

Mindfulness The EHP Way

HOW TO BRING PEACE AND JOY TO YOUR LIFE BY BEING NOW

*If you are depressed, you are living in the past.
If you are anxious, you are living in the future.
If you are at peace, you are living in the present.*

~Lao Tzu

The words in our opening quote offer the message of this chapter in a nutshell. There is speculation as to whether there was indeed a man named Lao Tzu, and if there was, did he really write the Taoist wisdom attributed to him? The practice of mindfulness draws on this wisdom of living in the present. The words and the sentiment, whoever wrote them, have survived since the 6th Century BC, so we're not offering a new concept.

The EHP way of mindfulness

We're offering you the EHP way of mindfulness - an enhanced state that we simply call *Being Now*. What may be new to you is our explanation for *what* being now is, *why* the words attributed to Lao Tzu are true, and *why* you might find being now valuable. We also offer practical suggestions as to *how* you can easily achieve the peace of being now.

What is being now?

When we are in the present moment we pay attention to what is happening **now** with all our senses. It's the difference between experiencing life and going through the motions with our attention on the past or the future. If we focus on what has been or is yet to come as we walk along the beach or through the woods, we miss out on consciously experiencing the sounds, smells, sights and sensations of what's happening here and now. Being now means taking in life's journey with all of our senses.

Young children are naturally in the moment. Their attention is here, now. Ask a young child how their day at school was, and they have difficulty telling you, because they have to think back. Most of their experience is being totally

present. Watch a child absorbed in something they are enjoying - there's no thought of what went or what's to come. It's later we learn to be more aware of past events and to plan the future.

We can also learn much from animals in this respect. If you've ever taken a walk with a dog, you have probably noticed they are completely in the moment, sniffing and seeing and hearing and tasting, tail wagging, senses alert and totally focused on their experience of the present place and time. They certainly have the ability to remember and anticipate, but they don't usually let it get in the way of having a good time right now.

Did you ever get lost in the moment doing something you enjoyed so much you forgot where you were, forgot yesterday and tomorrow? That's the state of *being now*. That's the state of being mindful. (We use the word 'mindful' and its variations in the sense of being consciously aware of our present sensory experience.)

Accepting our emotions

The word *mindfulness* in today's common usage relates to a way of self-management which encompasses noticing emotions and body sensations, including unhelpful feelings - and simply accepting them. From our experience both personally and in our coaching practices, we agree this can be a smart thing to do in the moment; we can find release by recognising what we are feeling, and sometimes that's all we need to do. Other times though, when an unhelpful emotion is experienced longer or stronger than we find useful, we might need something with a bit more oomph to move us on through. If you experience this, we invite you to *Empower Yourself* by choosing from the raft of ways we offer for comfortably releasing emotions that have hung around after their use-by date.

Why is being now valuable?

Being now, being mindful of the moment, can be our holiday from planning and fitting with schedules, our time out from the bustle of life. We are not suggesting an all-time focus on the present moment. We all need to plan and to keep appointments and it's smart to visit the past and note what we've learned. Recalling highlights and pleasant times can be wonderful, just as going into the future in anticipation of good times can add spice in our lives. What we are suggesting is taking time out frequently throughout the day, to experience the present, the *now*, as both the antidote for, and

a prevention of, stress.

To illustrate our point, a cartoon we've seen of a man waiting to enter the Pearly Gates says it all. He's grumbling about what an awful life he had, only for a sad-faced Saint Peter to tell him, 'You actually had a wonderful life, you were just too busy to notice'.

How our time focus can create depression or anxiety

You may have noticed much of our message relates to perception; how we perceive the past, the future, ourselves and others. We create stress by taking on a negative perception in our minds, oriented in the past or future. A past negative focus can lead to being unhappy, to guilt, regret, resentment and more. Moments of guilt or regret can provide valuable feedback for doing things differently in the future, but ongoing recycling of these feelings serves no positive purpose. As we mentioned in *Time Orientation 95*, lingering too long and too often on negative aspects of the past is the birthplace of depression.

