

# **MINDFULNESS** **FOR THE ULTIMATE ATHLETE**

Mastering the Balance  
Between *Power* and *Peace*

Prince Daniels Jr.

## **Mindfulness for the Ultimate Athlete**

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*This book is dedicated to the inner God that dwells in every living being in the world. May the words LOVE and GRATITUDE heal us. Peace*



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# PREFACE

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*The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that they can be great in whatever they want to do.*

—KOBE BRYANT

The intentions shared in this book cannot be easily expressed; words are inadequate to describe the true essence of what I want to convey. But if you read these pages with an open mind and an open heart, insights will appear in their purest and most truthful form.

The primary focus of this book is to teach both aspiring and experienced professional athletes how to cultivate their body, mind and spirit into a high level of maturity that leads to achieving a state called “the zone” in which you are functioning as an integrated whole. While exercise, skill training, and nutrition are all important, reaching and sustaining an experience of the zone can only be achieved through the practice of mindfulness and meditation. When these techniques are applied diligently and in a disciplined way, they will take you where you want to go, helping you to access your natural ability to blossom and flourish and manifest your biggest dreams. Why take your game to the next level when you can take it to the highest level? The ultimate level?

This book provides invaluable tools and instructions that some of the world’s best athletes have utilized to fuel their success. To follow in their footsteps—or even surpass them—you will need to remember two important things:

First, knowledge acquired is dead without application. Period. You will not become the ultimate athlete just by reading a book. You will not become the ultimate athlete by simply repeating a mantra and expecting something miraculous to occur. Faith without works—without action—will not take you where you want to go. Do the work for the work's sake. Don't look for the rewards, but do envision the outcome. The rewards will be a natural by-product of your effort.

Second, remember this sequence for efficient meditation: Always, always relax the body first, then relax the mind. Once the body and mind connect harmoniously in relaxation, an opening to the spirit naturally occurs, and you will then be able to have a fruitful meditation session.

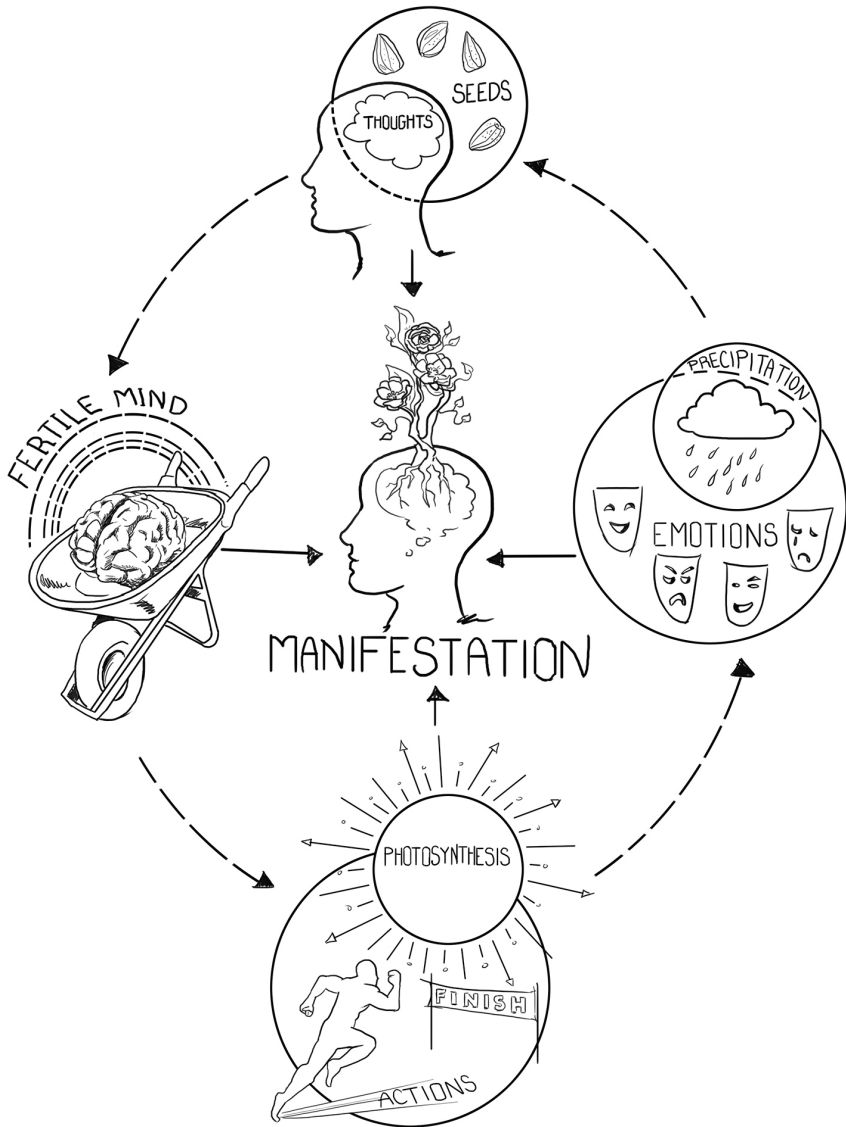
One more thing: Before immersing yourself in this book, remember to practice good habits such as eating right, reading inspirational material, getting proper sleep, taking care of your body, and cultivating a healthy relationship with yourself. These form the bedrock of a wholesome life and will accelerate the results of your practice.

