and starting again.

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**Adam Breen:** Yeah, I must admit helpfully I was sitting in front of a mirror at the time and that was what helped me to notice that I was breathing from the chest.

**Cameron Aggs:** Brilliant. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** Do you think mirrors are useful?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. I do. Absolutely.

**Cameron Aggs:** And look, I teach two hands technique, and for anyone that got two hands free at the moment, one hand goes on the belly, the other on the chest. And as you're starting to breathe, you're starting to notice the pace and the position of your breath. so in terms of pace, is it rapid or is it slow? In terms of position, is the the bottom hand moving most as you breathe? And for many people, it will be the top hand that will be moving most. And so accepting that this is not a personal failure that this is, what humans do and what you do. It's about then just trying to then make it gradually more diaphragmatic. And the way I do that is to simply push the belly out as I breathe in. And as we'll cover, I think in our next podcast, there's also a straw breath technique to assist with this and other ways that we can help to become more diaphragmatic more quickly.

**Cameron Aggs:** But the two hands technique, one on the hand, one on the chest, one on the belly, and using that to am I in my chest from my belly? It's a great way to do it as well.

**Adam Breen:** I guess you'd call that reclaiming the belly, right? That's phase two where we're focusing on the breath in the belly and...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** starting to anchor that sense of self-awareness through paying attention to something and you might even say grounding oneself, I guess that that ties into the idea of the captain or...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** or invoking the captain in our experience. Is that right?

**Cameron Aggs:** It most certainly does. so from phase one, turning on the motor of mindfulness and transitioning from doing into being phase two is where the kind of captain of mindfulness inside.

**Cameron Aggs:** So when I think of a mindful state of awareness, I think of an inner captain who's on deck of my ship who is practicing awareness, acceptance, and limit setting who's able to go right, we've rested and We've transitioned. Come on, Let's get a bit serious, champ. And so the captain says, "All right, everyone, let's start to get our act together a bit. I want to be more on the diaphragm and I want to be more intentional and more attentive to the breath because in phase one, I'm still aware of the breath, but it's more of a tangential awareness or maybe it's 30% aware of the breath, 70% kind of in my thoughts, etc. And in phase two, the inner captain's going, "Right, we're meditating, folks. let's get on with it."

**Cameron Aggs:** And so it's that sense of let's try and pay a closer attention to the feeling of expansion as I breathe in the belly and contraction as I breathe out. In so doing, I'm really bringing my center of psychological gravity down into the base of my being to kind of establish a home base here, which of course is a very grounded place to come from.

**Cameron Aggs:** and it's that part of us that as we inside of ourselves, connected to our center, physiologically and psychologically to some extent, that then just increases the potential that we will switch our relaxation response on and we will get that sense of ex grounded attention where we feel this home base feeling which is such a wonderful gift of mindfulness practice and meditation in particular that we get to feel at home grounded in the base of our own physiological structure. And it's a strong safe place to be especially when paired with the attitudes of mindfulness being non-judging accepting charitable.

**Cameron Aggs:** So it's emotionally I'm creating this charitable accepting warm space and then physiologically I'm creating this grounded space and those two things combine then to create this kind of platform for safety for the rest of our meditation. Yeah. Yeah,...

**Adam Breen:** This comes from attachment theory and psychology as applied to adults as well as the idea of physically holding oneself and I guess if you're putting your hands on the chest and the belly, it's almost like you're giving yourself a mini hug as well. And that leads further to the availability of that feeling of safety, right?

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**Cameron Aggs:** it is.

**Cameron Aggs:** And that's very much to your earlier point too about do I have a flowers or a statute or something sacred in the space it's a way of skillfully ramping up the profundity of the space the sacredness of the space and it's interesting for one kind when I'm doing one hand on the belly one hand on the chest it's all very rudimentary I'm just assessing my breathing but the intention.

**Cameron Aggs:** It can be this pace of that reflects this sense of holding particularly in the belly I can feel that sense of holding physiologically myself with my hand my belly it's a nice safe place to be so that safe place and know developing a safe relationship with ourselves for me is so much of what meditation is from the viewpoint of

**Cameron Aggs:** the studio. It's becoming a better friend a better captain to myself, a safer place for myself, and the observatory, learning that thoughts themselves are not so scary.

