

The background of the cover is a solid orange color. Overlaid on this background are several concentric circles of varying shades of orange, creating a subtle target-like pattern. The circles are centered on the left side of the cover.

# mental resilience

**THE POWER OF CLARITY**

how to develop  
the focus of a warrior  
and the peace of a monk

**KAMAL SARMA**

# **Mental Resilience**

## **The Power of Clarity**

**How to develop the focus of a  
warrior and the peace of a monk**

Published by the Warrior Monk Group

**Kamal Sarma**

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## **Praise for Mental Resilience**

Athletes are taught how to train as well as to rest their physical bodies so that they can recuperate after periods of intense competition. In corporate life we are continually making intense mental demands of our staff without always taking the appropriate measures to truly assist them rest their minds. Mental Resilience Training techniques described in this book will allow anybody to maintain peak mental performance so that they can thrive and not be bogged down with the stresses of modern working life.

**Colin Pitt, General Manager Learning and Performance,  
St George Bank**

The book has gotten to the crux of how to clear your mind and develop mental focus. This technique has been an inspiration for many executives in developing their mental resilience and levels of peace so as they can reduce stress and function at their peak.

**Les Fallick, CEO Principle Advisory Services**

At a time when working life is getting faster and more complex, every body needs to clear the mind and develop focus. It is an absolute must for high performance work environments. This book makes building mental resilience easy. It has helped me as a mother, a partner and as an executive.

**Elizabeth Broderick, Partner, Blake Dawson Waldron**

It is said that our lives are not determined by the things that happen to us, but on how we react to them. This is true on multiple layers, from both a professional through to personal growth. Being able to focus clearly, by clearing our increasingly cluttered mind, is a prerequisite for success. Kamal teaches easy to use and practical techniques to obtain mental resilience. I have found his teachings incredibly useful in just about all aspects of my life.

**Rob Prugue, Managing Director, Lazard Asset Management,  
Asia Pacific**

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Developing mental flexibility is extremely important in corporate life. This book is full of insights into a most perplexing contemporary dilemma: how to keep your most precious asset—your mind—in its natural resilient state.

**Kate Mulligan, Managing Director, Advance Funds Management**

Truly fulfilled people must have mental resilience. Leaders at any level must have clarity and focus. The technique and skills taught inside this book and CD has transformed my life. Techniques taught in this book are relevant for any part of your life in the bedroom or the boardroom.

**Dan Dumitrescu, Global Head of Technology, Edward W. Kelly & Partners**

For any of us who live busy lives our greatest potential regret may be that of not seizing the moment and truly being present to the reality of our lives as it unfolds. This constant “being somewhere else” is one of major causes of stress and exhaustion. The tools in this book will help anybody to be truly present to their life so that they can thrive rather than just exist.

**Bettina Pidcock, Director of Marketing Asgard Wealth Solutions**

This book successfully integrates the lessons learned from thousands of years of Eastern meditation tradition with the latest findings of Western science. For novices and experts alike, it will broaden and deepen your understanding. I have meditated in the peace and quiet of a mountain retreat as well as a combat soldier in trenches during a war. Meditation is a powerful tool to develop focus, peace and clarity. I regard this book as the best book on meditation I have ever read.

**John Gibbons, Practicing psychologist of 40 years**

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## Dedication

It has taken me almost four years to write this book and many times I wanted to stop writing. The process that began some time ago was spurred along by one very dramatic incident on a plane trip from New York to San Jose.

As we were about to land, the plane hit some very vigorous turbulence and started heaving up and down. When the luggage started falling out of the overhead compartments, I grew very concerned.

The woman next to me grabbed my hand and held it tight. I thought that we were going to die; that, this time, my number was up. I was getting ready to accept the inevitable.

In those few moments, in thinking about my whole life, I realized I was really quite happy with who I was. I had been a good person, I thought. A good husband, an OK son, and I knew I had tried to be a good dad to my one-year-old daughter. All in all, I had a good life. The only major regret was that I still had not yet been able to pass on to my second daughter everything I had learned on my journey in meditation. I had learnt so much from the brief life of my first daughter. And it meant a lot to me to be able to give something back that is so profound to me.

So this book is for them. It is a thank you to my first daughter and a guidebook to my kids.

