

**Audio Transcript for Episode 505: “Mindfulness, The Present Moment, and Non-Judgment” with
Tianna Soto**

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.

TIANNA SOTO: “So mindfulness, as I've come to learn and understand it, is bringing your awareness to the present moment, and not judging what comes up in that present moment. And the non-judgment piece is so huge, because a lot of times, when we tune into ourselves, a lot comes up to the surface.”

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CHAD MOSES: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. I'm your host, Chad Moses, and in each episode we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery. If any of the topics we discuss or the stories we share feel too heavy for you, know that it's OK to pause, to restart, or to stop altogether. As we discover new stories, we hope to remind you that your story is important.

[music playing]

CHAD

Mindfulness. It's become a bit of a buzzword. But boiling it down to a single word does it a bit of disservice. Mindfulness can take the shape of various forms of meditation, yoga practices, immersing ourselves in nature, noticing our breath, or tapping into our senses.

But how does mindfulness, and all the avenues it involves, intersect with mental health? How can our awareness of the present moment, of a tangible aspect of reality change or improve our inner world?

To help us explore and understand this, we're going to be joined by Tianna Soto. Tianna is a Puerto Rican, Jamaican-Chinese writer, speaker, and mental health educator based in New York City. She received a Masters in Clinical Psychology in Education from Columbia University and is a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor. And, I might add, a To Write Love on Her Arms Intern Program alumnus. Her ongoing mission is to empower others to embrace their journey with clarity and confidence.

We hope you enjoy the conversation, which includes a guided body scan meditation at the very end. So without further ado, let's get started.

[music playing]

CHAD

Tiana, thank you so much for joining us. I know that you are in the midst of a lot of travel and a lot of busyness even as this year is so young, but thank you for finding the time to sit down with us.

TIANNA

Oh my gosh, of course. Thank you so much for having me. I had this moment when you were introducing me where I'm very touched to be connected to you all for so many years. It's been so amazing to see To Write Love grow and shift and evolve. And I just really appreciate you having me. So thank you.

CHAD

Well, that's reflected right back at you. It has been such a joy to see, you know, your story and your life and your talents really bloom in the midst of, you know, some chaotic times, and also, in some grandiose ways. So let's start there. Our conversation today is on stillness, is on mindfulness, is on meditation. But I'd like to kind of start there. Well, what is mindfulness? What is the topic that we are talking about today?

TIANNA

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, there's so many places we could theoretically begin with talking about mindfulness. But I guess I can share a little bit of my story and what mindfulness means to me. It's a pretty broad term that I think is very buzzy nowadays, especially in western—meaning, like, mostly United States—culture. And I came to understand mindfulness, probably not until the end of college and graduating. But when I think back to my time in college, I was quite disconnected from myself in mind and body and spirit and soul. Not every day, but on a lot of days. If there are any college students listening, or just working professionals, you know how chaotic our world can be and how busy things can get. And when I think of myself as a younger person and as a student, I felt like I was just going through the motions. I wasn't really present with my thoughts and my body. And I was just trying to kind of check things off of my to do list every day, constantly running around trying to stay afloat. Back then I wasn't really thinking about terms like mindfulness or meditation. I'd heard about them used in spiritual context and some educational context, but I didn't really have a personal connection or practice to it. And my senior year of college, I became very burnt out. Again, if there's any college students listening and maybe you're having senioritis you'll know what I'm talking about. But I certainly had that feeling and was ready to graduate, didn't really know what I wanted to do after school, was passionate about 2 million things and couldn't make up my mind. But at the very core, I was super tired. I had packed my plate so heavily with obligations and classes and extracurriculars and leadership roles that I was unwell. So I wasn't sleeping great, was getting a lot of headaches. Didn't really want to hang out with friends, pretty anxious, pretty depressed at times. And that's how I met mindfulness. I'll never forget one day during my senior year of college being so exhausted and burnt out and I'm pretty sure I was about to go to acapella practice or something like that. Some obligation I had to run to yet again. And I remember sitting in my room, and like having this really heavy cry, and realizing that my body couldn't take anymore what I had been putting it through for years. And something told me to go to YouTube and try a yoga video. Up until this point, I had never done yoga before and I was really introduced to mindfulness, I'd say on YouTube. Started doing gentle yoga stretches, learning about my body, and I realized how not mindful I had been for so long. So mindfulness as I've come to learn and understand it is bringing your awareness to the present moment, and not judging what comes up in that present moment. And the non-judgment piece is so huge, because a lot of times, when we tune into ourselves, a lot comes up to the surface. I know that was a long story, but that's kind of how I arrived to this work.

