

THE MEDITATION MASTER

Martin Gill chatted to davidji - an internationally recognised stress-management expert, corporate trainer, meditation teacher and author of the critically acclaimed 'de-stressifying: The Real-World Guide to Personal Empowerment, Lasting Fulfillment, and Peace of Mind'; and 'Secrets of Meditation: A Practical Guide to Inner Peace & Personal Transformation', winner of the Nautilus Book Award.



Previously you were a successful businessman for 20 years. What led you on your new journey to wholeness?

There was emptiness inside me. I was feeling out-of-balance, stressed out, working 100-hour weeks, going through the motions on auto-pilot, eating my lunch in five-minutes each day, impatiently burning through each day, living to work. I had traded in my morning meditation for a 5am-train ride to the World Trade Center, and I had traded my evening meditation for a glass of Scotch.

I was in deep emotional turbulence in the wake of 9/11. And one day, as I was walking in SoHo past a row of cardboard boxes that people were living in, a hand suddenly reached out, grabbed my leg, and a face peered up at me and uttered, "What's going to be on your tombstone?" Those words hit me like a ton of bricks.

When I got home that night and told my wife about my experience, she said, "Quit your job and go visit Deepak Chopra. He's holding a meditation retreat in Oxford, England. The answers will come." So I quit my job and headed off to hang with Deepak!! It was a sweet love-connection and re-igniting my meditation practice changed everything.

What was it like apprenticing under Deepak Chopra for 10 years?

Apprenticing under Deepak for a decade was one of those once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to study the ancient wisdom teachings, to sit at the feet of masters, to teach on a daily basis, and to be the fly on the wall to some of the most illuminating conversations I'd ever fathomed. I started working with him and co-founder Dr. David Simon as the COO of their Centre in San Diego. After a few years, my role evolved into becoming the Lead Educator of the Centre and travelling around the world teaching meditation, yoga and Ayurveda; but ultimately, the greatest gift was when I was appointed the first dean of Chopra Centre University. During my tenure, I trained more than 50,000 students and certified more than 1,000 teachers from around the world. Deepak gave to me selflessly, as did Dr. Simon, and to honour their legacy I've devoted my life to the same path.

What techniques do you teach as a stress-management expert?

Over the past 14 years, I've had the privilege of teaching people from every walk of life - bankers and Wall Street occupiers, politicians and the homeless, high-stress business people and yogis, members of the military, Special Forces and for the past three years members of Law Enforcement through my Blue Courage Awareness Training supported by the Department of Justice.

I teach awareness through mindfulness, meditation, visualisation - awareness of Self, awareness of others, and awareness of our surroundings. I teach the Yoga Vashista, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali in a real-world, practical application. I've developed many techniques combining modern neuroscience and the timeless wisdom of the East.

My 16-second technique has cultivated the most unlikely of meditators - from CEOs, to Dutch Special Forces, to policemen and women in their patrol cars.



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My focus right now is a five-pronged approach that teaches mastery of awareness, conscious choice making, emotional intelligence, non-violent communication, and discovering one's dharma. That's why I wrote 'destressifying' to help people transcend stress, step into their power, find deeper fulfillment and achieve true peace of mind.

Do you think stress can be good in anyway?

Stress is in the eye of the beholder. It's all about our interpretation of a given moment. Stress is how you respond when your needs are not met, and what we do with that information becomes the fabric of our life. When we interpret it as threatening, then it debilitates us. When we can view it as a challenge, it helps us to grow, stress has gotten a bad rap. We know that when we receive it in large doses and when it comes at us relentlessly that it damages us physiologically and emotionally - that's called chronic stress.

But when the moment where our needs are not met has a finite start and end, and we can view the situation as a challenge rather than a threat, we grow from the experience, we forge bonds with others, we expand our abilities... what doesn't kill us, does indeed make us stronger if our perception is that this is a growth experience.