*Dear Kavisha and Kailash*

*I hope that one day, when you need it, you will use this book and develop resilience and clarity in your life. Use this book as your toolbox and create your own path.*

*Love Dad*

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CHAPTER 1:

# **FROM MONASTERY TO MANAGEMENT**

‘We will only understand the miracle of life fully when we allow the unexpected to happen.’

— Paulo Coelho



The initial idea to write this book began with a trip to my local bookstore. I was looking for a book on meditation—not just any kind of book, nor just any kind of meditation.

I did find a lot of books on meditation. But none that fitted the bill. There were books by enlightened sages or saints of some religious persuasion; others by ‘new age’ authors whose pages were packed with soft-focus photos and lists of affirmations with the promise of achieving a personal Nirvana. There were those written by philosophers and academics that eulogized at length about the theoretical aspects of meditation, but did not address the very practical steps a person would need to take if they asked: “So how do I start meditating? Then, what do I do next? How will it affect my life? How do I know I am doing it right? How will this make me mentally resilient.”

I have been practising meditation for the past 20 years and for the past eight, have been teaching meditation. Most recently I have started teaching in corporations and I have thought a book could provide a toolkit, a practical guide for my students’ ongoing reference and practice.

This book is written to fill a gap that I found when looking for a plain speak guide. My approach to teaching meditation through this book is to give you information without jargon or hype. This information will provide you with the tools to begin a meditation practice and through it, develop a more resilient and clear mind. I call the technique described in this book Mental Resilience Training™.

## **How to use this book**

This book is written in 2 parts. A theory part, which is from chapters 2 to 5, and practical section from chapters 6 to 13. If you are keen to get started skip the theory section and come back to it if you need.

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A CD with Mental Training exercises to get you started accompanies this book. The exercises are at various levels and designed for different purposes; the CD can be used in conjunction with the explanations in the book or on its own. If you have always wanted to try meditation but weren't sure how, simply find a comfortable place to be, put the CD on, listen and ... away you go.

You should be able to start using these techniques quickly. The theory has been kept deliberately light but there is enough to show how the process of meditation works, what signposts you may experience and what other people have experienced along this amazing internal journey.

The CD is also a resource you can come back to if, or when, you feel you need some support in your practice. When used in conjunction with the book you have the complete toolkit to help you learn to meditate.

## **Why Am I Qualified To Write This Book?**

What is my background? First, let me 'confess' that I am not a saintly man. I am a most ordinary working man who is making his way in the mesh of activities and relationships that comprise a management role in a commercial environment. I have found that the practice of meditation is my most valuable skill. In fact, I believe meditation is more relevant for managers, mothers and entrepreneurs—'ordinary people'—than it is for monks and nuns! Meditation is more pertinent for people who live in the world and are not sitting high up in the mountains trying to figure out the meaning of life. Actually, just in the time I have been writing this book my wife and I have dealt with a brain tumor scare, two babies in intensive care in hospital, a break up of a business and life with a chronic illness.

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## **My Approach To Meditation and Mental Resilience**

My practice of meditation has helped me through both personal and professional crises. Let me explain why I approach meditation the way I do.

I was born in Assam, in north-eastern India, near the border with Tibet and Burma. My family moved to Australia when I was five years old and as I grew up, I was desperate to be a 'normal' Australian young boy. Life was full of meat pies, Vegemite, sport, movies, girls—the usual stuff.

When I was 13, my father accepted work as a missionary doctor in Karnataka and the family moved back to India. My parents were very protective of me and, fearing I would give into peer pressures (illicit drug taking, in particular), sent me to a monastery (ashram) to continue my education. Instead of living the 'normal' life of a suburban teenager in Australia—going to a co-ed school, enjoying family holidays at the beach, meals full of meat, driving around in large cars—I found myself in a very different world. Life in the monastery meant sleeping on a concrete floor, getting up at 4.30am, having daily cold showers, being a vegetarian and following a life of poverty. To say this was a culture shock is an understatement.

While I was at the monastery, I learnt to read and write Sanskrit and studied major religious texts—the Bible, Bhagavad-Gita, Koran and Torah. This discipline and study was all too much for me. As a 13-year-old, all I really wanted to do was read comics, not the Vedas<sup>1</sup>. Frustrated with the rules and regulations that were part of life in the monastery, I would sneak out and vent my teenage angst by taking long treks in the nearby hills. On one of these expeditions I met Nanda—an ascetic who lived by himself in a small, simple hut near

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Indian sacred texts

the monastery. It was Nanda who introduced me to meditation and mental resilience training techniques.