CHAD

Mindfulness kind of revealed itself to you as a therapeutic thing, not as a BuzzFeed trend. It wasn't in, kind of, the popular vernacular at that moment. But we have seen it over the years become a bit more familiar. Just in conversation, you see headlines about mindfulness meditation, you see a number of books on it, and you said mindfulness is about being attentive to the moment but so many things are trying to pull us away from that. How do you see these past couple years, with vaguely everything around us, really kind of adding to this cultural intrigue about mindfulness? What is it about these past few years that has made mindfulness more of something that we want to chase, more something that we're interested in investing our time into?

TIANNA

I think that there's so much chaos—not even what I think, there *is* so much chaos in this country and in this world, like you said, a lot is competing for our attention. I think about my never-ending email inbox or

notifications on my phone, or if you're a student, like, checking things off your to-do list. I find that because our outer world, our external world, can be so loud and chaotic and busy, that lately there's been kind of a shift in people wanting to make their inner world the opposite of that. Which I think is a lot easier said than done. But at least in my world, and in folks that I've worked with, I've seen that a lot. It's like maybe almost a sense of trying to control your experience. And I'm hesitant to use the word control, because that can get a little sticky. But I find that when the outside world is loud and moving quickly, you know, there might be this need to make our inner world a little more still and peaceful. I also think that in the past year, a lot of folks are talking about this thing called The Great Resignation where a lot of people are leaving their chaotic jobs and seeking opportunities that are more fulfilling and speak to people's passions. And people are really being forced to think about what matters to them and what's actually important. And at the end of the day when you're dealing with health concerns, campus closures, all of these things that disrupt our life and create turbulence, all of that can push us in a direction of perspective and realizing like, "Hey, actually, my family is really important to me," or "My significant other is my biggest support system and I want to spend more time with them instead of having all these late nights at the office." So yeah, I think people are being kind of forced but also asked to consider what is really important to them and for some that's taking care of their body and health. I think a lot of people who hear about yoga or see yoga content online assume that it's about being flexible and bendy and doing all these, you know, really intense postures. But for me, and I think at the very core of yoga, is the practice of intentionally carving out time for yourself. So if it's sitting on the ground or laying on your mat in your dorm room, or going for a little stretch break in your house, whatever it is, that is yoga. And so for me, I found that that practice of carving out time for myself was in itself mindfulness. In college, I just never did that. And so when I rolled my mat out and made the intentional decision to sit down and be free of distraction, be free of my laptop and all of that, that kind of woke me up to what mindfulness can do, which is the chaos of the world kind of melts away and you're forced to be present with yourself.

CHAD

It sounded like your yoga practice, your mindfulness practice began, not when you began to stretch but when you decided, "Now is the time I'm going to unroll the mat." It strikes me that it is rather easy to start a mindfulness journey. Now, cultivating that will, of course, take a lifetime. But the first step can be as simple as just making a decision. Saying, "Hey, here is something I'm going to do for myself."

TIANNA

Absolutely. I think that's exactly what it is, at least for me. And mindfulness and meditation and yoga and all these great practices will mean something different to everyone. But I think mindfulness, that act of bringing your awareness to the present moment without judgment *is* a decision. Whether it's, you know, the choice to turn off your notifications, or go on Do Not Disturb so that you can protect your peace during the work day, taking a break at work to have 10 deep breaths, like that is a decision you're making to pause the chaos that's going on, show up for yourself and, I don't know, have a moment of stillness. Earlier I was on a flight yesterday and the turbulence was quite bad. There was a storm happening and the pilot was making all these announcements, didn't want the flight attendants moving around because the weather was truly turbulent. And I remember getting a little nervous at times, I had been sort of tired on the plane. And I remember thinking, "OK, I cannot control the weather, I cannot control this plane. But I can control how I'm showing up in this moment. And I'm going to put my laptop down and breathe." So again, with that intention piece and the decision to carve out time. It is easy to start but I think sticking with it sometimes can be harder in the long term.