Actually, they're kind of holographic, in the infirmary realizing this is a space where I can intentionally calm and do my emotional laundry, where I can switch from rumination to reflection, which makes everything feel better. all of this is about creating a safe place from the posture to the breath to the holding all of it is creating a safe place within.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** I think

**Adam Breen:** So we've been through phase one. We've done the warm up. We've shown up. We're transitioning from into being mode. The captain's coming out on deck, but he's still or...

**Adam Breen:** she's still surveying the situation. Maybe got a coffee in hand. waking up a little bit. and then we start reclaiming the belly. we're holding the belly. We're creating a sense of safety by focusing on the breath, anchoring awareness, and the captain's waking up and starting to exercise some direction around that,...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yep.

**Adam Breen:** as you said, by saying, "Okay, we need to be paying attention to the breath now," for example. So then I think phase three is more of a heart-c centered thing, right? It's where you acknowledge yourself

**Cameron Aggs:** And keeping in mind with the hands they can start at belly and chest but very quickly they can just transition to the legs or in the lap as well

**Cameron Aggs:** So yeah, captains on deck, getting more serious about becoming a bit more intentional and focused and this attention training the puppy for example and getting the crew to kind of quieten down and come into the practice. and so I think of that so my mind now has been on my belly and what I do is I move my attention then to the space of the heart in the middle of my chest to acknowledge the fellow that I'm meditating with, which is me, cuz this is one of the great realizations is that we're always in our own company, especially with meditation. And we're often not very good company, which is why meditation again is so hard, apart from having unrealistic expectations. Most of us are pretty crappy company to ourselves very often.

**Cameron Aggs:** but this is a studio where we train oursel to be better company to ourselves which interestingly just starts with a more courteous conversation with ourselves where we're not yelling at ourselves or berating ourselves or jumping to conclusions or what have you, and so there's a very interesting little experiment way of doing this phase three or of the practice and acknowledging where and it's called the greeting meditation where I greet myself as the guy who's meditating as if I was greeting a good friend who I hadn't seen for ages at a festival or on the street.

**Cameron Aggs:** And of course if I do that, I'm going to go, "Hi, John." "Hi, Adam.

**Adam Breen:** I

**Cameron Aggs:** Nice to see I haven't seen you in ages." How have you been? and what I notice is that very easily there is that atmosphere of positive regard or friendliness, right? there's that whole I am happy to see you. And if most of your listeners ask themselves this question, would you be happy to see yourself in meditation? How comfortable is that for you? Often that's not the case. We're angry with ourselves. We're kind of mean to ourselves or we're

disassociated from ourselves. But most people don't find it weird to say, "Cameron, you idiot." But most people find it hard to say, "Cameron, nice to see you in meditation."

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**Cameron Aggs:** which is really interesting, No problem with the Cameron, you're an idiot. Yeah, most people water off a duck's back. But to say, Cameron, nice to see you. Thank you for bringing me to this practice.

**Adam Breen:** Okay.

**Cameron Aggs:** I really appreciate and again, courtesy, Because Cameron hopped up at, 5:30 so he could do his little sit, he could have stayed in bed. He could have been on his phone, but he's come to meditation. He's brought me to meditation because I'm now the beneficiary of that earlier move. Cameron, thank you for bringing me here. This is what I do. Cuz the twing and throwing of psychological life is really interesting. We're sending and receiving messages from ourselves, very often. And so what I say to myself is, "Hi Cam, nice to see you in this meditation.

**Cameron Aggs:** you for bringing me here. And then I say back to myself, thank for bringing me here. Hey, thank you for showing up. I appreciate And that I really appreciate it bit to me is that more mark of I mean it, for realies, thank you, so it's a real politeness, just like someone who's gone out and bought you a coffee, come home and brought you a coffee because they knew you want one. Hey, thank you so much for going out and getting me a coffee and remembering and grabbing me a donut, thank you Cam for bringing me here. And that's even before we get to and Cam, how are you? So, in the greeting meditation, the first phase would just be that acknowledgement.

