



STAY

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WOKE

a meditation guide
for the **rest** of us



sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

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The guided practices in *Stay Woke* are available as free audio downloads at justinmichaelwilliams.com/staywoke.



PROUD
BLACK +
EDUCATED

WE ARE
THE

Revolution



We close our eyes,
and we can see a life
we haven't started living

yet. We see the people we know we were put on this earth to be—and we all know that we were born to do something incredible. We feel it inside. We can see the mother we've always wanted to be, the lover we've always wanted to be, the father, the entrepreneur, the dancer, the artist, the actor, the singer, the leader, and the relationship we've always wanted, the business idea we always think about. But we spend so much time sitting on the sidelines, waiting for the right moment. We sit, and we wait, because when we were younger, somebody told us, "That dream you have is *not* for you." It's not for you because you're too fat, or too old, or too ugly, or too gay, you're not good enough, you're too skinny, too black, or—my favorite—"people like us just don't do that." Whatever. They told us we weren't good enough, and we believed them.

I have a confession to make. This is not really a meditation book.

Yes, I'm going to teach you everything you need to know about meditation, but if you came looking for your typical hippie-type Zen meditation book, you're in the wrong place.

This book is for people who are overwhelmed with obsessive thinking. For people who are dealing with so much anxiety and stress that they have trouble sleeping. For people who have felt ashamed, wounded, not good enough, silenced, or marginalized. For people who feel like there's something missing in their life but can't figure out



IF YOU CAN WORRY, YOU CAN MEDITATE

what it is. This book will help you pinpoint that wound, heal it, and use it as fuel to live the life you've always dreamed of.

This book is about *taking action*.

This book is about getting rid of that *stuck feeling* that's been gnawing at the back of your mind for all these years.

But, most importantly, this book is for us—*for the people.*

For my black brothers and sisters, this is for you.

For my LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters, this is for you.

For my women who have had enough, this is for you.

For my starving artists and workaholic creatives, this is for you.

For my conscious entrepreneurs who want to make an impact, this is for you.

For those who have been discriminated against for their otherness, this is for you.

For my social justice warriors, this is for you.

For my tree-loving planet savers, this is for you.

For all people of color and everyone who is woke enough to understand why I'm pointing that out, this is for you.

Throughout my last decade of teaching yoga and meditation, I've been blessed to work with thousands of people, of *all* types of backgrounds, from more than forty countries around the globe, and everyone says the same things: "I've tried meditation, but I can never stick with it," or "I just can't get my mind to slow down," or "I don't believe in meditation." *And I understand why.*

Meditation—at least the kind of meditation most of us have heard about—started with a bunch of men who were monks, sitting in the forest. And to become a monk, you had to release and abandon your entire family, your friends, all of your internal desires—sex, passion, intimacy—and all of your emotions and needs, including hunger, thirst, and everything you loved. You had to renounce all of it, sit under a tree, and devote the rest of your life to spiritual practice to transcend the suffering of life. Sounds intense, right? It was. So intense that ancient monks had to use special techniques to help them totally abandon their worldly desires. The most powerful of these techniques? **Meditation.**

I need to break some news to you. We are not monks. We are modern people in a high-tech world. We have First World problems and shit to do. We have iPhones and social media, and we have emotions that keep us connected to our passions, dreams, and one another. We have relationships, kids, jobs, and long to-do lists. And if you grew up like me—overcoming systemic oppression, homophobia, sexism, depression, poverty, toxic masculinity, community disempowerment, racism, and trauma—you need a different type of meditation. *One that doesn't pretend the struggle doesn't exist.*

The reason why so many people try meditation and it doesn't stick is because they're practicing the wrong kind of meditation, a kind based on renunciation. This makes meditation feel like doing a chore or even being punished. It can feel like your mind is going crazy with random thoughts and you have to *force* yourself to sit still and stop thinking. Sound familiar?

The style of meditation I'm going to teach you in this book is the opposite of all of that.

And if you're someone who thinks you *can't* meditate because you can't get your mind to stop thinking, I got some news for ya:

If you can worry, you can meditate.

