

Why Meditation is Your Ultimate Life Hack – Light Watkins and Emily Fletcher – #836

Dave Asprey:

For this episode, I want you to be able to experience many of the different ways meditation can make you a better human. So I put together a package of resources for you. What I've done is I've put together a conversation about meditation as a high-performance tool from Ziva Meditation founder, Emily Fletcher, who's a good friend, and also some content from meditation teacher, Light Watkins, who probably has the most perfect meditation teacher name ever. And he goes in the other direction, explains meditation for rest. So we've got high-performance and rest both in the sphere of the universe of meditation. And they get into meditation's benefits on each end of that spectrum. And what you'll find is that there are a ton of meditation podcasts that I've pulled together over the past six or seven years of doing Bulletproof Radio, where I talk with different experts about all of these different things.

What I want you to do is understand that there's a meditation for flow states. There's a meditation for learning. There's a meditation for cravings, for stress, for sex, and there are tons of tools online to help you meditate. And if you go to daveasprey.com and you look around, you can actually get guided and unguided videos by a lot of these people. And if your cells are doing a poor job of making energy, meditation is more challenging. It's harder to pay attention.

So you want to be at your highest and best when you show up for yourself. And that means eating the right foods or maybe fasting even because some kinds of meditation require that. But understand meditating when you're completely bone tired and exhausted, it can be rejuvenating, but it's probably not going to be a supercharging meditation then. So get your biology working and then get your mind in your heart, your body, your soul, your spirit, all the different things that meditation touches, get those together, but do it in that order if you can. If not, eating better is going to help you. Meditating is going to help you. Doing the food first and then meditating is going to help you even more. So you get more results in less time. Enjoy the special episode.

Announcer:

Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Emily Fletcher has been on a couple of times before. She's a friend and she's the founder of Ziva Meditation and created something called the Ziva technique. And she's the leading expert in meditation for high performance. She started at Ziva in 2011 in New York, and she's been on the New York Times, the Today Show, Vogue and ABC. And she's one of the top hundred women in wellness. And she's spoken on meditation for performance at Google, Harvard, Viacom, and Wanderlust, where I also spoke and saw her most recently. Emily, welcome back to Bulletproof Radio.

Emily Fletcher:

I am so excited to be back here with you, Dave, thank you for having me.

Dave Asprey:

You talk about yourself as a recovering control freak, but you also say that you go to Burning Man and India as often as possible. How is that possibly... How does that line up?

Emily Fletcher:

Well, I used to... I'm an adult child of an alcoholic and I think that this is a very common attribute that children of addicts or alcoholics have, because you don't know what's going to happen in your home. Everything is unpredictable. You try to control anything you can. And sometimes that will be your diet. Sometimes it will be your exercise. Sometimes it comes out in OCD. For me, it was I think always aspiring towards greatness. It was, I wanted to be a better singer, a better dancer, a better actress. And it wasn't really... Well, I think that that control, that perfectionism helped me. I think it's one of the reasons that allowed me to accomplish what I did, but it's that whole rule of the tools that got you here won't get you where you're going. And so at a certain point, they started to be detrimental.

And so it wasn't really until I found meditation that I started to understand the art and the beauty and the power of surrender, that you could actually let go and let something else take the wheel. And it doesn't mean being lazy, it means trusting that nature has more information than you. And I think experiences like going to Burning Man and experiencing that beautiful right-brain serendipity, that present moment playfulness, and then going to places like India, where even, this is going to sound so hippy dippy, but even the trees vibrate because people have been meditating there for thousands and thousands of years. There's just a different frequency when you go up into Northern India. And so having those life experiences really opened me up to what is possible and to this whole other way of living your life, which is one of fun and flow and trust instead of trying to control everything.

Dave Asprey:

Light Watkins. Welcome to the show.

Light Watkins:

Thank you, Dave. Good to be here.

Dave Asprey:

I wanted to go back with you. One of the things that attracted me to interviewing you was that you talk about spending years sitting in an uncomfortable positions with whirling thoughts and feeling like a meditation failure. Tell me what that was like because I think a lot of people who meditate now are dealing with that. And I certainly did when I first went to a monastery years ago and, and all that, it's like, man, I suck at this. What was going on with you?