**Cameron Aggs:** And unless you think that we need to clarify something more, why don't I just guide the listener through a five minute practice where I step everyone through phase one and phase two fairly quickly and then we move into this acknowledging yourself or greeting yourself and just again meditation and...

**Adam Breen:** Yeah, let's go.

**Cameron Aggs:** as an observe what it's like to do this practice and what it can tell you about the state of your inner relationship right now. All right. So, sitting in a posture or lying down in a way that maximizes the back's ability to be straight. if you're sitting this back is kind of straight and tall but it's not stiff. The shoulders to the extent you can make them are relaxed.

**Cameron Aggs:** the belly is open and you're just kind of coming into your meditation by paying attention to the breath. You start to notice how it feels as the breath comes into your body. Start to notice a sense of expansion. And then as the breath flows out from the body, this sense of deflation. And instantly this brings you into the reality of the breath, how it feels in your body right now, what it's like for you mentally. And just noticing, observing, and continuing to just come back to an awareness of the breath wherever it's most vivid and accessible to you.

**Cameron Aggs:** So here we are turning on the motor of mindfulness transitioning into a time in practice where the inner mindful part of us says all right let's see if we can get this even more focused and so I want you to become really aware of the space of the belly or as far down into your chest as you can feel this sense of expansion. If your attention is in your belly, notice

what it feels like as your belly tightens on the exhalation. The skin tightens as you inhale and then the feeling of the skin loosening as you exhale.

**Cameron Aggs:** Bringing your attention to the base of your being. This feeling of the belly, potentially the bottom of your chest with a sense of this is how it feels for me right now. And then in phase three, move your attention to the center of your chest, the space of the heart, where you're simply going to acknowledge yourself as the person listening to this podcast, who has made the time and taken the effort to improve your state of being.

01:20:00

**Cameron Aggs:** today noticing of course that you're in your own company, aren't you? That you're sitting with yourself inside of yourself. And so when I guide you to notice what it feels like when you say to yourself, "Hi, using your name." And Hi, using your name. Nice to see you in this meditation. for bringing me here. Thank you for doing it. I really appreciate it. And just doing that silently inwardly now with a mind that notices. Hi. Using your name.

**Cameron Aggs:** Nice to see you in this meditation. Thank you for doing this practice. I really appreciate it. And then bring your attention back to the breath, back to the space of your belly or the bottom of your chest. And just noticing if it feels looser or tighter. Noticing if that felt a little bit weird or a lot like home. And then from here, just take three more long, slow, and deep breaths.

**Cameron Aggs:** And then when you're ready, come back into a space of listening. So, how did you find that, Adam?

**Adam Breen:** It was a nice shift in how I'm feeling. Excuse me. the phase three part acknowledging yourself was interesting for me.

**Adam Breen:** I did it a couple of times and when you said insert your name here, I actually went and did that the second time. so it was interesting to have a more direct conversation with myself by using my name,...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yes.

**Adam Breen:** I thought. and I did feel a shift in my attitude as a result. that was probably quite inspiring.

**Cameron Aggs:** Great. Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. playing around with that. And to that point of using your name, I very often have to pull my clients up because they'll explain or describe their experiences using you language.

**Cameron Aggs:** do you know when you come home and he hasn't done this thing and you feel really annoyed about that and people keep their own experience at arms length through the use of you language as opposed to when I come home and he hasn't done that I feel very and so this using our names is an intensification of that first person reality which of course will be deeply uncomfortable

**Cameron Aggs:** for many people who are used to keeping themselves and their experience at arms length. Yeah.



01:25:00

**Adam Breen:** be saying it to myself. So, I took your words and I repeated them, but it was in my own mental voice. and I thought I'd mention that because I've noticed in my own practice in the past, sometimes the voices of other people come up and I guess here it's important for us to be giving voice to things as ourself, right? I and Adam. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** or from your therapist's voice, you can kind of say it as they would to approximate this kind, courteous relationship. because we're so close to ourselves and we have so many grievances with ourselves when we go to say it, there is this whole background of a relationship that we have with ourselves, which has often been very critical or catastrophic. And then all of a sudden we're asking ourselves to be the captain, strong, firm, kind, polite, courteous. and many of us don't have the emotional, psychological infrastructure to speak to ourselves in a kind,...