Nanda had studied yoga and meditation for many years. This gave him a supple body and calm approach to life and, though I never knew his age, I'm certain he was far older than he looked. Although I was bucking against the authority of the monastery, I found myself fascinated by Nanda. When he offered to teach me yoga and meditation, I jumped at the chance. When I try to describe Nanda I always struggle, because he is so hard to pigeonhole. Nanda was at peace with himself and his surroundings.

Nanda I figured was about 85 years old, but he looked about 50. His skin was taut and it had a beautiful glow to it and his face had a feminine gentle quality. The whites of his eyes were very white and clear with a piercing quality. He did not look strong, a bit scrawny really, but he could hold a handstand for over 10 minutes on a cliff edge. Most people would consider him handsome in a grandfatherly way. But perhaps the most intriguing—and, for me, important—aspect of Nanda, was that he had more faith in me than I had in myself.

Nanda was a very erudite man. He could quote Shakespeare and Socrates and relate their ideas back to the mind and how it worked. He had been trained in physics, mathematics and used many scientific analogies in my training. Nanda taught me how to be aware of the power of my emotions; how not to be overwhelmed by the extremes I would sometimes feel. During my lessons he would say that there was no textbook for my mind; that I had to find my own way.

“A teacher can only show the way,” he would say, “but you have to climb the mountain yourself. So, the less emotional baggage you take up with you, the easier it is”. Nanda told me to be wary of people who claimed to be more spiritual than me, who said they could “take me

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up the mountain” on their back. He did not allow me to be lazy with my practice, he was a tough task master.

These early lessons provided me with the keys I was craving so that I might discover the full potential of my mind. I learnt to stretch both my body and mind, as I had otherwise not even imagined was possible. A lot of teenagers spend time in the gym, pumping iron, taking care of their developing body. I took this approach to my mind. As Nanda said, “You have a beautiful resilient and radiant mind, you just need to take care of it”.

At the age of 19, I returned to Australia and went to university. I studied economics and a Masters of Business Administration (MBA). I followed the herd after graduation, and was drawn to the promises of corporate life. My first serious job was with one of the world’s leading management consulting firms, McKinsey & Company. McKinsey provides advice to organizations around the world and, in my role, I was making presentations to some of the most influential people in powerful companies, talking about strategies for multi-million dollar projects and advising them on how to increase profitability. I would fly business class across the world, stay at 5-star hotels and pay for it all on my corporate expense account. I had come a long way from living in a monastery and a life of humility and poverty.

McKinsey culture—like that of many similar professional organizations—is one of “work hard, play hard”. Many workdays began at 7.30am and finished at 11pm. I had desperately wanted to be successful and when I was there, I thought I was. I was living the life of a corporate jet setter, life centered around the next flight, the next deadline and the next hotel room. But in this time I was also forgetting the benefits of being still, both in body and in mind.

I have discovered that all human evil comes from this: man's being  
unable to sit still and quiet in a room alone  
— Blaise Pascal <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Blaise Pascal, French mathematician, physicist and philosopher invented one of the first digital calculators: the pascaline. His experiments greatly increased knowledge of the atmosphere and his contribution to computing was recognized by the naming of a computer language – Pascal.

McKinsey was a great training ground; my life was focused on adding value for the shareholders and putting clients' needs before my own. I was engrossed by it all. What amazed me too, was the inordinate amount of power that such large, globally active corporations had. It excited me, but it frightened me too. In some situations, the work that we were engaged in had the potential to drastically change the economy of communities or even nations and could impact ongoing generations. What also frightened me was the mental state that some of these executives were in while making these huge decisions. I remember a CEO who was going through a messy divorce. He was feeling very bitter and twisted by the whole saga. He said that he had trouble sleeping, could not think properly and he felt he was in a state of depression. He would come into the office with the Armani suit and cufflinks and act macho but every now and then he used to admit that he felt like he was falling apart at the seams. On top of all this he was being asked to make a decision that would likely change the lives of thousands of people and environment for many years to come.