Worrying and meditation are essentially the same thing, except with worrying, you play out bad scenarios in your head over and over, continuing to return to them throughout your day. Meditation works exactly the same way: the trick is flipping the switch from fear to empowerment. When you worry, you let your thoughts control you; when you meditate, you take your power back.

I'm sure you've heard about some of the benefits of meditation.¹ It:

- Reduces stress
- Helps you sleep better
- Fights off depression
- Relieves anxiety
- Improves your memory
- Improves your focus
- Makes you more productive
- Boosts self-confidence
- Combats prejudice
- Enhances empathy
- Helps with decision-making
- Boosts your immune system

And that's just to name a few. A quick Google search will lead you to a plethora of studies done at major universities around the world highlighting the benefits meditation has on the body, mind, soul, and spirit.

Over the last several years, I've been on a mission to take meditation out of the spiritual echo chamber and bring it to everyday people like you and me. I believe *all* people, of *all* backgrounds, deserve to have access to the truth. So I started asking big questions. How does meditation loosen the grip of our toxic habits, especially when it comes to things like porn, drugs, alcohol, social media, sex, and the incessant need for validation? How does it fit in if we're stressed out, overwhelmed, stretched too thin, and don't have extra time? How does it help us get shit done? How does it impact social justice? Productivity? Relationships? Money? Trauma? Healing? Entrepreneurship? Creativity? How does it help us overcome the obstacles that hold us back from our inherent greatness? The answers to those questions gave birth to the style of meditation that I'm going to teach you in this book.

I'd like to introduce you to **Freedom Meditation**, a practice that connects us with the most powerful version of our own selves—the Self that's deep down inside, untouched and unscathed by all the bullshit we've gathered over the years—and sets it free.

LET'S GIVE IT A TEST RUN. Place both hands over your heart and take three slow, deep breaths—5 counts in and 5 counts out. Feel your chest rise and fall with each breath. Make sure you don't breathe too fast. Really slow it down—5 long counts in, 5 long counts out. Notice how your entire body expands a little bit with each inhale and contracts and gets smaller with each exhale. After at least three breaths, keep a hand over your heart and answer these questions: What's the *real* dream for your life? And why are you still holding yourself back from getting there? **What's the *real* reason?**

And don't tell me, "I don't know." If you're reading this book, I know you're ready to take *some* part of your life to the next level—so what is it? What's really holding you back? Drop in and think about it for a sec. I promise we'll have an opportunity to work through this together as you learn to meditate. If you're having trouble identifying what's stopping you, don't worry—we'll be unpacking this more a little later in the book. In all cases, it's better to think about this now than to wait until life hits you upside the head with a dramatic situation to wake you up, like it did to me.

I've got a little story for you. In 2012, my grandmother, whom I was very close to, was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, and the doctors told her she only had a few months to live. This rocked my world like nothing I had ever experienced before. You have to understand, my Baca, as I called her, was my best friend. She was my light, my coach, my everything. Anyone who is superclose to their grandmother knows what I mean. It's a special relationship unlike anything else in the universe.

I was devastated when I got the news, so I flew to my hometown, Pittsburg, California, to be with her. The moment I arrived, she kicked everyone else out of the room, sat me down, looked me in the eyes, and asked me a question that literally changed the trajectory of my entire life.

She asked, "If you were in my shoes and knew you were going to die in two months, what would you do?"

I started trembling. I felt the tears well up, but a childhood of being told, "Only faggots cry" blockaded my tears like a dam holds back a stream. Before I could even think, the answer erupted out of my mouth with a roar of emotion from the deepest part of my soul: "I would stop everything that I'm doing and record an album."

My Baca smiled, because she was a believer all along. I, on the other hand, was frozen in some combination of shock, joy, and longing, like what I imagine the disciples felt when they saw Jesus ascend from the tomb. The ghost of my truth had been resurrected.

Here's the thing. I had always wanted to make music. It had been my dream ever since I was a little boy, but I never thought I was good enough—I had let all the kids at school who teased me about being gay make me feel like I sucked at everything. They said I was "too feminine" when I sang or performed, and being feminine when you're a little black boy growing up in the hood means getting beat up. Plus, when I looked around at the people closest to me, there were very few signs of anyone making money doing something they loved. The idea of working and *enjoying* your work, or being passionate about your work, was almost nonexistent in our community, where people were barely making ends meet.