**Adam Breen:** It's better than zero.

**Cameron Aggs:** courteous, firm way.

**Cameron Aggs:** which then makes meditation gym the growing of the mental muscles that would underpin a better relationship with ourselves and initially if you need to borrow my voice and how I would say it to you do do that because you're creating that little spot in your brain with my voice maybe that is still then wiring up your neurological circuits and it will become increasingly available

**Cameron Aggs:** to then say it in your own voice, depending on the person. and that's a nice hack. It's a lot better than zero and it's a really skillful way to do it. and even, a less, so in this phase three, just simply acknowledging ourselves like that greeting meditation, that's a very intense way of doing it. we're using our name. Heck, that's weird and nice to see that's not usually my experience. and now I'm thanking myself. I'm used to punching on myself, that's a lot.

**Cameron Aggs:** And so many people might find it easier in phase three to simply just say hello to themselves and hello to their experience, which might include, for somebody who's in pain or has high anxiety, hello tightness, hello Cameron or even just without saying hello Cameron, just hello basically and hello to the breath, hello to my body, hello to this exper experience.

**Cameron Aggs:** This kind of consciously acknowledging oneself the space is a wonderful prerequisite for kind of growing a more intimate relationship with ourselves and reconfiguring our self-t talk more generally.

**Adam Breen:** So there might be some rupture as I think you would say in your past relationship with yourself that again as you would say needs some repair and...

**Adam Breen:** maybe it's not going to get repaired in one session...

**Adam Breen:** but That makes me think that there's a role for the medic or even the cheerleader that we talked about in episode one here.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** And look, before we even get to medic and cheerleader, a really great point here is even as captain when we're saying hello to oursel, nice to see you, thanks for showing

up, so again, that's a little bit more abbrevi Hi, nice to see you. Thanks for showing up. I appreciate it. that can be done in a more matterofact way, a more courteous way, as opposed to this real loveydovey love your guts. Nice to see you, good luck. Have a great sit,

**Cameron Aggs:** So for everyone listening, how about just a courteous, polite, hi, nice to see you, have a good sit,...

**Cameron Aggs:** wishing yourself which is actually one of the components.

**Adam Breen:** It's like the person walks into the room.

**Adam Breen:** It's like the person walks into the room and...

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** you don't ignore them. You actually say hello.

**Cameron Aggs:** Which in that regard, meditation is also practice in not being an a\*\*, like you because someone walks into the room or joins your conversation, you would acknowledge them,...

01:30:00

**Adam Breen:** Oops. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** Hello. Even if you don't particularly like them, if you're a camp counselor and little Johnny Smith, who you have a hard time with, he's too loud or obnoxious or he's this or that, you still say, "Hey, little Johnny, how you going? good to see Welcome to camp."

**Cameron Aggs:** as just an act of again courtesy and in a way this is I guess kind of coming back then to love and loving communication as service so when I'm saying to little Johnny who I kind of find irritating hey little hey Johnny nice to have a great time at camp I'm being of service in that moment aren't I whether I really like little Johnny or not I'm being of service and so we can think of the same being true to ourselves as well. Hey, I'm here sitting, why not be courteous to myself and wish myself hi, have a good sit, good luck, which can then be a little bit playful as well. I know you're going to suck at it, but, good luck, so there is always an entry point, I would argue.

**Cameron Aggs:** unless there are certain times when maybe that's not true but for most of the time there should be an entry into a more acknowledging more courteous conversation and if we miss out this phase three of acknowledging ourselves as being the person in whom we are we're sitting with and I'm sitting to improve my own mental health that's why I'm doing it after all or emotional being or whatever it is if we miss that and we just try to bypass it I mean we can do that and that's fine. But I think we miss something very important and potentially very healing in our lives.