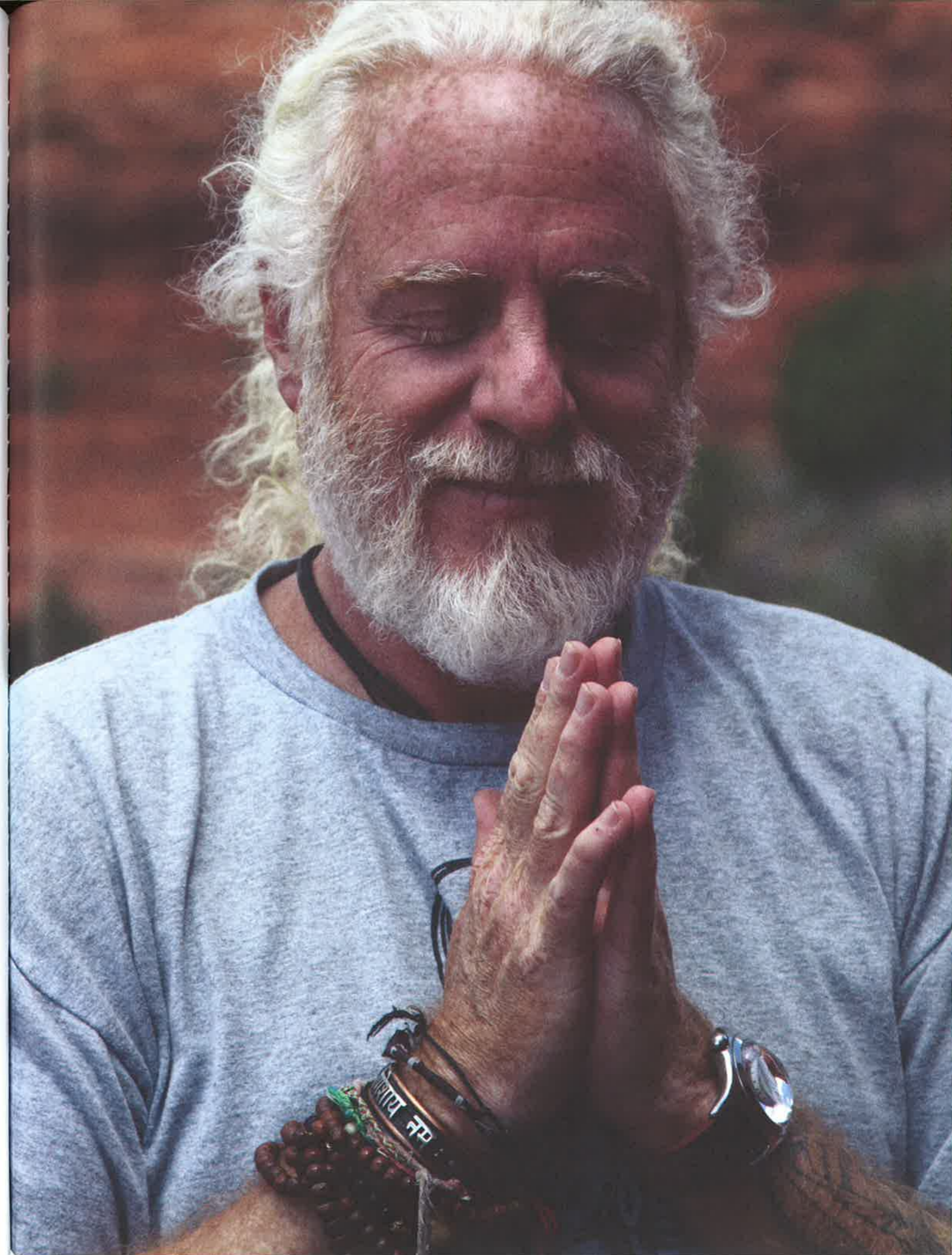
'destressifying' is about looking at life with new eyes - seeing the world as a series of challenges rather than threats. 'destressifying' helps you move beyond the conversation of whether stress is good or bad, it helps you transcend stress. So short term and with a purpose, stress will heal, nourish, inspire, and focus us. Any longer than that, it will most likely kill us.

How long have you been meditating, and why did you start?

I began my meditation journey in college; it was an experimental Asian studies class. We were instructed to raise our hand when we had a thought - in his hands, our Zen master carried an 18-inch bamboo stick, known as a kesaku. When I had a thought, I would raise my hand and he would silently walk up behind me and thwack me on the back. I only lasted in that school of meditation for two weeks. I found myself lying to my Zen master - and when your lying to your Zen master, it's time to move on. I then dove into drishti meditation through candle gazing, and then explored - sometimes for a few days and sometimes for a few years - mindfulness, metta and vipassana, chakra tuning, tantra, sound-healing, heart-opening, deep Kundalini awakening, and mantra. I wrote 'Secrets of Meditation' to demystify the world of meditation so people could connect to the practice that most resonates with them.

Can you give any tips for those who struggle meditating?

If you are doing it, you're doing it right. The only bad meditation is the one you don't show up for. You can meditate any time throughout the day, and all it takes is 16-seconds. Oh and guess what? We have between 60,000-80,000 thoughts a day - that's one thought every 1.2 seconds. So don't try to clear your mind or stop thoughts. They are part of the practice - they are not distractions - they are your meditation. No thoughts... flat-lining; thoughts... ALIVE! So the next time you have thoughts in your meditation, instead of scolding yourself, smile and celebrate and remind yourself, "I'm alive! How cool is that?"