CHAD

We had a brief journey into this theme on our last episode of the podcast. We were talking about picking battles that you're able to win, that you don't need to get it all right all at once. But a lot of it's being aware

of the context that you find yourself in. “Am I on the ground? Or am I several tens of thousands of feet in the air? And what can I control in this moment?” And, you know, that's probably the easiest example. But there's so many things that are going around, I think it's so important to be aware of where we are and what we are and what's happening around us. And if everything is feeling chaotic, what are the tiny things that we can control? Can I find my pulse for just a second? Can I identify a path of least resistance to an exit where I can feel the sun, where I can breathe fresh air, where I can remove myself from a crowd of people? Can I turn my phone on Do Not Disturb? So it's, yeah, it's not about getting it all right. But it's about finding what are the things that I can chalk up as a win in these moments?

TIANNA

Absolutely. And it's all about finding what works for you, as well. I think when people hear mindfulness, there is a pressure to get it all right, or they associate mindfulness with a practice like yoga or meditation or being super zen somewhere. But it's not always about that. Like you said, it's the little decisions that maybe are the path of least resistance to something that you want to achieve, finding little ways to make your existence more pleasant and more calm. I know for some people that's writing or gratitude or closing the door at their office and actually doing a meditation for three or four minutes. There's so much power in pausing and slowing down. A lot of folks that I share this with, I always use the example of driving. Like if someone cuts you off in traffic, it immediately spikes your cortisol levels. You're really stressed out, you might want to yell or scream or gesture or honk at them. But what would happen if you paused for a second, and then gave yourself a minute to check in with yourself? Right? Like, where's this anger coming from? Is it the person who cut me off? Or is it the fact that I have ten emails on my computer that I have to answer? And taking that pause and making the decision to bring your awareness to the present moment and not judge yourself, I think is transformational.

[music playing]

BECKY EBERT: Hi! It's Becky Ebert, TWLOHA's editor and producer. I want to talk to you for a moment about something specific: t-shirts. To Write Love on Her Arms has always sold t-shirts as a way to help fund our mission—the mission of hope and help. But the products we sell in our store do so much more than help us financially. Each piece of merchandise is a conversation starter. It spreads the TWLOHA message to someone who may not have found out about us otherwise. So whether you wear our shirts, hats, hoodies, or rain jackets, we want to thank you for bringing a message of hope and help wherever you go. To see our latest designs, head to store.twloha.com now and use the promo code **PODCAST20** to receive 20% off your entire order.

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CHAD

I'd love to tap in a bit to your master's degree of clinical psychology. Could you talk a little bit about the intersection between the psyche, between mindfulness practices, and our mental and emotional wellbeing? How cleanly do those connect?

TIANNA

Yes, absolutely. You're speaking my language, my friend. So I guess, to talk about my program and my degree, it sounds a little wild when I explained it. A lot of folks were like, “Did you go to Hogwarts? I'm confused at what you're doing.” I studied clinical and Counseling Psychology with an emphasis in spirit, mind, body work. And so that means a million different things to every single person who is listening, who will hear that and those words. For me, in my experience, it was the marriage of eastern and western thoughts and culture and ritual and practices. So taking western psychology, what we know from the

traditional psych world, clinical counseling, therapy, you know that whole world, and bringing it together with eastern practices like mindfulness, like meditation. But bringing them together in a way that is very accessible to people, doesn't have to be super lofty or academic. And so I'm really lucky that I was able to do this Hogwarts-esque program. But I feel like if there's anything I took away, it's that this work is accessible. And it can be very simple. So when thinking about mindfulness, a really good example of east and west coming together is this thing called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, which takes the power of mindfulness with what we know about stress and how it impacts our body—which I'd argue every single person knows what stress is at this point, to the max level, perhaps—but it brings those together and creates a way for you to essentially heal and tune into yourself using practices from both traditions. So, for example, a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction class or workshop might include education about stress and how it affects our breath, and why our palms get a little clammy when we're feeling stressed out, and the different body responses that happen. And then marrying that with a practice like the five senses and drawing your awareness to things you can see and hear and smell and taste, or doing a brief actual meditation practice, maybe even a guided visualization. And so some folks are really afraid to try these practices because they feel otherworldly and they're not able to be described in scientific words but we're actually finding that there's so much cool science behind it. And when you bring traditional psych and eastern ritual together, there's just so much that we haven't even tapped into that we can find out.