**Adam Breen:** So talking about healing then, I mentioned the medic earlier, and maybe this is a more advanced step. I'm not sure, but I'm just trying to piece together the captain, medic, and cheerleader model from episode one into...

**Adam Breen:** how that might fit here. if we've got some healing to do, I guess that's the medic's job, can you speak to that a little more?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, it absolutely is. Yeah, I'd love to. so, the captain's the one that's being courteous. Hi, nice to see Thanks for doing this. although good luck actually cheerleader but if I am hurting and we don't have to go Cam are you hurting like we already know that then I'm kind of putting on my medic hat to go what's hurting and thereby I'm kind of evoking the infirmary idea and I'm kind of pulling the string then on what's happening for me with curiosity coping and compassion

**Cameron Aggs:** and it's a little bit, we talk about the medic. to some extent, it is like an ambulance officer arriving at the scene of, for example, a seven-year-old who's fallen off the monkey bars and has broken their arm and let's say it's a neat break. So, the bones sticking straight out. And as it relates to the curious part of the ambulance officer or our internal medic, the first thing the ambo is going to be doing when they arrive is they're going to be asking questions, does this hurt? How did it happen? they're going to ascertain the nature of the wound, aren't they? And how the wound happened. and so that actually requires them to be very curious. so the same is true for us, right?

**Adam Breen:** Mhm.

**Cameron Aggs:** If I'm really upset about what that guy said or what's happening here or I'm feeling really stressed or strained, like we said last episode, the present moment doesn't come prepackaged. we have this general sense of discomfort or anger or out of sortsness, depressed mood, anxiety, and we need to curiously pull the string to go, what's the go with that? in the meditation, not ruminatively, but as much as we can, describing it reflectively. Im what am I angry at? I'm still angry about last night that, we didn't get to watch my show when it was my turn. okay. And so, what is it about that? we pulled the string. it's just that we also didn't get to do this other thing I wanted to do.

**Cameron Aggs:** And so ordinary I'd let it go but I'm feeling like my voice isn't getting heard here.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** And that could be its own thing and that's a simpler wound. Or it could be and this reminds me of how in my family of origin I was never heard, and then it's a more complex fracture or break, right? but I'll only know that if I'm willing to pull the string on what's going on, And follow the lead where it goes. And that's tricky because in order to really pull the string on our mad, sad, bad, and frightened feelings, we have to be open to experiencing our bad feelings, our mad feelings. And many of us aren't willing to do that. And so that gets complicated at that point.

01:35:00

**Cameron Aggs:** and we do either too much and we ruminate or worry about it all or we do too little and we avoid it or disassociate from it. but the medic is called upon to be curious and to have an attitude of coping, when was the last time a medic rocked up even to a very dramatic scene and you had this thought of, " my god, the ambo is losing their mind," You want to have a sense that the medic's in charge, And that's where we kind of come back to the coping part of the medic, that whatever this is, it's not going to kill me. Or in the case of the child has fallen off the monkey bars. All right, so they've got a fracture here or a break. this is not the end of the world and the hospital is nearby and they're going to be fine, right?

**Cameron Aggs:** But too much of that, they're going to be Risks coming across as being dismissive if it's not appropriately garnered in care and concern and Curious coping compassion for the fact that mom is losing her mind, kiddo is losing his mind, and trying to explain to that seven-year-old, son, it's just a simple break. And there There has to be that empathy that empathizes with the suffering while still having the backbone that you're going to be And so curious, coping, and compassion can all play out inside of our meditation when we think of meditation as a kind of an infirmary or as a place where we can do our emotional laundry.