The paradox of my childhood was love and abuse, protection and violence, acceptance and "Don't talk about it." My family sacrificed a lot and did the best they could to provide an abundant life for five kids and shield us from the danger of our environment, but still there was a lot of trauma. There were gunshot holes on the exterior of our house. And one of my most vivid memories is calling 911 trying to protect my mom from my violent stepfather, who choked and beat and abused her until we finally escaped to live with my grandparents.

All I wanted was to make a lot of money and be successful enough to *get out*. And I'm so grateful to say that I did. I got a full-ride academic scholarship to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), started my own marketing company at twenty years of age, and was making six figures by the time I was twenty-six. I had celebrity clients, a black BMW, and an apartment two blocks from the beach in Los Angeles. Most people would say I was "living the dream."

But it was the wrong dream. It was a dream based on a desire to *leave*, not a desire to *fly*. To fulfill cultural expectations based on oppressive traditions;

to do whatever I could to be loved, validated, and accepted by my mom and dad; to be “successful” as defined by everyone else’s expectations; to save and rescue everybody, because I was the smart one, the successful one, the one who “made it,” numbing my *real* dream in the process of overfunctioning and overachieving. Is any of this sounding familiar?

You see, those of us who grow up in the struggle—whatever particular struggle that may be—are not given an opportunity to dream big enough. When you grow up with violence and abuse, you dream of safety. When you grow up living from paycheck to paycheck, you dream of security. When you grow up in a broken home, you dream of stability. When you grow up being teased for being different, your dream is to belong. When you grow up marginalized, you dream of the same basic rights that seem to be afforded to everyone else by default. So of course you forget to dream bigger. Of course the dream you had when you were a kid gets pushed to the recesses of your mind. It hurts too much to hold on to that dream—the dream you had before you knew about the struggle. Before you knew about racism. Before you knew about slavery. Before you knew about suffrage. Before you knew about the Holocaust. Before you knew about divorce. Before you knew about depression. Before you knew about drugs. Before you knew about domestic violence. Before you knew about systemic oppression.

Underneath all that bullshit, there’s a dream. It might be dormant and covered in complacency, but it’s still there. It hasn’t abandoned you. Meditation will help you wake it up. And if there’s a new dream knocking on your door, meditation will help you answer it.

I remember the first day I met with my meditation teacher Lorin Roche like it was yesterday. We met up at the end of Ocean Park Boulevard in Santa Monica, California, on a warm April morning at 9:45 a.m. The beach was mostly empty, since it was a weekday. The sun was shining and the waves were crashing just a few feet away as we sat together with our feet buried in the sand. I was skeptical and jaded from several failed attempts at meditation, but I had heard Lorin was the real deal, so I allowed myself to be open to the experience. I didn’t know it then, but that one meetup would shift the course of my life forever. Lorin became my mentor. He took a tender, young, and broken Justin under his wing and taught me everything he knew. I developed Freedom Meditation directly from what I learned from him.

I used to be riddled with anxiety and sadness. I used to constantly compare myself to other people. I felt like I didn't belong. I craved external validation. I would lie awake in bed at night obsessing over work, money, and relationships. It was like I had a void that could never be filled. But the meditation practice I learned from Lorin healed all that. It helped me release my unhealthy relationships with caffeine, drugs, alcohol, and meaningless sex, and it gave me access to a wellspring of power and radiance that existed underneath the haze of all my vices. Meditation empowered me with intuitive guidance, fast decision-making, and a clear state of mind so that I could break through my toxic patterns, find my purpose, and live the life that had been waiting for me all along. I promise to teach you everything I know in this book.

I met Lorin nine months after my Baca passed away. Within three years, my life completely changed. My debut album, *Metamorphosis*, premiered in the iTunes top 20 pop charts alongside Taylor Swift and Britney Spears. Since then I have performed on stages alongside Deepak Chopra and Chaka Khan, and my music has been downloaded millions of times in more than sixty countries around the globe. I travel the world speaking, teaching, and performing and make more money now than I did before I took that big leap into the unknown of the music industry.

But this isn't about me. This is about you, your journey, your life, and you moving toward *your* full potential.