CHAD

I love this theme of balance that's coming out, and it's a bit too on the nose to say yoga and balance, but you were describing earlier how you wanted something still within you to combat the chaos that was, and the disorganization that was outside. And you're talking about using the clinical, the book smarts of western psychology with the more esoteric and spiritual from the east and there's balance there. And not everything needs to be a dichotomy. Not everything needs to be an "either/or". And I think that that really plays out in what we're seeing, especially in these past like three to five years, of "mental health care *is* health care." You are mind *and* body. It's all one unit that you are bringing into this plane of existence. And so, caring for one *can* care for the other. Neglecting one *can* be neglect of the other, because it is all in fact, part and parcel the same thing.

TIANNA

100 percent. And when you say that, so much comes to mind about mental health care and healing. For example, some folks might go to talk therapy and find that medium super transformational for them, but maybe at the end of the day, their body still doesn't feel good. And maybe someone else goes to art therapy, and they don't say a word, and they're able to paint what they're feeling and that is transformational for them. So it's like, there's just so many pathways to get to where we want to be and you can love more than one topic and pull—I always think of healing as a toolbox. Like, what can you pull out of your toolbox to help you? Whether it's eastern ritual or western medicine, what makes you feel connected and empowered? And if it doesn't make you feel connected and empowered, you don't really have to listen to it, in my opinion.

CHAD

Well, let's talk about some of those tools. Mindfulness and meditation, they are big and sometimes loaded terms. And the reality is, these terms span a wide array of cultures. And because of that, there are a ton of different practices. We've mentioned yoga, we've mentioned a meditation set. What are some other practices that, in your mind, fall under this bigger umbrella of mindfulness and meditation?

TIANNA

Yeah, I was just gonna say that I think of mindfulness as the umbrella topic. And then within that, there are so many different practices that can bring you to the present moment. I'd say meditation is one of the

most popular ones, and even within meditation, there's many different types: There's silent meditation, guided meditation where you're listening to an audio that's maybe guiding you to visualize something or a certain prompt to think about, there's laughing meditation. If you've ever YouTubed that, it's a hilarious thing to watch.

CHAD

I love the laughing yogi, yeah.

TIANNA

Just like full body laughter, which is like truly an example of being in the present moment, because what else is there besides laughing at yourself, and then laughing at everyone else's laughing. So wonderful. So meditation, millions of ways to practice that. One of my favorite mindfulness practices, though, I have to say is music. Talk about a practice that marries eastern and western because you could analyze music theory all day and the mechanics of it, but there's something so out of this world about music that's deeply healing and transformative to people. So for me, sometimes my mindfulness practice of the day is listening to a playlist, pausing work to listen to a song that I really love, and just allowing myself to be present with the notes and the lyrics. Another awesome mindfulness practice is honestly just taking a walk. I know it sounds very basic. But if you think about the last time you took a stroll, maybe even without your phone, or walked your dog or something in the park and were forced to be present with another being, with yourself, with nature, that is a wonderful mindfulness practice. Speaking of nature, simply admiring nature and cultivating a sense of awe for what's around you is also mindfulness. And it doesn't have to be like traveling to a grand place and sitting on a mountaintop. It could be noticing the squirrels and the birds in your yard, or the little kid who's playing on the street outside. Like, drawing your awareness to what's happening and allowing yourself to really feel what's coming up in the moment. So I'd say music, walking nature, meditation, breath is a huge one. I think breathing is our anchor in life, metaphorically and physically. If you tune into your breath, you will always be brought back to the present moment. Noticing if it's shallow, or if you're feeling a little panicked and seeing if you can deepen it a little more. These are all like little ways, I think, to bring yourself back to the present when the world feels very turbulent.

