

# a key to happiness by Sarah McLean

**practice present moment awareness**

*"With the past, I have nothing to do; nor with the future. I live now," said Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Mind/Body medicine guru Deepak Chopra's advice is, "Live in the present for it is the only moment you have. Keep your attention on what is here and now. Accept what comes to you totally, learn from it, and then let it go."

Sounds good. But how can we keep our wandering mind, our awareness, on the here and now? The mind's habit is to worry about the future or dwell on the past.

As a meditation teacher, my advice to those who find it hard to be **HERE NOW** is, when they realize it, to bring their awareness or attention back to the breath. The breath is always in the present moment.

The body too is always in the present moment. This is where we live. This moment is when our life takes place.

Some people realize that becoming present with their lives is important, and introduce present moment awareness practices into their routines through a daily meditation practice called mindfulness meditation, but that isn't the only way to do it.

In almost any moment, you can anchor to breath awareness. You can do it now: Become aware of your breathing. Feel the air flowing in and out of your body. You don't have to change a thing, simply become aware.

If you say, "Well that sounds good but I have so many problems to deal with." Ask yourself what "problem" you have right now, not next year, tomorrow, or five minutes from now. What is wrong in this moment, really? You might come to find out some of the problems you face are not here, not now, but in the past or the future somewhere.

All that you ever have to deal with, cope with, in real life - as opposed to your mind's projections - is this moment. In this moment is when you make decisions for your future. In this moment is when you access your intuition, take action or set intentions.

Becoming present in this moment is a practice. You can create it as a new habit. It helps to 'rewire' the habits of the mind to be anywhere but here. Being in the present moment doesn't have anything

to do with complacency or 'giving up'; being in the moment is the best way to access the intelligence that informs our lives.

We can't and don't take action in the past or in the future, so thoughts about a time other than now can begin to make us feel powerless and out of touch. The present is almost forgotten, ignored or simply reduced to the time that passes so you can get to the future.

In Deepak Chopra's book *Power, Freedom, and Grace* he reminds us to practice life-centered present moment awareness. "Accept this moment. You can want the future to be different, but even the act of setting an intention is in this moment. Take action in the present, detach from worry in this moment. Let the intelligent universe handle the details.





Another way to become present is to turn a routine activity that normally is only a means to an end, and give it your fullest attention. Here are four examples.

1. Let's say you walk up and down a flight of stairs at home or at work. Try this: when you take the stairs, **pay attention to every step**, how the body moves, and how the air enters and leaves your body while you do it. Listen to the sounds your body makes inside and out. **Be totally present**. It will be a different exercise every time.

2. When you wash your hands, **give your attention to all of the sensory perceptions**: the sound and feel of the water, the movement of your hands, the way you stand or bend over, the scent of the soap, the temperature change as your hands dry.

3. When you get into your car, after you close the door and before you turn the car on, give yourself a minute and **simply sit** there. You can close your eyes; this tends to make the other senses more active. Feel your body, **feel the flow of your breath**. Feel the temperature of the seat, the air. Become aware of yourself, the one sitting there, your presence, the one who is having the experience.

4. A perfect time to practice present moment awareness is when you find yourself waiting for an appointment or a friend or in line at the grocery store. Eckhart Tolle, author of the best-selling books, *Power of Now* and *A New Earth*, suggests that we give up waiting as a state of mind.

"Waiting creates a sense that the moment we are in isn't good enough. When you catch yourself simply waiting - waiting for another time, or something else to happen - snap out of it. **Come into the present moment**. You can use your breath. **Just be, and enjoy being**. If you are present, there is never any need for you to wait for anything."

So, next time somebody says, "Sorry to have kept you waiting." You might reply: "That's all right, I wasn't waiting. I was just standing here enjoying myself."

**Enjoy yourself. Enjoy this moment. This is it your life, Right now.**

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