You created the 21-day meditation process. Can you explain a little about this?

It's often been said that it takes 21-days to create a habit. Research shows that it is more effective to create change by introducing new habits instead of focusing on self-discipline. So, in other words, it's better to introduce something new into your life to take the place of a bad habit instead of trying to use discipline to stop the bad habit. It's been said that it takes approximately 21-days to transition old memory patterns into new ones.

I've changed my thinking on that over the past 10-years. Now I believe 40-days is when a shift can really take hold. 21-days creates a change but 40-days is when transformation truly happens. But 21-days is the halfway point to 40-days, so you can't get to lasting transformation with at least a 21-day shift. If nothing else, 21-day meditation experiences, challenges, and programmes help new meditators dip their toes in the waters of stillness and sets a solid trajectory to creating a daily practice.

You also teach 'conscious choice making'. Can you provide an example?

We are conditioned beings. Behaviours we learned as children have been reinforced over decades, so we react rather than respond in many situations. Especially when 'fight or flight' kicks in and we are more reflexive than reflective. If we can introduce a pattern to interrupt into our knee-jerk reactions - that break in our conditioned behaviour, we can create the space for a more patient, intuitive, and creative response. An example of conscious choice making would be taking a 16-second break from cleaning the house, tending to kids, replying to emails, arguing with a co-worker or spouse etc.

Can you provide a simple technique for our readers to practise from your book 'de-stressifying'?

Of all the techniques that I've shared throughout the world, the one with the most powerful effect is perhaps the simplest one. It's a game changer, and I call it "16 seconds to clarity" (or 16-seconds for short.) Not only does it have a profound de-stressifying impact in the moment, but it can also be the foundation for a long-lasting daily practice.

Think of something that has irritated or bothered you in the past few days. It could be a difficult conversation, a disappointment or an unmet expectation. (Don't go too deep. This isn't therapy.) Take a few moments to settle into that space.

Now take a long, slow, deep breath in through your nostrils, and count to four. Observe the air as it moves into your nostrils and to the back of your throat. Watch your breath as it moves down your chest and deep into your lungs. Feel your belly expand.

Observe your belly being filled, and hold that breath in to the count of four. Now slowly, to the count of four, release your breath and watch it as it moves up into your chest, into your throat, into your sinuses, and out through your nostrils.



And when the last wisp of air is out of you, hold that breath out to the count of four. And observe it, watch it, witness it... as it dissipates into the air. In those 16-seconds you were totally present. You were not thinking about the past or any of its grievances or regrets, nor moving into the future with all its predictions and projections. You were not thinking about your irritation. Your mind is a little calmer; your heartbeat has slowed a bit. You've filled your body with heavily oxygenated blood and nourishing hormones, and in the process, you've released a little bit of stress.

What do you think are the most stressful life situations, and how can we deal with them?

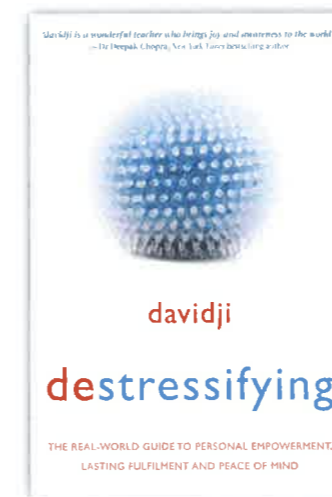
We are often spinning multiple unmet needs and stressors on an hourly basis. If we practise meditation every day, if we commit to the five cores of de-stressifying by mastering our awareness, meeting our needs more consistently, heightening our emotional intelligence, communicating more consciously, and leaning into our dharma, we start to transcend the pain, irritation, and confusion that comes with living life in a conditioned way. de-stressifying is a way of life. Committing to daily practices of kindness, compassion, taking deep breaths, forgiving quickly, letting go of what no longer serves us, and allowing new nourishing behaviours into our life - then we move beyond dealing with them, we truly transcend them.

Do you ever get stressed, and if so, how do you relax?

We all can control the speed and frequency with which life comes at us. I spend a lot of time in stillness and silence and that allows me to receive the world in slow motion. I have a pretty busy schedule and like all of us - there are a lot of moving parts. But I am committed to lightening the load on my heart, meditating throughout the day and living a 'namaste existence' with every one I see - including someone who irritates me or with whom I hold a grievance - is an expression of the divine.

It's a daily practice and an on-going commitment to a better life, and a better world. But just like we've all asked 'what would Jesus do, or what would Buddha do?' I ask myself, "What would the best version of me do right now?"

For more information, visit davidji.com



de-stressifying by davidji
(Hay House) £9.89
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