



In the middle of New York City's fray, an Australian expert is helping people cultivate the tools to get grounded, find wellness, and practice self-love, in a renaissance practical way.

A MODERN MEDITATION

by ANNA VOLFFIC
Photograph: ANNETT SAMAN

Jenni Dawes is hip to a good night's sleep. Unlike many of the New Yorkers who have sought out her meditation and mindfulness trainings, she dismisses the standard counsel of someone getting plenty of shut-eye. But not at all the time, because she follows the 80/20 rule.

The first thing I notice when we meet at a Japanese restaurant in Brooklyn, is that Dawes' make-up-free skin glows. This might have something to do with her vocation, teaching shung-our city dwellers the gentle art of wellbeing through her company, Kindred. From last year's meadow pop-up meditation studio to corporate retreats, podcasts and group classes, Kindred blends ancient techniques with a modern mindset. "We offer guidance to urban living," says Dawes, whose classes typically feature both Qi Gong and meditation. She has taught employees at Spotify, Airbnb, Ralph Lauren and Viacom how to quieten the mind and take full, satisfying breaths. As she lets me this, I realize I haven't breathed deeply for weeks. "Meditation is amazing but you have to pair it with something," Dawes says. "Qi Gong is perfect, by the time you sit and meditate, your mind is clear and you can go so much deeper."

Kindred isn't simply about adventures in stress, though. "My big thing is building a soul out," Dawes says. She advises students to fit their own truth in with whatever works for them: dancing, reading, walking...things you can turn to when you hit a roadblock.

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This inside-out approach is at the core of everything Dawes does, giving her work a sense of gravity and pragmatism. An Australian expert multi-hyphenate, she created business strategy consultancy, Collaborative, six years ago to offer branding and content for beauty companies such as Madefire. She also founded the go-to-of-New-York group, Adventure Club, which bubbles away during the summer months. It's a busy life—balancing an entrepreneurship—and testament to her ability to stay Zen in the long, crazy game.

Consciousness and commerce are not the most obvious bedfellows, but it's a balancing act that Dawes accomplishes with élan. And unlike an ascetic living in an eat-dirt, Dawes knows that the struggle is real. Fittingly, we spend a lot of time talking about the challenges of being a woman in an exciting city like New York. We are constantly being asked to engage in a battle, fighting for space, for a promotion, for a romantic relationship, for more time.



READ MORE One of the reasons we find stress is that we have too much energy in our heads. —Jenni Dawes "A lot of it is about grounding yourself, putting your energy to rest."

"New York is such a crazy, crazy environment," she concurs. "On a day-to-day basis, it takes a toll on you, physiologically and psychologically." Indeed, you can go to the gym, do yoga, eat everything organic... "But if you're not dealing with your stress levels, then stress is the saboteur that will come in and wipe all that away."

So, what are her tools? Some are refreshingly simple. For one, Dawes suggests making your home as cheerful by adding lots of greenery. "Big ferns and peace lilies—lilies make me so happy, they help purify the air." She advises lighting candles or palo santo and indulging in Epsom salt baths as an act of kindness to yourself, which she is very big on.

Dawes talks a lot about the practice of self-love, something that she has learned to do through much personal reflection. So when the question of dating in New York comes up, her advice is uplifting. Describing the act of seeking the perfect match (digging up to apps, throwing your photos, writing a one-liner or sending an incoherent message) as going white to illustrate what you're looking for, "Instead of seeing love outside, send it to yourself," she says. "Focusing intensely on the feelings and qualities that love and romance encompasses will then draw people to you."

Another tool she suggests to help in stressful situations—say if you're in a meeting and you're feeling a strong emotion such as anger—is to name that emotion. "Don't judge it or get caught up in it, just gently observe it, like clouds moving across the sky. If you try and resist something, it intensifies. When you accept it, it dissipates." Innomax is another case of the overly stressed. "One of the reasons we stay stressed is that we have too much energy in our heads," she says. "A lot of it is about grounding yourself, putting your energy to your feet." She suggests lying or sitting down and breathing into every area of your body from your head to your feet, to redirect your focus back to the ground.

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Dawes was in her early twenties and working as a beauty writer in Sydney when she met the man who would become her spiritual teacher. He was a mixed-race psychotherapist to boot. "I knew I'd been looking for something but I didn't know what it was," she says. Over the next two years he taught her Qi Gong and meditation. "She spent hours sitting in silence, deconstructing and learning pathways to self-awareness. "Previously, I was playing acting and (was) emotionally volatile," she says.

She describes this process of awakening like peeling an onion, layer-by-layer. We talk about how there are many ways to deconstruct those early experiences that can form habits and models that don't serve us, how life, essentially, is the great awakener—it's constantly giving us opportunities to dive in and overcome our own limitations, to grow, as painful as this may often be. "We're not taught important life skills (growing up), we're not taught about relationships or finances or how to deal with our emotions, and meditation is great for that," she says. "It's not about learning, but remembering."

The takeaway from all this of course, is balance. And curiously, two qualities that Dawes embodies in a sort of casual, uncomplicated way. "The key is to be kind to yourself, and if you can get it up to 80 percent of the time that's more than enough," she says. "Even if you can be gentle toward yourself in the moment, then that itself is a meditation."

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Photo: Annett Saman. Contact with Anna Wolffic