One of the most important lessons I learnt during my time with McKinsey was a new way to approach problems—a technique that underpins my business career to this day. I learnt that effective decision-making requires a hypothesis. The path that leads to that decision is guided by research and analysis to support or disprove the hypothesis. My life, at that point, was based around analysis and logic. The life I had had, based around faith, was no longer valid. Before my corporate life, I would generally accept that I could 'just' believe something to be true. Now, I was deeply immersed in a world where facts, logic and reason were the ultimate evidence.

Some years after leaving McKinsey, I married—my university sweetheart—a doctor who practices medicine in Sydney. We bought a house and settled down. I was living the suburban dream and busily climbing the corporate ladder.

Life was great!

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When I was about 30, my life hit a massive brick wall. My wife was pregnant with our first child and we were as excited as any young couple could be. On a routine check she was admitted to hospital for bed rest. On her second night in hospital, I got a call in the middle of the night to say she was delivering. In the 30 long minutes it took me to get to her, my wife had had an emergency caesarean.

On reaching the hospital, I was told my wife had suffered complications and I was extremely lucky; the surgical team had managed to save her life. They also told me I was father to a baby girl but she was also suffering complications and was in intensive care. I felt joy and dread all at the same time, my heart racing with excitement, hands clammy with stress.

At 3am, the doctors told us our daughter was in bad shape and they would need to monitor her closely. By late morning she was much better. Things looked positive and we all felt relieved. I remember touching my child for the first time, and realizing how incredible it felt. However, I remember the pain of seeing her tiny body with tubes and needles being inserted into her soft skin.

After three days in hospital her condition deteriorated so severely that we had to make the painful decision to take her off life support. That night was the most painful night in my life. The sounds and smell of that night are chiseled into my psyche. These are moments that define your life, when everything that you thought was important falls away. I can still remember the piercing beep of the monitor tracking the fluids that were being pumped into her tiny body.

The lightness, almost nothingness of the weight of her body. The pinkness of her beautifully formed lips. The sharp "Dettol" like smell of the antiseptic of the hospital. The cries of other healthy babies in the ward wanting to be nursed by their mothers. The total despair of that night was unforgettable. Looking down at her, a wonderful being that had been a gift was now in the process of being taken away from us,

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and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it except cry. Our beautiful baby daughter died silently in my arms as the sun rose.

Life was horrific.

My wife and I struggled to maintain both our sanity and our marriage. The grief and guilt were overwhelming. When we came back from the hospital the grief started to mix with depression. My life began to nosedive. I wanted to stay in bed and curl into a ball and cry. When the crying stopped I felt numb. I struggled to get up and go to work. When I eventually got there I was incapable of doing much. At that time I was working in the investment management industry, with Australia's largest fund manager. I had to deal with senior executives from top organizations, daily. I needed to make significant decisions. I needed to be "performing" one hundred per cent of the time. Being unproductive for a few hours was bad. Being paralyzed with grief and guilt for a whole day was a disaster. I was in real fear of losing my job<sup>3</sup>. My mind felt dull, sluggish and I was in a continual state of mental blur. The heaviness in my chest just would not go away. The void in my stomach just kept on getting deeper.

Nothing I did could relieve the helplessness I felt. I tried alcohol but it just made me feel sick. I contemplated drugs and psychiatric medication but I knew they just masked the symptoms and would leave me feeling even more hollow. My body was falling apart—I lost 13 kilograms (approximately 30 pounds) in less than two weeks. I wanted the overwhelming feeling of despair to go—but nothing would get rid of it. I thought of suicide on a number of occasions. Now I felt that I was falling apart at the seams.

But through those dark days, one option that did keep coming back to me was meditation, I wondered if I could use it to get back my mental resilience. It had been years since I had practiced and it seemed a lifetime ago that I had gone trekking out to Nanda's hut for my lessons,

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<sup>3</sup> I thank my boss, Dr Jack Gray and AMP Capital Investors at the time for the depth of their understanding. They were truly wonderful and showed deep levels of compassion.

but somewhere deep in my mind, I had a sense that it might be a solution to my grief and depression.

Desperate for something to wrench me out of my despair, I read some meditation books to remind me of the techniques I had learnt. But I found they no longer had any resonance. The techniques seemed to be full of mumbo jumbo and relied on a foundation of faith. I needed something different now. I needed a tool to discipline my mind so I could come back into this world with a new practice; one that was experiential, that was grounded in practicality of living an ordinary life.