To align yourself with the ultimate path, contemplate and absorb this simple and practical concept:

*When you plant an apple seed in the ground, after some time that apple seed will grow to become an apple tree. Not an orange tree or a banana tree. This is the universal law.*

In short, know that you are unique—there is no one quite like you. Practicing good habits is like planting good seeds: Inevitably, good outcomes will germinate and blossom, reflecting and supporting your unique self.







## FOREWORD

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It's hard to put into words the sensation of being in the zone. On one hand, you feel you have control, like a martial artist or Neo in *The Matrix*. On the other, you're at peace, as if on a busy New York City street but there's only your own thoughts to be heard. Now I don't mean you're in your zone listening to your headphones as your go your merry way. I'm referring to a focus that filters out the current noise and distractions of everyday life and that is laser-focused on the objective at hand. Finding that focus is difficult if there is no vision.

If you cannot envision the best version of yourself, what do you have to work toward? I 100 percent agree with Prince in this book when he says, and I summarize, the spirit is the initial spark giving the vision. Then the mind formulates a plan to get there, your mission if you accept. Lastly, the mind tells the body to act out this vision, creating a perfectly integrated system, spirit, mind, and body capable of overcoming any obstacle.

More important than finding the zone itself is the process. As a former athlete and in my time thus far on this earth, I can attest to the fact that being diligent in the process of becoming that best version of self requires patience—it's not instant coffee. It requires perseverance for when you're brought to your knees but more importantly requires a blueprint so when you're down you're still affixed on the goal you've set for yourself.

I try to operate myself as a business day by day, with one main principle: practicing perfecting any task undertaken. I know I'm not perfect, but giving a perfect effort is nothing more than a mindset.

My father used to tell me that if you're going to do something, do it right. Simply put, how do we know how well we can do anything if we don't give our best attitude and effort?

This leads me back to my goal of being one of the best receivers to play the game. A good friend of mine, Derrick Moore, or "Dmo," taught me the power of meditation throughout college and even early in my NFL career. After severely frustrating seasons to begin my career, the losing began taking its toll. It was recommended I meditate, just spend time five minutes a day in silence, allowing all my issues, distractions, and priorities to fall by the wayside. Over time that five minutes turned into fifteen, twenty minutes, and so on, as I began to armor myself via meditation so that the daily distractions merely became speed bumps on the way to the best version of myself.

It starts with that spark the spirit ignites and that the mind then sets forth as a mission, in turn telling the body to move. For a good business to operate well, it must keep up with what's going in and out of the company, operating expenses, net profits, etc. In turn, that company can now gauge performance based off past performance or basic requirements. Similarly, the body must be conscious of what's going on if it wants to operate to its potential.

I remember the days I'd visualize myself making a great play only for those visions to come to fruition. I couldn't understand why at first, and it seemed so surreal, but the more it happened, the more I realized this zone I continuously fall into is a direct reflection of the efforts committed up to that point in time. It's the perfect practice, the repetition, the great attitude and effort that allow you to be the best version of yourself.

Through our actions we can begin to be our best by focusing our thoughts through meditation, embracing failures and using them as stepping stones, knowing that when you add Spirit to the equation of hard work and effort, you might just get something supernatural. To all who are trying to find the zone, start by stacking good days of work on top of good days and watch how one day those efforts are repaid. Remember, it's a process.

—Calvin "Megatron" Johnson Jr.

# INTRODUCTION

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I was five years old, living in family housing on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi. It was Christmas Eve, and like most kids, I was excited because Santa Claus was coming and that meant presents. But we didn't have a chimney, and I was worried. "How is Santa gonna get in?" I asked my parents. "Will he come through the front door?" They assured me that he'd find a way and told me to go to sleep.

During the night I got up to use the bathroom and couldn't help walking down our long hallway to peek around the corner and into the living room. And there it was: a snazzy new BMX bicycle just my height with a bow on top. I hurried back and went to sleep, thrilled to be getting a new bike. Later that same night, I had a dream of riding that bike. It felt like riding on clouds, such a euphoric experience, and so real it felt like it was actually happening.

The next morning, I woke up with a mission, focusing only on that bike. Then I saw the training wheels. I ran to my mom and said, "Ma, last night I had a dream that I can ride my bike without training wheels. I really want to do that!"