Light Watkins:

Well I, for years, I was dabbling in meditation and it was an extension of my interest in yoga. I started practicing yoga, taking yoga classes, and then ultimately I became a yoga teacher. And that's where my struggles with meditation were really highlighted because people look to yoga teachers as experts in meditation, but it's like looking to your doctor as an expert in nutrition. When you read about it, doctors don't really get a whole lot of nutritional instruction when they're going through medical school, and what they learn how to do is treat symptoms. Same thing with yoga. When you go through a yoga teacher training, at least back when I did, there was no meditation instruction. I mean, you meditate it, here and there a little bit, but 99% of the instruction was about how to do a downward facing dog or how to do a crow pose and these kinds of things.

So when I'm teaching yoga now, people are projecting meditation expert status onto me. And I'm feeling like a fraud, there at the front of the room, because all I know how to do is to imitate what I've seen, which is the guys sitting with their backs straight and their legs crossed and the straighter your back, supposedly the more expert you are in meditation and you have your fingers come together, your

thumb and your index finger come together, and that's supposed to be a part of the look. But inside, I'm sitting there...

Dave Asprey:

The look?

Light Watkins:

Yeah, I'm sitting there thinking about all these random things, and insecurities, and my mind is all over the place. And I have no idea if I'm doing it right, or if this is what's supposed to be happening, or what samadhi even is. I mean, obviously I could explain those kinds of concepts very eloquently from my yoga reading and spiritual reading, but I never had a direct experience.

So that was the struggle beforehand. And when I met my teacher back in 2002, and he was telling me that there's two basic categories of meditation. There's the monastic track, which you've been trying to do. And then there's the householder track, which has co-existed in tandem with the monastic track for thousands of years. And this householder style is better suited for people like you. People who have a job, people who are in relationships, people who have recreational activities. And the main hallmark of the householder style is you want to actually sit comfortably. You want to get off the floor. You want to uncross your legs and you want to sit like you're about to binge watch a Netflix series.

Dave Asprey:

What is the best way to get outside your head? It's okay to say Burning Man. That was one of my recommendations, but...

Emily Fletcher:

Well, we've been there together. So it's kind of how you do it. And look fun is one way. Play is one way to get out of that incessant reviewing the past and rehearsing the future. And it's not getting out of your head in general, it's getting out of that critical mind, that closed individual thinking.

Light Watkins:

Instead of having meditation in its own category of experiences that's completely unrelatable to anything that we claim that we need in our Western world, we want to put it into the rest category, right? And if we can put it in the rest category, then it can make a lot more sense. Then we can justify spending that time, because that's ultimately when you're engaging in the householder track, ultimately what you're gaining from that is a degree of rest that you wouldn't otherwise get from sleeping. And as you and your audience probably understands, we're in an epidemic right now where most people are not sleeping properly. And that's the deal. It's not even about how many hours, it's about the quality of rest that you're getting. And I think that conversation is starting to become more popular now among hackers and people who are looking to optimize productivity. And so meditation is the ultimate rest hack. If you can get a meditation or two into your day and you can enhance the quality of rest that your body is able to get, then everything else starts to become more optimized.

Emily Fletcher:

You wake up in the morning, you meditate. It's like brushing your teeth for your brain, filling yourself up with bliss and fulfillment and the ability to adapt. And then you enjoy delivering that throughout your

day. And then somewhere mid-afternoon, early evening, you do 15 minutes and you seal the way, you do it again. It's like you've taken a vacation for your brain and you have all of this energy and kindness and creativity to deliver to the rest of your workday and to your family and to your friends. Instead of just coming home exhausted, drinking wine, and passing asleep on the couch. I think that we're using the term meditation as this sort of catch all, like the word food and blue...