Depression comes in a range of intensities and is covered more fully in our *Empower Yourself* section. For now, we'll do a quick overview and let you know that to feel depressed, we have to spend a considerable amount of time focusing on unhappy or unpleasant events from the past. To create and maintain depressive feelings we need to replay hurts, resentments, bad luck and the like, and do nothing to express our emotions, relieve or change the situation. (It is also possible to create depression if we feel helpless to change present circumstances or to influence our future.)

You might also recall us saying that lingering too long and too often on future negatives - imagining what can go wrong - is how we create worry and anxiety.

Anxiety, like depression, has many shadings - from feeling slightly nervous through to panic - and also has its own chapter in *Empower Yourself*. To feel anxious, we have to focus negatively on the future by making internal movies and soundtracks about what can go wrong, about what we fear. If you think of a time when you felt a bit anxious, notice it wasn't about what was happening at the time, but what might or could happen. (We can also *recreate* anxious feelings by reliving fearful situations from the past.)

Being Now is valuable because with our memories and imaginings temporarily outside our awareness, we are free to see, hear, taste, smell, touch, feel and enjoy the reality of right here and now. When we are fully in the moment we experience all the richness our senses can provide.

Being now can provide a place of happiness, joy, peace and contentment.

How do we achieve being now?

There are many ways to enjoy being in the now. It's highly probable you have already done so today, if only for short spells, and perhaps unconsciously. We are most likely in the moment when doing art or something else creative, swimming, playing sport, making love, having a good laugh with a friend, taking a walk, enjoying good food or playing with a pet. We can be in the moment doing simple things such as gardening, arranging flowers, singing along with the radio or doing some knitting.

Extreme pursuits can also fit the bill for being in the now. Far from the common perception of 'adrenalin junkie', recent studies suggest that people engaging in activities such as sky-diving, white-water rafting, and climbing mountains are actually reaping the benefits of immersing themselves in the present. To perform acts involving such risk, we need to focus on where our body is in space (proprioceptive awareness) or risk death or injury. If a tightrope walker were to start thinking about the class she took last week or what she might have for dinner, she would soon be bouncing in the safety net.

The goal here is to have ways of making being now a conscious choice. When we take a little time to consciously bring our awareness into the moment, we invite wellbeing into our day. This can reduce and release stress and contribute to effective stress-proofing. It can recharge our batteries, give a fresh perspective and achieve mindfulness - being mindful of and grateful for this moment.

If you already know a way or ways which work for you, treat yourself by doing them as often as possible. If you're not sure or would like another choice, here's the formula for the simplest way we know to pause in your day and experience *now...*

Being Now - one of the many ways:

1. Sit comfortably.
2. Tense your whole body, then let go and relax - let your body pretend it's asleep.
3. Take a deep belly breath in and slowly let it go, focusing on how it feels. (Make this a belly breath rather than a chest breath - so your shoulders barely move.)
4. Look around you, taking in s-l-o-w-l-y, the colours,

shapes, textures, light and shadows.

5. Listen to what sounds there are, now, including your own breathing.
6. Notice what you feel - your breathing, your heartbeat, your feet on the floor, where your hands are resting - and linger on each sensation...pause and really notice...if you notice a spot of tension in your body...tell it to let go, to relax...keep breathing slowly and deeply.

Spend as long as you like with your feeling sensations. If you only have five minutes, take five minutes. If you have ten, lavish ten minutes on yourself. If your mind wanders, call it back to noticing your breathing again.

In a few words:

Tense, let go. Breathe. See. Hear. Feel. That's it!

The more often you practise being now, the more your body and mind become accustomed to it and the more quickly you will achieve this state. Even a minute or two, several times a day, will make a difference.

You may find this exercise takes some concentration at first, and if you want an even easier start, simply focus on how your breathing feels as you take one, two or three deep, slow, belly breaths.

Practicing these exercises will make it easier for you to master other skills such as meditation, self-hypnosis and relaxation, and being at ease with how to use your multiple brains.

*This breath, this candle on the lake
this breath ricocheting down
the silken canyons of my senses
tether me softly to the heartbeat
the colours
of now*

*Resist the scrawny talons of long ago breaths
picking at my hem
Run my fingers through the jewels
of precious moments
of precious breaths of now*

~ Evelyn