I read all that I could get my hands on and tried to strip all the information back to its bare bones—to uncover the fundamentals of the meditation they were espousing. In dissecting all the information I was gathering, I began to release the ritual cats that made meditation confusing (see box below). What I ended up with was a simple practice that focused on the development of mental resilience and clarity. I call this method Mental Resilience Training.

### **Ritual Cats <sup>4</sup>**

When the spiritual teacher and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat who lived in the monastery made such a noise that it distracted them. So the teacher ordered that the cat be tied up during the evening practice. Years later, when the teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up. Centuries later, learned descendants of the spiritual teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice.

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<sup>4</sup>The stories I tell in this book have been told and retold for centuries. I have sourced them from many places. One great site is <http://www.rider.edu/~suler/zenstory>.

My return to meditation ultimately lifted me out of my downward spiral. I still felt pain and grief for the loss of our daughter, but through my practice I was able to compartmentalize this grief so it no longer paralyzed me. My mind regained its original power and focus; I began to function “normally” again and began to enjoy my life.

I now practice meditation daily and teach it to my friends and colleagues—from successful entrepreneurs to stay-at-home mothers and fathers looking after a busy household. This diverse group has several things in common: they are in relationships, face conflicting demands, are time poor, have deadlines to meet, get sick and feel angry or sad. Just like me. The meditation practice I teach provides the skills to cope with these day-to-day pressures and become more mentally resilient.

When the mind is at peace, the world too is at peace  
— J Krishnamurti

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***Why Mental Resilience Training?***

Many people are put off by the word “meditation,” due to the religious or new age connotations. These same people however have no qualms about going to a gym when they feel physically weak. Meditation is about keeping the mind strong, resilient and clear. This technique is called Mental Resilience Training as it helps keep the mind clear and strong without religious connotations.

### ***Can you learn to meditate without a teacher?***

When I learned to meditate I was fortunate enough to have a private teacher. My teacher got to know my psychological makeup and then developed a meditation practice based on these traits and my personal hot spots. I was extremely lucky to have had such a personalized practice.

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However, it is still possible to acquire a strong and effective meditation practice without personalized instruction. The techniques described in the book and the exercises provided on the CD are suitable for anyone facing pressures and stress in their work life and personal life. They are suited to anyone wanting to learn how to delve into their minds, stop the seeming chaos and clutter and find the right tools to increase their clarity, resilience and, ultimately, peacefulness and productiveness. You can achieve a very effective practice by using the techniques in this book. And, if you want to pursue your meditation practice further it can be useful to attend a meditation retreat for a weekend or a week.

### ***How long will it take me to learn how to meditate?***

Most people, it is said, take 21 days to transform new behaviors into new habits. So, while I cannot promise mystical results or a magic potion that can heal all your ills, I can promise that if you commit to 21 days of practising meditation (using this book and the CD with the suggested program in Chapter 13), you will definitely realize the benefits: clarity of mind and mental resilience. “If you want to dig a well, it’s no use digging a few meters, and then stopping and trying somewhere else. You have to keep at it for a while.” This adage applies to your journey with meditation. We live in an age where gratification is often instant. The latest news is online, on the television or radio. If we want to communicate with a friend or colleague overseas we pick up the phone or send an email. If we are hungry, we grab some “fast food”. We have become increasingly impatient. And meditation is not an instant thing; unlike coffee, the buzz is unlikely to come immediately.

For meditation to have the required results for your wellbeing, you need to take the time to slow down and see what’s really going on inside. Just as if you were rediscovering a long lost friend, learning about yourself takes a while to happen.

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I know meditators who have practiced for 20 years and still consider themselves beginners. Each time they sit for meditation they find something new and wondrous about themselves which makes them even more resilient. However, saying this, even if you meditate for 1 minute or even one heart beat, you will start receiving some of the benefits. Just in the same way as putting a heavy bag down for a moment gives you relief, so will a mere moment's meditation give you calm. It will also give you the ability to carry that heavy load even further.

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# **PART A**

## **THEORY SECTION**

‘If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend six hours sharpening my axe’ — Abraham Lincoln



CHAPTER 2:

## **MEDITATION & MRT**

### **— WHY BOTHER?**

‘Everything is changing; Let go a little at a time and breathe new life into your old ways of thinking and feeling. Let not fear be a complete barrier to the unknown.’

— Anonymous

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