Things to your body than butter, which does very different things than coffee. And yet we call it all food. And so same thing with meditation, there is breath work, there's kundalini, there's vipassana, there's Ziva. All different types and some of them lift you up and some of them are about letting go. And so I think it just depends on what you're doing. And if anything you're looking to escape your life, then this can be addictive. But if you're looking at it as a tool to heal, then I find that it can only be additive. And the thing about Ziva is that it's not just about an escape. It's actually not about feeling good when you're doing it. Occasionally, it feels nice when you're doing it. But I actually, I say to my students all the time, I'm like, I don't care if you enjoy the meditation. I care if you get better at life. You having 15 minutes of nice feeling in a chair, if you want to do that, go get high.

If you want a heat backlog of trauma from your entire life, then meditate. Right? And so this is an interesting distinction is that mindfulness, which is more akin to breath work or focusing. Most of the apps out there, most of the YouTube videos are teaching what I would call mindfulness, which is where you're directing your focus. And it's very good at dealing with your stress in the present moment. Like, oh, I'm stressed, my boss yelled at me, let me go listen to my 10 minutes of my app.

Versus the meditation that I teach is all about getting rid of your stress from the past. And to do that we're actually, de-exciting nervous system and inducing very deep healing rest. And then the third part of what we teach is manifesting, which is all about your dreams for the future. And so the manifesting, I get some eye-rolls from some high performers, but really it's just consciously creating a life you love. It's you getting intentional. Yeah, to your point, we're manifesting all the time. It's just, are you aware that you're holding a magic wand in your hand or not? Are you just thinking that your life circumstances are showing up or you're starting to take responsibility for the co-creator role that we're playing with nature all the time.

Dave Asprey:

If you harbor ill will towards others, even if you smile at them and look at them and all that stuff, it costs you greatly. And if you have some of this manifesting and everyone does, some people are better at making stuff happen than others. And you're walking around angry and pissed off at people all the time while behaving appropriately as an adult, you're going to create chaos in the world around you, in ways that you are not aware that you're doing. And that is why I focus on things like gratitude and forgiveness and compassion in meditation, because if you don't do that, you don't even know all the shit you're creating in the people around you. And it's also why if you have people like that in your world, you get them out of your world or make them do the work.

Emily Fletcher:

Yep. I agree. And PS, thank you so much for talking about these things like gratitude, forgiveness. They're so simple, but they are so incredibly powerful. And I have everyone do it before they do any manifesting, you start with gratitude, right? Because it's like if you had a friend that was always asking you for things, but never saying thank you, you would eventually stop giving them things. And I think it's the same. If we anthropomorphize nature, if you're never saying thank you to nature before you're asking for things or manifesting things, eventually it becomes a little less effective. Also, if you are taking

time being disciplined about giving thanks each day, you actually retraining your brain to look for everything that's going right.

Dave Asprey:

So you're saying people can't meditate if they haven't slept well. Or at least they can't meditate very well.

Light Watkins:

No. People can't do their job if they're not rested. And meditation as a very practical application can help them become a better whatever: lawyer, comedian doctor, mother. There's no one who can't benefit from having more rest.

Dave Asprey:

Is it reasonable to say, I could sleep less if I meditate more. Or is that just, yes?

Light Watkins:

Well, I think what it does is it enhances the quality of your sleep that you are getting. And I'm sure there are exceptions to everything, but I would say as a rule, you still want to get enough sleep so that your body has that. Your body still needs a sufficient amount of sleep. It still needs the dreaming, the REM state, and it needs the waking state in order to achieve maximum balance. The experiment that I think that your listeners and whoever else can run for themselves so they can gain some sort of empirical evidence for this is to... When you want to get up 15 or 20 minutes earlier to meditate, right? You do that. You force yourself to get up. You sit, even if you just slide up to the headboard of your bed and close your eyes, and you meditate for those last 20 minutes, and you notice how you feel coming out of your practice, right?

And then you split test it the next day you stay in the bed and you hit the snooze button three times for those 20 minutes. And then you see how you feel coming out of the alarm experience. And you'll see which one has a better quality of clarity, and rest, and perceptual acuity coming out. And my guess is that it's going to be the meditation experience.