CHAD

Thank you for sharing just how varied it is, and again, the admittance that you did not just name every single one. But, you know, on some level, there will be as many different types of mindfulness practice as there are people on the planet. Keep looking until you find something that does bring you some joy, that does bring you some rest, that does bring you an ounce of stillness and allows you to just kind of get lost in the depths of yourself. This is where community comes in, that mindfulness is a community exercise, even if it is practiced individually. Telling people, talking about what you discovered in your own practice, is going to be an encouragement to others. I'm taken right now into a conversation that we had at the very beginning the pandemic with our friend EbonyJanice and she introduced us to this song by Janae Aiko, called Trigger Protection Mantra. And that's a place that I've gone back to, a song that I've come back to time and again, just as a moment of peace. And that was taught to me from a friend. So yeah, borrow, borrow, keep borrowing. Borrow from your friends and family. As we're talking about these different practices, it's one thing to name the practice. But I think it's also important to realize that these practices do have real-world consequences. These are things, these are tools that can affect mental health challenges. In what ways can different practices of mindfulness play a role in treatment of mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety?

TIANNA

There are many, many ways that you can use mindfulness as a healing tool. And when it comes to something like anxiety or depression, I think of—I know it sounds very broad—but first I think of the simple awareness of what you're going through. For example, when I think back to college, when I was experiencing anxiety and depression, I didn't really know what was going on. Because I was so disconnected from my body, I wasn't even able to recognize different types of stress. For instance, running around in college doing a million things, my breath would often be shallow, my palms would be sweating, I would feel sometimes like I was suffocating and I didn't know what that feeling was. And I was trying so hard to press it down, that I didn't realize, like, "Hey, these are symptoms of anxiety. And there are things you can do to overcome these symptoms of anxiety, or at least cope with them and manage them." So I think mindfulness can be really helpful in just bringing awareness to what's happening in your body, what thoughts are racing through your head at any given moment. A lot of practices in clinical psychology—I'm thinking of things like CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) or DBT—they incorporate mindfulness exercises and mindfulness themes. But you don't always realize that it's mindfulness that we're talking about. I used to work in a substance use treatment center in New York City, and some of the therapists would have folks do meditations, in groups and individually. There were yoga groups, there were ways that we were able to bring that traditional clinical lens together with mindfulness to really help people unpack their emotions, unpack their anxiety, depression, trauma. There's so so much as well when you talk about, specifically I think depression and trauma, where we hold a lot in our bodies. A lot of people you might have heard of the book *The Body Keeps the Score*, that's really referenced a lot in the psych world. But, you know, tuning into your body, having that awareness, that mindful awareness of the present moment and what's happening, can really just open up the doors for you to you know, reflect on things in your own life, how they might be showing up in your physical body, affecting your energy, all of that. But I think the awareness piece is huge and just giving people a space to bring their whole selves into their healing journey and not feeling limited, like they have to have the perfect words in talk therapy or describe their symptoms in a certain way. Like sometimes it's just being and not doing anything.

CHAD

We're addressing a bit of performance anxiety when it comes to talk therapy. "Am I telling a compelling enough story? Am I saying it right? Am I using the right words? Am I confusing? Am I making any sense?" And when it comes to mindfulness you are released of that sort of burden. And I think it's fair to acknowledge that other access points for mental health often do come with some other hurdles, namely financial—it costs money to find a counselor. Now, *To Write Love*, we do what we can in order to identify cost-reduced and sometimes free services. We offer scholarships, but often we know that that financial burden can be one that is a complete deterrent to someone seeking traditional outlets for therapy and counseling. When it comes to mindfulness, these are pretty free. You were talking about getting outside can be the start to mindful practice. For the people that are listening, who may be interested in introducing a mindfulness practice into their lives, what would you suggest as an accessible, perhaps even completely unintimidating starting point for someone looking to get started?