Part 1 of *Stay Woke* has one goal: to teach you how to meditate in a way that is customized to fit in with your messy modern life. You'll learn how to stop self-sabotage, overcome fear and self-doubt, and enhance your intuition so you can finally make sense of all that random thinking. I'll also teach you how to discover your *unique energy signature*—the special sauce that turns meditation into an unbreakable habit. Once you complete this ten-step recipe, you will have created a personalized Daily Meditation Ritual that *you can do on your own, for life*.

Part 2 of the book is formatted buffet style—thirty-three grab-and-go minipractices designed to help you with anxiety, stress, sleep, focus, productivity, purpose, intuition, self-love, and social justice. After you've completed all the steps in part 1 and cooked up your own meditation practice, you can flip open to any page of part 2 and enjoy the minipractices at your own pace or work through them with the Daily Practice Plan on page 294.

Meditation will give you the opportunity to go inside, and feel, and know, and touch, and take responsibility for your gifts and talents so that you can finally stop wasting time, move beyond your fears, and wake up to the life you were born to live. And not just for yourself—for your family, for your community, for the planet, and *for the people*.

I'll warn you, though: it ain't easy being woke.

Saying that you're "woke" isn't just about knowledge. And it isn't just some catchy hashtag that randomly popped up on your news feed or favorite blog. The word *woke* came from my ancestors. It was created by black people in the 1960s who had to fight for their existence. By people who had to stare segregation and oppression in the face yet still keep hope for a brighter future. And even though the word has been misused and misappropriated by journalists around the world without apology, we—the people—cannot abandon woke. We *need* woke. "Woke" isn't just some throwaway word, like "fleek" or "bae." It's sacred. If you are black, or Native, or trans, or poor, or disabled, or a woman, or anyone who's had to face an uphill battle just to enjoy the freedom that is your birthright, you *better* Stay Woke. Many of our ancestors didn't have the luxury to think about things like meditation, mental health, manifesting, and life purpose; they had to sacrifice their passions to create stability and the possibility of change for the future generation. We are that generation. We have been paid for. And we cannot take that for granted.

Staying woke isn't just about awareness. It is a call to action. And it matters most when you feel like giving up.

STAY WOKE

STAY WOKE you are worthy. STAY WOKE you are ready. STAY WOKE you can do this. STAY WOKE you are not alone. STAY WOKE you are not broken. STAY WOKE you have the power within you. STAY WOKE don't give up. STAY WOKE it's okay to cry. STAY WOKE I know the road has been tough. STAY WOKE there are better days ahead.

STAY WOKE. STAY WOKE. STAY WOKE.

I have tears in my eyes as I write this. I cry for the losses in our communities. We have gone through so much. More than most people could ever imagine. So please, my brothers and sisters, STAY WOKE. Don't go to sleep. We need you.

I call to you. I pray to you. I scream to you so loud that you remember who you really are. I remind you of your greatness. I remind you of where you came from.

I REMIND YOU THAT

YOU ARE ROYALTY.



We have been passed the torch. Yes, there's much more work to do, but the only way we can rise up is if we stand together and say YES to our lives, YES to our dreams, and YES to the greatness that lives inside of each of us.

STAY WOKE your community needs you.

STAY WOKE your family needs you to change.

STAY WOKE the future generations are counting on you.

STAY WOKE to the ways in which you internalize shame.

STAY WOKE in times of trial. STAY WOKE in times of pain. STAY WOKE I know it'll get better. STAY WOKE I know there will be brighter days. STAY WOKE we need you to make it. STAY WOKE I'll be by your side. STAY WOKE we'll get there together. STAY WOKE and we'll never die. STAY WOKE even when you're alone. STAY WOKE I'll hold your hand. STAY WOKE we can lean on each other. STAY WOKE I'll be a better man. STAY WOKE please know that I love you. STAY WOKE please know that I care. STAY WOKE I'm always beside you. STAY WOKE even when you think I'm not there. STAY WOKE my beautiful people. STAY WOKE beautiful people that shine.

I care about you so much. I just want you to thrive.

STAY WOKE—the revolution starts inside.

Thank you for allowing me to be your guide. It is an honor I do not take for granted. We are on a great journey together. And it all starts . . . now.