So, I've heard certain teachers say, meditation can give you two to five times deeper rest, right? And that's what they mean by that is if you take any part of your nighttime sleep, the deepest parts usually are between 2:00 AM and 4:00 AM. So if you take any 20 minutes from that chunk of time and you multiply it in terms of levels of rest, times two to five, that's the quality of rest that you are supposedly getting when you're sitting in meditation. And so that's been my experience. If I'm tired because I went to bed late and I'm waking up a little bit earlier to make sure I meditate before I engage in activity, I find that I'm a lot clearer from waking up earlier and doing the last 20 minutes of meditation versus hitting the snooze button and then being alarmed out of rest and feeling all out of sorts and all over the place.

Emily Fletcher:

Thank you so much for talking about these things like gratitude, forgiveness. They're so simple, but they are so incredibly powerful. And I have everyone do it before they do any manifesting. You start with gratitude, right? Because it's like if you had a friend that was always asking you for things, but never saying thank you, you would eventually stop giving them things. And I think it's the same. If we anthropomorphize nature, if you're never saying thank you to nature before you're asking for things or

manifesting things, eventually it becomes a little less effective. Also, if you are taking time being disciplined about giving thanks each day, you actually retraining your brain to look for everything that's going right. And there was some interesting science that came out suggesting that even on the days where you can't think of anything to give thanks for, just asking the question "What am I grateful for?" is enough to change the chemistry of your brain.

Dave Asprey:

I've been in times when I'm like... Self-pity and self-hatred and mean voices in my head and all that stuff, and meditation definitely helps with that stuff. But like you said, gratitude, and if you can't find anything, you're just not looking.

Emily Fletcher:

And I think the tricky thing is that when you're in those states, you oftentimes don't want help. You might think that you want help, but actually what people want is what I call the suffering trophy, where they just want the trophy, like I don't know how you make it through the day, that sounds very hard. And I think that you can do that. You can genuinely give someone the suffering trophy without being mean about it, because it's honest. I don't know how I made it through the day before I had meditation mindfulness and manifesting. My life was much, much harder. I would not have made it through my postpartum had I not had these tools. So I can do that honestly, with compassion and say, you want the suffering trophy. When you want help, when you want to change, call me.

Dave Asprey:

I mean, there's a bunch of meditation teachers out there, right? Meditation has become cool, there's apps that... Companies with meditation apps are worth a billion dollars and all that stuff. How is what you're doing moving humanity forward, given that meditation has become a thing?

Light Watkins:

That's a great question. And the first thing that comes to mind is the parable of the young man, the young boy, walking along the beach with all the starfish, scattered all around on the sand and he's tossing them in back into the ocean. And this old man sees him and walks up to him and says, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I'm trying to save the starfish," and the old man says, "Well, there's millions of these starfish, you can't possibly save them all." And he picks one up though, little boy picks one up and tosses it in, and he says, "I saved that one. I picked up another one. I saved that one." Right? And I think anyone in any type of profession that is with the intention of leaving humanity better than how they found them. I think you have to come to terms with the fact that you can't save everybody.

You can't have a bigger effect than what you're having, if that's your intention. I think the intention needs to just be, to do the best you can with whatever you have available to you. And this could be anybody. You're a bus driver, you should try to make your passengers feel as comfortable and as safe as they can on your route that day. And you just never know how the ripple effects of your humanity and your good intentions are going to affect everybody else. You can't. What we do know is we can't suffer in isolation and we can't be happy in isolation.

And I think this is a really important point for people to embody, because I think we live in a time now where, because we have such access to information and social media, it looks like everybody else is out there making a much bigger impact than what we're making. And it's very easy to feel like we're not doing enough. I heard Oprah on one of her podcasts talk about this with somebody. She was saying, I forget who she was talking to Paulo Coelho, or somebody like this. And she told them she

opened up. She said, "I feel like sometimes I'm just not doing enough." Oprah Winfrey feels like she's not doing enough.

Dave Asprey:

I've had the same thought to be perfectly honest.