TIANNA

I'm really glad you brought up accessibility and lack of accessibility because, oh yes, so mental health is very expensive. It's super hard to find a therapist in a lot of places, and still very heavily stigmatized. But I think with mindfulness, a really fun place to start is your breath. I know it sounds so simple and basic, but you'd be surprised how many people don't connect to their breath or don't have any awareness of how they're breathing. I can use my family as an example. I remember when I started down this mindfulness journey and was practicing leading some meditations and things, I would do it with my siblings and my parents and we would all realize, like, "Wow, I did not realize how shallow my breath has been all day, because I've been working so hard." But that realization alone can be huge because then that impacts your everyday life and you carry that thought with you now for the rest of your life, like tune into your

breath: "Is my breathing OK or am I rushing through the moment?" I think a really easy place to start as well, of course, accessibility-wise, you would probably have to have a phone or computer. So there is a level of lack of accessibility for some folks. But there are many free apps or recordings online that you can access, that can help you just tune into your body and your mind your emotions. One of my favorite apps is called Insight Timer, and they have a lot of different silent, instrumental, and guided meditations that you can choose from. But another free resource is writing or the creative arts. I find that you might not have access to instruments around you or something, but art-making, journaling, even just community, connecting with people. If you have people around you, that I think in itself might sound like a stretch, but that can be a mindfulness practice is just engaging in a good conversation with somebody and being in the state of flow where you're so present and engaged in something that everything else starts to melt away. If you have pets at home, notice what your pet's doing or your kid. That intentional awareness, again, is in and of itself a mindfulness practice.

CHAD

Again, that sense of balancing the getting outside yourself to access something within yourself. At To Write Love, we often remind people that you're invited to take a pause, to take a breath, to find hope, to be grounded and find comfort in your breathing. That's something that, you mentioned, is a no trite way, kind of the building block of this conversation and every conversation. So with that, Tianna, we love to have you lead us in a bit of a guided breathing meditation. Why don't we put some skin on it. Let's see what this actually looks and feels and sounds like.

TIANNA

I would love that. And keeping in mind, wherever you're listening from, if you save this and come back to it later, this is something you can return to at any time. But for the sake of today we'll do just a brief mindful body scan. So if you're in a place where you can, I invite you to find a comfortable seat. This can be in a chair, on the ground, on your bed. Anything that makes you feel safe and peaceful. You can even lie down if you want, if it feels safe and comfortable. You may even feel the urge to fall asleep and that's OK if you do. But I invite you to find a comfortable seat, maybe take a couple of shoulder rolls or roll your neck around your wrists, wiggle the fingers and the toes and just notice the energy that you have today. It's OK if it's feeling a little bit tired, sleepy, or slow. Maybe you're feeling the opposite. And maybe you just had a bunch of coffee and you're buzzin and ready to go. Once you've come to a little bit of presence and awareness of your energy today, maybe find some stillness in your seat, taking a deep breath and releasing any tension—whether physical or mental—that you might be holding on to. Starting to release any tension, any control in the jaw. Noticing if your eyebrows are tight or furrowing, relaxing the shoulders down and away from the ears. And if you're in a seat, noticing what it's like to be grounded in your chair, noticing what it's like to have both of your feet flat on the floor and just arriving in this present moment, no matter what has happened before this, no matter what's happening after. Depending on your comfort level, you can allow your hands to fall gently in your lap, either palms face up or face down. You can also bring one hand to your belly and one hand to your chest as another way of tuning into your breath and just noticing what it's like to have the belly rise and fall. Taking a moment to be really present with yourself and speak really kindly to yourself if you notice any fidgeting or distraction that's coming up. Now I invite you to either close your eyes, or if you want to keep them open you can maybe gaze a couple of feet in front of you, not focusing on anything specific but allowing your eyes to just be in a soft gaze. And whether your eyes are open or closed, start to imagine, start to visualize the space just above the top of your head. It might seem a little funny at first. And as you visualize the space, maybe you think of a warm golden light. Maybe you think of your favorite color. Maybe you even visualize a song that makes you feel really safe. Maybe you imagine a place or a location that makes you feel happy and nourished. Whether you're thinking of a color or an image or a song, continue to breathe at your own pace and welcome that energy into your physical body, imagining that it's washing over you from the top of your head all the way