She scoffed. "You've never even ridden a bike. You don't know how."

"I know, I know," I said excitedly, "but I did it in my dreams. I rode my bike without training wheels. Can we take them off?"

"You'll have to ask your dad."

And so I did. He was my stepdad, but I thought of him as my real father because he was always positive and honest with me. He taught me good morals and values and was there when I needed him. I will always be grateful for his influence on my life.

“If you think you can ride your bike without training wheels,” he said, “then let’s go!”

So I got my helmet, went outside, and watched him take off the training wheels. I started getting on the bike, but I was pretty short—my toes were just touching the ground. So I used the curb to help me get up. And then I immediately toppled over. I felt hot inside, and my eyes watered. I was embarrassed—but not for long. As my dad stood there patiently, ready to help if I needed it, I got up and tried again, and fell over again, but I was more prepared this time. It still felt bad, and I held back tears, but then I looked across the street and saw the curb on the other side of the road. It was taller. I walked over with my bike, hoisted myself up, put my foot on the pedal, and pressed down. Then I did so with the other leg with some extra force, and off I went, holding onto the handlebars, gaining control, pedaling, and balancing. And for a moment, everything kind of disappeared because I was in a pure state of bliss, riding and riding and riding. And then *boom!* I crashed into a green trash can. I didn’t see *that* in my dream! But I jumped up in jubilation, ecstatic that my dream had become a reality.



This experience had a profound effect on me. I became convinced that each of us has an innate ability to accomplish whatever we can visualize and believe in; a sense of possibility and potential ignites the process of manifesting what we want. As time went on, I had similar experiences that I understood as representing the zone—the best version of you at any point in time. In order to get there, you need to connect with what I call your “Inner-G,” or your inner genius—the unique energy that defines who you are at the deepest level.

This is not an easy thing to do. It takes commitment and focus and a belief in your potential. You don’t have to be the best in the world at something to be ultimate; you only have to be the best version of yourself, both as an athlete and as a person. The image of a samurai warrior is a good example of what I’m trying to convey.

The samurai began as members of the Japanese military in the twelfth century. Their primary role was protection, not aggression. In addition to their superior skills as swordsmen, they cultivated discipline, balance, mental concentration, and a focus on the present moment—each one a quality of inner strength that defines an ultimate athlete.

Some of my inspiration for this book came from George Leonard, whom I consider a modern-day samurai. He was a unique individual, both an ultimate athlete (a fifth-degree blackbelt in aikido) and one of the founders of the human potential movement of the 1970s. He emphasized the importance of balancing our mental and physical abilities and wrote a number of books about this connection. In one of them, he said, “The athlete that dwells in each of us is more than an abstract ideal. It is a living presence that can change the way we feel and live . . . [It is] the ideal unity of physical and spiritual.”<sup>1</sup>

This unity is what the practice of mindfulness and meditation can bring to athletes. They are powerful tools for helping us get out of our own way, overcoming all the noise and programming that keep us from our goals. The idea that such a practice can help athletes improve their mental, emotional, and spiritual fitness isn’t new—numerous studies have been done on their benefits to people in all walks of life—but connecting these improvements to enhanced athletic performance is a recent discovery. Much of that research will be presented throughout this book.

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## **How This Book Is Structured**

*Mindfulness for the Ultimate Athlete* is divided into two main sections: Power and Peace. Power refers to the tangible, and Peace to the intangible. Both of them are present in the core of the ultimate athlete, and both need to be in balance. If you try to power your way

through everything, you will encounter destruction. If you are too peaceful, there's a danger of passivity and submissiveness.

Power, for me, is about action and includes both the body and the mind. In school and in sports, we learned that power is considered a strength, not a weakness. Someone with power usually comes out ahead. They command respect. And so physical power, used wisely, is good.

The power of the mind is also respected. Mental strength is experienced as having knowledge and information about a subject or a situation and also as the ability to control one's thoughts and emotions. We don't know quite as much about the mind as we do about the body when it comes to athletic performance, but evidence of its impact continues to grow.

Peace is about stillness, and it's more mysterious than Power. In this book I look at peace and the role it plays in the life of the ultimate athlete through the lenses of the spirit and the zone. Its essence is intangible, but when you have those experiences, when your spirit moves you or when everything just seems to click, you know it. We don't have the same knowledge or insights about these intangible forces as we do about the body, or even the mind, but they are equally powerful, perhaps more so.

But the two need to be balanced and their use put to good ends. As with any polarities—hot and cold, up and down, east and west, ebb and flow—Power and Peace make up a whole. Both are necessary. Together they form a single unit, a complete and indivisible whole. When your body, mind, and spirit align, the zone is in reach, which is where Power and Peace come together. The more you learn about them and act on that knowledge, the more empowered you become to accomplish the goals you set for yourself. Each of those four components is briefly described below.