Light Watkins:

Yeah, I think it's pretty clear. It's become clear that everybody feels like this. So when you come on up in an interview or you give a talk and they do your introduction, and you hear somebody else list off all the things you've done, and the big impact you've had, and the people who look up to you. Sometimes it feels like you're talking about somebody else, because in our little world and in our mind, we just feel like, oh, I'm just me, I'm the same I've been since I was 15 years old, and just out here trying to do the best I can, and I know what all my flaws are, and I know where my shortcomings are, my blind spots. And you have got a long way to go still.

And I think this is a good way to be because it keeps you humble, it keeps you focused on the process and not the outcome. And that's really the big difference. I think if you stay focused on the process, we don't know how this thing's going to go, we don't know how someone that I get a chance to work with is going to affect someone else. They may become president, they may become some big leader of a corporation that changes the landscape of all the other corporations. You just don't know. So I try to just keep in the mind, the whole parable of, you can give a man fish, feed him for a day or teach him how to fish and feed him for life and just keep teaching people how to fish for happiness, for peace, for bliss. And it's not my control what happens after that. My job is just to make sure I'm doing the best job teaching people how to fish for happiness.

Dave Asprey:

It's awesome that you're talking about happiness there, because a lot of the things that you teach on your website, by the way, lightwatkins.com. If you're listening in, you appreciate Light's perspective on things. You're talking about happiness. And after I interviewed these 500 people for game changers, and I boiled down the three things that people really have a big impact on the world are doing. One of them is they're happy, that they're doing things to increase happiness. They're not happy because they were successful, they were successful because they learned how to be happy. And that made success easier for them.

It's still interesting to me, how many people get stuck on that third manifesting element you talked about from the Ziva technique. For someone who's listening, who is an engineer, who is a high performer and thinks manifesting is complete and utter and total bullshit, what would you say to them?

Emily Fletcher:

I would say that it's basically you placing the order with the cosmic waitress at the cosmic restaurant. It's you taking the time to even ask yourself what it is that you want, because to your point earlier, a lot of us think that we want money and that the money will make us happy. And so we never take the time to get specific about what it is that we actually want. And we don't all want the same thing. So to me, the power in manifesting is getting really quiet, utilizing that time right after you've meditated, and asking the question, what do I want? What would I like to manifest? And that's half of the magic. It's just you taking the time to listen to those desires that nature actually put inside of you. Nature put those desires there so it's not even you coming up with them.

It's just acknowledging the fact that we have 50% left brain and 50% right, 50% individuality and 50% totality. And so this is taking the time to have that conversation, to place your order, to make your intention known. And then it's about surrender and trust. And to your point, knowing that your happiness does not lie on the other side of the manifestation of the desires. You got the \$6 million and it didn't make you happy. I got on Broadway, three weeks later it was the saddest I had ever been. A lot of... get married, they have the kid, they buy the company, they buy the car. And lo and behold, if you don't have the ability to access your bliss and fulfillment right here, right now, it is not coming on the other side of any person, place, or thing.

And I think that as some of these more modern manifesting tools have been incorporated into the popular vernacular, that's when people get a little dismissive of it, because they think, oh, well, you want me to just secret a Ferrari? And then if I get a Ferrari, then I will be happy. It's like, no, you have to do the work of accessing your happiness here and now. And you have to do the work of taking responsibility for your desires, because your desires are not there to tell you where you need to go to fill yourself up. Your desires are there because that's nature using you to go and deliver your gifts to the world.

Dave Asprey:

What do you say to a newbie meditator? Says, all right, I decided to not try, and I sat there and I just thought about jelly donuts the whole time. What's going on with that?

Light Watkins:

So the difference in a seasoned meditator and a new meditator, there's a couple of things. Number one, the new meditator, oftentimes they don't have any structure in their practice. So they're just in there using shoddy guesswork. And what they're hoping for is that most of their thoughts are going to be positive in nature. And the ones that are not positive or that are neutral in nature, those are the ones that tend to get rejected. And it's a knee jerk reaction that this is what they've been doing their entire life rejecting those thoughts in favor of the positive, affirmative thoughts. The seasoned meditator has an understanding and really learns to do this with a lot of repetition and practice that it doesn't really matter what you're thinking about. It doesn't really matter what you're thinking about in terms of the process, as far as the process is concerned.