down to your toes. Continuing to take deep breaths at your own pace. Visualize the top of your head, the forehead, releasing any tension in the eyebrows, the temples, your eyes, and cheekbones. Relaxing the muscles of the face and gently dropping the jaw if you notice that it's clenching a little bit. Continuing to be aware of your breath and releasing any holding on or tension in your chest, your neck. Drawing your awareness down the body to your torso, noticing what it's like to have the belly and the lungs just rise and fall with your breath. Continuing your awareness down the body, noticing what it's like to be rooted in your seat or held by the ground if you're laying down or on a different surface. Drawing your awareness down the body, to the legs, the knees, visualizing the shins and the calves, drawing that awareness all the way down to the ankles, top of the feet, bottom of the feet, all the way down to your toes. And if your feet are on the ground, just noticing what it's like to be routed to arrive here in this present moment, wherever you are listening from, whatever energy brought you to listen to this recording today. Noticing where you're at, mentally, physically, emotionally, and not judging yourself for whatever you're feeling in this moment. Once again, I'll invite you to imagine that color, that safe place, that song or that feeling that you thought of at the beginning of this practice. Once again, imagining that that energy is filling the body all the way from the toes, through the body, and all the way up to the top of the head. And together, wherever you're tuning in from, we'll take three final deep breaths in together to seal in this practice. So first time, deep breath in, fill the lungs, fill the belly and exhale, letting go of any stress you're holding on to. Second time, deep breath in. And exhale. Letting go of any final bits of tension. And third time, deepest breath you've taken all day. Inhale. And exhale. Extending some kindness in your mind, maybe being proud of yourself for showing up and carving out just a few minutes of your day, to be present, to remember why you're here, and to remember that you're safe and you're exactly where you're supposed to be. Whatever position or posture you're in, you can start to wiggle the fingers, wiggle the toes, maybe do some shoulder rolls or some wrist rolls. And then if your eyes are closed you can slowly start to blink them open. And then come back to the space.

CHAD

Tianna, thank you so much. Yeah, just kind of the simple thing of listening to your own body for a minute is, yeah, I don't know. I feel like I'm ready to get through the rest of the day. And like you mentioned, these are practices that can be returned to time and time again. I'm wondering at this point, before I gush into full gratitude here, is there anything else that you wish you would have talked about regarding mindfulness? Any other points or things or anecdotes that you think may be helpful to the masses?

TIANNA

Well first, thank you so much for having me. I feel like I could ramble for hours about mindfulness and hopefully some of it made sense. But I think if there's anything I would extend to anyone who's listening, it's that mindfulness is really about bringing your awareness to the present moment, not judging yourself for whatever comes up in that moment. And if you want to live a more mindful life, it's not about perfection. Something you all say so beautifully is that "We need your presence, not your perfection." And that, to me, illustrates the power of mindfulness to a tee. We need you to show up in mind, in body, in heart. Not just race to the next thing, not be stuck in the past or always looking ahead to the future. But noticing the beauty and the little moments that are happening right now, on this call, when you get off of this recording and go out into your life. Life is happening in the present, and I think if you can open yourself up to that thought and celebrating the present moment, there's so much more that we can enjoy and welcome into our life.

[music playing]

CHAD: We want to extend a big thank you to Tianna for joining us and for sharing both her personal and professional perspectives on the crossroads of mindfulness and mental well-being. And also to you, the

listener, we hope you leave this episode with an extra tool or two in your self-care kit. There is a boldness in your breathing and it is deserving of your attention. Take time to notice it. Take time to pause and slow down. And lastly, remember that when we say we're glad you're here—we mean here, now, in good company.

[music playing]

CHAD: We hope this episode has been a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it is OK to reach out and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website: twloha.com. That's [T-W-L-O-H-A.com](https://twloha.com). And click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

If you're in the U.S. or Canada and need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line. Simply text the word TWLOHA—again, that's T W L O H A—to 741741. You'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

For a list of crisis support resources for our listeners living outside of the United States, please visit twloha.com/find-help/ and click on the International Resources tab.

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A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. And again, I'm Chad Moses. Thank you so much for listening. We're glad you're here.