### ***The Body***

During my career as a professional football player, fitness was always defined in terms of physical development, outer appearance, and performance. This archaic way of thinking helped me reach a



pinnacle of strength and endurance, but on the inside, I felt weak and unfulfilled, as if there was another level I couldn't reach, other muscles and potential I hadn't tapped into. For example, I was convinced that I could run faster and did everything I could to make that so. My mind fixated on factoring in and processing all the equations of speed, trying to connect the dots between what my spirit was convinced I could do and my body actually doing it. *Run faster!* became my mantra, and if I didn't, I felt like a failure.

I then discovered that true fitness is composed of three interlocking parts: the mind, the body, and the spirit. Taking care of your body through nutrition and proper rest is still a priority, but your body is affected by your thoughts, emotions, and the overall quality of your energy, which influences those thoughts and emotions. I realized that my obsession with physical improvement while tuning out my mind and spirit was starting to work against me. I was feeling disconnected. Only when I started to focus on strengthening my mind and my spirit did I begin to unlock my physical potential. The ultimate athlete learns that true power comes only when they've achieved a balance of inner peace and external performance.

### ***The Mind***

By using meditation to hone the power of your mind and drawing on the peace that comes when you feel spiritually whole, you can convert energy into matter and turn your dreams into reality. Your mind is the bridge between your spirit, brain, and body. Said another way, what you focus on and energize with your emotions you bring into being, so you want that focus to be clear and those emotions to be healthy. When you take time for deep contemplation, when you exercise consistently and mindfully, you will build more mental strength, increase brain function, lift your mood, and attain better health, which will translate to continual improvements in your chosen sport. The mind is a gym, and meditation is the workout that will unleash your inner and outer potential.

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### ***The Spirit***

The third pillar of true fitness is spiritual fitness. Through the practice of meditation, we can increase our awareness, courage, focus, concentration, and inner tranquility. As we become more in tune with our spiritual self, we become more attuned to who we are and what we're supposed to do in this life. As an athlete aspiring to "ultimate," you will put yourself under tremendous pressure. Things will get hard. There will be dark moments. You will have to dig a bit deeper to see beyond. The way to get through it is to be spiritually rooted, connected with your inner source of inspiration, motivation, and belief. When you are in touch with your inner spirit, your inner fire, you can get through anything.

Ultimate also means excellence not just in how you perform but in who you are—to be and do your best both in and out of the arena of competition. Once professional football was no longer a significant part of my life, I went through a period when I didn't know how to cope. It was difficult for my mind to break its routines and habits, to set new goals and find my identity. I deepened my practice of meditation and realized that my spiritual being was directly connected to my physical experience. As I began to understand myself more deeply through this interconnectedness, I began putting the pieces together again. Magnetizing, empathizing, and communicating with like-spirited people took me to a whole new level of purpose and self-confidence.

To live a wholesome and successful life, you first have to learn about yourself. When you do, you'll be able to understand others because, in the end, we're all the same on the inside. Access to your true spirit, to inner clarity and insight, comes from the practice of mindfulness and the quietness of meditation.

### ***The Zone***

When all three pillars of fitness have been developed, you are ready to enter the zone. For me, the zone occurs when I experience my best self. Some have described it as a kind of flow state in which the awareness of time seems to stop and everything is perfectly

coordinated. You feel locked in. There is only the present moment and effortless action. It's a space of enhanced confidence and focus where the entire self—body, mind and spirit—is operating as a whole. As an athlete, your experience of the zone is a direct communication that you have pushed yourself to the outer edge of your limits, the outer edge of your physical ability. You have reached an important milestone and are ready to go even further.

The practice of meditation is also a practice for experiencing the zone. Like the zone, it's an altered state of consciousness. The more you practice, the more you sharpen your focus and calm your mind, the greater the likelihood that you will enter a flow, a state of steady awareness and effortless concentration. The more you experience this state, the easier it is to return to it. A consistent practice prepares you for breakthrough experiences not just during training or athletic performance but in every aspect of your life.

### **Practice Your Way to Ultimate**

To get the most from the chapters to come, approach this book with an open mind, insurmountable faith, focus, and commitment. Use the knowledge you gain as a tool and apply it so that you can honestly evaluate its impact.

By absorbing the ideas presented here and practicing the exercises provided as consistently as you can, you will begin to align your body, mind, and spirit, emotions, and energy into a synchronicity that will eventually unfold into a flow. Like a flower from a seed, your efforts will empower the athlete in you to reach the level of ultimate—the top of your potential. Are you ready to take your game to the highest level you can imagine? There's an infinitesimal difference between being good and being great, so small that it's easy to overlook. This book will help you jump that gap.