**Cameron Aggs:** but of course most of us end up doing something more akin to, if we've kind of metaphorically fallen off the monkey bars. Cameron, why were you on the monkey bars in the first place? I told you not to go on the monkey bars. They're plainly unsafe, So, we'll drive the blame into ourselves or we'll be more catastrophically outside. these monkey bars they're plainly unsafe. I'm going to write to my counselor which of course taking effective action and with regards to all these things absolutely necessary at different moments but it's also about choosing the moment and in the space of meditation it's not the moment to be languishing unduly in I'm going to write to my counselor about these monkey bars it might be to note all right I am going to have to do something about that injury like I am going to have to talk to

**Cameron Aggs:** wifey or my boss about it but then we don't want a language there rather we want to tend to another way of describing it is if we were shot, for example, on battlefield by friendly fire. we get wounded all the time and often by people that love us, through the course of our lives. And at times, there's a part of us that's wounded and who really needs us. if a bloke's wounded on the battlefield, ...

**Adam Breen:** They need to go to the infirmary. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** he or she doesn't need us to be going, who shot that? And They need care, loving, compassionate, concerned right now, right? And then we'll talk about the friendly fire later on. And so the internal medic means developing a part of us that's capable of being coping, compassionate, and curious.

**Cameron Aggs:** because as I said last episode and I'll repeat it here. We can only ever really get compassionate to the extent to which we understand and are willing to look at the nature of the wound. And again most of us try to avoid that where we can thinking that looking at the wound is self-indulgent or what's the point? It is what it is and they don't realize that. But how I address that what it is makes all the difference in the world.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. So, there's a lot of material that we've covered in all of that today. it seems to me that you're not going to develop these skills that you're talking about of being able to switch between the observatory, the infirmary, the studio, the gangster, the medic, the cheerleader, the captain, etc. in one session and so maybe that's beyond the scope of this particular episode, but I know that you've got something really exciting coming up with meditation gym. You've got a series of courses that you're working towards. Would you like to wax lyrical a little bit about what people might be able to get from meditation in the future?

01:40:00

**Adam Breen:** And more so than just these series of podcasts when we Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah, I think Yeah. certainly what I'm very very cognizant of is that for meditation or mindfulness to lead to change, it has to be done regularly. knowing what

meditation is, etc. is just the longest distance from actually doing it. because most people are not so great with their mental health hygiene in terms of how friendly they are to themselves and also most people aren't so great with diaphragmatic breathing even when they know how to breathe. most people aren't consistently coming back to that.

**Cameron Aggs:** what I'm designing with your help is a series of courses that emphasize mindful breathing and three to four methods for really engaging your belly breathing. from a two hands technique, a straw breath technique and a pull technique. Yeah. for navigating mad, sad and stressed experiences as well as a mechanism for feeling more grounded and settled in our lives, more generally. and then this kind of of how do I construct a cap a captain, right? how do I construct an inner medic? How do I become curious, and that's where we're looking at a series of resources to take people step by step through that.

**Cameron Aggs:** And of course what that looks like exactly at the moment we're not so clear on but it does need to have this mindful breathing this kind of the behavioral basis and the biological basis of mindfulness and then this kind of captain medic cheerleader as the more intellectual hanging I guess that we can kind of drop the other mindfulness content off so that people can kind of understand okay is this a captain moment or is it a medic moment? And by the way, what kind of captain do I have? am I good at cheerleading? which is, for my money, that's gratitude when pointed outwardly. Hey, thank you world. has that thankful quality to it. but then it also has a self- appreciative quality to it. thank you Cam for meditating today. Thank you for not telling that guy who pushed in line to go and blah blah blah.

**Cameron Aggs:** thank you for writing that email before you left work today. just punching that out so you didn't have to deal with the fallout tomorrow. even though you resent having to do it because you don't think you just did it. And I thank you for that, gratitude, self- appreciation, and also best wishes. And here's a really interesting turnaround for particularly folks with anxiety and generalized anxiety that suffer a lot with what if. Yeah. and micromanaging a future that may or...

**Adam Breen:** Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** may not come and in all of its different contingencies. very often those folks and most of us are short on just best wishes. Hey good luck in that meeting. some of us you better not f\*\*\* that up or what if it goes badly. How about wishing ourselves good luck. May I be successful, may the world rise up to meet me.

**Cameron Aggs:** And again that's a discipline That's a mental muscle that you can build in meditation gym that we'll help you build. because that's what I want to do. I want to help people build the living skills that underpin the ability to treat ourselves with more kindness, compassion, wisdom, and skill. And meditation gym is my best effort at bringing that to life.

