

There are many types of “mindfulness” practice and meditation. Typical “mindfulness” practices often leverage awareness of an object or action as a way to focus attention. It is this focusing of attention and associated increased awareness that allows a practitioner to enjoy benefits such as increased calmness and stress relief. However, unlike general mindfulness practices (such as lovingkindness or compassion meditation, which focus on gratitude practice and related techniques; mantra meditation, which invokes a verbally or mentally repeated mantra; or even mindful eating, which directs the practitioner to use eating as means of paying attention), Zazen asks the mind to tune in to itself, for the practitioner to keep the eyes semi-open and to establish a presence of mind and general awareness of what “is”. “During Zen meditation, practitioners also dismiss any thoughts that pop into their minds and essentially think about nothing.” ([VerywellMind.com](http://VerywellMind.com)) Which is really hard to do! Many Zen masters have referred to it as taming the “monkey mind”, because our thoughts scamper all over the place like incorrigible monkeys. A more recent writer referred to it as learning to tell the roommate living in our head to shut TF up.

Nature: Nothing puts an overwhelming situation or fear into perspective like Nature. When we tune into Nature, we realize just how small we are within the infinite universe and how temporary our situation is. Nothing is more calming and centering than a few deep breaths of fresh outdoor air. And nothing is more thought-provoking than our place, and the place of every other living thing, in the universe. A simple walk to class can be turned into a Zen walking meditation in Nature. Sitting on a bench outside after class can turn into a valuable 5 minutes of Zazen and Vitamin D-making. Even the most unpleasant weather conditions can be leveraged to focus the mind on what “is”, and to develop the skill of living without clinging (which is the basis of suffering, in Buddhist philosophy).

Falconry: For me, there are three experiences that bring Nature into the sharpest relief: (1) sitting under the stars on a clear dark night, (2) gazing out from the peak of a hiked mountain, and (3) practicing falconry. From the website of the North American Falconry Association: “Falconry can be defined as the taking of wild quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of a trained raptor. This ancient art is a very demanding endeavor, requiring a serious dedication of time and energy from the falconer. On November 16, 2010 the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added falconry to its list of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity.” “In its purest form, falconry is a raptor doing what it does naturally – hunt its prey – in cooperation with a human. The laws of nature decree that a wild raptor pursuing wild quarry is a fair chase. Neither side has an unfair advantage over the other. This is the purest form of falconry, its highest ideal and practice.” “Falconers are totally obligated to birds in their immediate possession. [The birds’] physical and psychological welfare is of the greatest importance.” As the grateful keeper of a wild-trapped red-tailed hawk, I can discuss how **resilience** is lived through falconry — the resilience of the falconer, of the raptor and of the quarry.