And so your attitude is everything. The more passive, the more nonchalant you become while you're meditating, especially around those what may be termed as intrusive thoughts, the more your mind will respond positively in terms of settling itself through the thoughts. So you have to go through those thoughts. You have to embrace those thoughts in order to go beyond those thoughts. The second thing that the new meditator and the seasoned meditator have, in terms of their separate approaches, is the new meditator does not appreciate all of the things that have been happening before they started meditating, right? Which means that your body has been taking on stress. You probably are a little bit sleep deprived. And so that has a major influence on the quality of your thinking experiences as well. And stress had a big head start on the effects of the meditation.

So meditation is very powerful, especially when you have structure, it can be extremely powerful for your mind and your body, but the stress had a big head start and it's not going to happen overnight. It's just like when you go to the gym at 40, and you've never worked out consistently in your entire life, you're going to feel sore for those first week or two. And the meditation version of the soreness is you're having all these crazy random thoughts. And I equate meditation in that sense, as a plunger, it's like a plunger and it's unclogging the crap that's been stored up in the body, that's been

clogging up your potential. And so just like if you have to do this in a bathroom, in a toilet, what's coming out is not going to be pleasant. It's not going to be nice. It's not going to smell good. Right?

But ultimately the goal is to unclog the toilet and the way you know the meditation is working is not based on what you're thinking about in the meditation. It's based on how well are you sleeping at night. How adaptable are you during the day. How compassionate are you with the people that you care about. A lot of people treat their clients and coworkers better than they treat the people they profess to love. And that's because we bottle up the stress at work and we come home and we don't have an outlet for it, so we just let it all out. And so the people we profess to love and not end up taking the brunt of our reactivity and us being triggered at work and it ends up ruining those relationships. And we're sitting around wondering why we have a bad marriage, why our kids don't like us, why I can't seem to get my life together, but I'm very successful in my job.

And it requires more balance. And so when those areas of life start to improve more and more, that's how you know meditation is working. But meanwhile, in the meditation itself, you're thinking about jelly donuts. You're thinking about what movie you want to see next, or you're having anxious thoughts or you're feeling like you're having depressing thoughts, right? And what people also don't understand is that whatever went into your body at any point in your life can potentially come out of the body when the plunger gets to work. So if you had a history of 14 or 15 years of depression or anxiety, and you start meditating, your body, sometimes as it's releasing this stuff, it can make you feel like you're re-experiencing it. And it feels problematic in the moment. But as the seasoned meditator understands, this is something that's leaving me, it's not coming in.

Then it allows you to relax more into it. And just by again, changing your attitude, reframing the experience. This is not a bad thing. This is actually a sign of progress because I'm not doing anything different, I'm still sitting here on my bed. I'm still engaged in the process. And yet I'm having these randomly crazy thoughts. Oh, this must be something that's on its way out. And let me just stay relaxed, stay calm as much as possible. And as a result, it allows the mind to continue to settle beyond that. And we find that the quality of our experiences can go up when possible. So it's the "do less, accomplish more" approach to meditation

Dave Asprey:

Beautifully put. Well, Emily, your new book *Stress Less, Accomplish More* for people that don't want to go straight to the meditation course. It is a profound read. It's an easy read. And it's got all of the things that you would want to know in order to just think about, all right, how can I get more of the things that I want in my life, including getting stuff done with less stress along the way, is that reducing stress reduces struggle, which makes everything easier, which makes life more fun. So there's some secrets of the universe in that book, and I liked the way you interpreted the universe in it. So thank you for writing *Stress Less, Accomplish More*, and for sharing it.

Light, thanks for being on the show. Thanks for doing what you can to make the world a better place. I think it's working.

Light Watkins:

Thanks. And I want to acknowledge you for being such a big proponent of all of these different hacks for the body, hacks for the mind, hacks for the spirit, hacks for bliss. There are a lot of people who are being introduced to these practices because of the work that you're doing. And I'm just appreciative to have been able to cross paths with you in this way. And hopefully we'll get a chance to sit down and have more time to talk about these wonderful things.