**Adam Breen:** Beautiful. ...

**Adam Breen:** meditation gym is probably going to have some mental health workouts that you can do just in the gym. And I think you were saying the other day you'd like it to be almost like a personal trainer for the mind. Would that be right?

**Cameron Aggs:** Yeah. Yeah.

01:45:00

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes. Yeah. Absolutely.

**Cameron Aggs:** and that it breaks down what seem meditation for example it seems like it's all right I'm gonna watch my breath and I'm going to do that for 10 minutes and then why would I want to do that and it's like let's break it down because there's a kind of a boring front end to that but there's a fascinating back end to meditation practice and how do we actually go about building those discrete skills and...

**Cameron Aggs:** how do we come to be a better neighbor to ourselves which our culture is relatively silent on. we're all very fixated about how to look good, to others and relationships and, achievement and a whole bunch of really important things. But in terms of how do I become a better friend to myself, our culture is not so good at that.

**Adam Breen:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Breen:** So, we're coming towards the tail end of the podcast episode now. as a second last question for listeners at home, if you've ever tried meditation and struggled or maybe you've never actually tried it in practice before, what's one thing that you'd want them to know? Mhm.

**Cameron Aggs:** come and just watch your mind. it's fascinating and try not to personalize your failings in just being loud at all being very loud.

**Adam Breen:** Hey,

**Cameron Aggs:** Think of that's what it's like almost like you're flying a plane. it's not that your plane is particularly loud. It's like flying a cessnug a two person plane is just very loud. It's so think of it like that. inhabiting a human life that's active and engaged in my world is going to be very loud and my lawn is going to be overgrowing and I'm going to be out of shape. it's going to take me a while to get into shape. And it's exactly the same as if you were to go to the gym for the first time. No one would think that they're going to look buff after a week or their first session, right?

**Adam Breen:** Right. Yeah.

**Cameron Aggs:** It's like, no, I'm going to have to do this for three six months, and then I'm going to start to look a bit buff. It's the same principle that applies to meditation gym.

**Adam Breen:** So, it's more about showing up as often as you can rather than trying to be perfect at the start.

**Cameron Aggs:** And to not catastrophize the fact that you're probably pretty s\* company with yourself. That's a very common thing. So if you're not a great friend to yourself, if you have a hard time in acknowledging yourself, think of that as just a fairly universal problem, but one that can be solved by repeated practice. And again, keeping in mind the training the puppy story, which will be up on our blog relatively soon.

**Cameron Aggs:** You know how we train the mind in meditation. Very similar to the love, the patient, but then the firmness that you would bring to training a puppy.

**Adam Breen:** beautiful. And Cam,...

**Adam Breen:** for listeners who are on the different streamers like Spotify or Apple, etc., who may not be aware of the meditation gym website, can you tell us where to go?

**Cameron Aggs:** So yeah, it is meditation-gym.com. and that will take you to the podcast and blog, and by the time you're listening to it, who knows what else we'll have up. you can sign up for courses that we're going to be bringing to bear this year. so it's going to be a wonderful resource. I'm really excited about it.

**Adam Breen:** Thank you so much for your time and intelligence and wisdom today. I'm sure that for the listeners at home and certainly for myself, we've got a lot out of what you've said. It's been a real deep dive into some relatively complex concepts and I think you've done a wonderful job of explaining them clearly and I'm really really looking forward to seeing the meditation gym itself come to life as I'm sure many listeners are too. So, thank you again for today. Namaste and...

**Adam Breen:** all that. And stay tuned for episode 3 listeners.

**Cameron Aggs:** Thanks, Adam.

**Cameron Aggs:** Bye now.

**Adam Breen:** You can. So, I've stopped my recording. not on mute though. Why not? I'm going to have to wrap up super fast, but I just wanted to have a quick debrief for a couple of minutes.

01:50:00

**Cameron Aggs:** Yes, mate.

**Adam Breen:** How do you feel about it?

Meeting ended after 01:50:13 🙌

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