

Whether we are living in confinement or living our usual day to day life, are we taking the present-moment plunge? Are we here and now in our thoughts and acts or letting our thoughts overwhelming us all the time?

It is very easy and tempting to go with the flow and be overwhelmed by social gossips, fake news and stressful debates and live constant stress.

Living here and now is understanding that we are not our thoughts and that we can make mindful choices and have an active presence. It is difficult for the self to do this when overwhelmed by past experiences and future concerns, that only underscores the need to challenge the self and the conditions it imposes on experience to be able to live fully.

There is different ways to practice being attentive in the present, being here and now.

Therapeutic Presence

One way to practice present-moment attention is to let go of the past and the future. We all spend a lot of our time obsessing about the past and the future—worry, regrets, replaying and anticipating, making plans, falling into fantasies and daydreams. “Quite simply, the future is not here. . . . The past is already over. We have to deal with things as they are in the moment. . . . Healing and transformation are possible the moment we accept the actuality of things as they are.”

A wide range of Buddhist texts and teachers make the same point, and it has become central in the modern mindfulness movement. As Thich Nhat Hanh said “From now, I’ll use the term ‘mindfulness’ to refer to keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality.”

Joyful Presence

Another way to attend to the present moment is to cultivate full appreciation of the rich experience available in each moment. Think of the well-known MBSR practice of slowly, mindfully eating a raisin.

Happiness comes “when we learn to accord infinite value to the slightest moment of existence.” It was the Epicurean poet Horace who coined the well-known phrase *Carpe diem*, “Seize the day,” (act now, for death awaits).

Joyful presence is getting the most out of the “Here and Now”, Enjoying the moment.

Mindful Presence

Buddhist scholars regularly point out that the word translated into English as “mindfulness” (*sati* in Pali, *smṛiti* in Sanskrit) has ‘remembering’ as its fundamental meaning. This is “mindful presence”—presence that remembers. And to be clear, “remembering” here does not just mean remembering to be mindful: it refers instead to remembering what has value, what matters most.

Mindful presence, then, does not turn away from the present moment at all. However, it requires us to rethink what goes in that moment. My present experience only makes sense in terms of who I am, where I come from and where I am headed; my plans and projects, my history and circumstances. Therapeutic presence encourages us not to cling to these elements of experience, which means radically simplifying the story, and there is clearly value in this. Yet when we operate in the world, the story of our lives—unfolding from past to future, shaped by memory and anticipation—structures our experience at the deepest level.

The present moment is not defined solely by letting go of past and future (therapeutic presence), nor by accepting and appreciating what arises right now (joyful presence), but by choosing in this very moment how we make sense of the world (mindful presence).

There is, however, a fourth way of practicing attention in the present moment, which we might call “active presence.”

ACTIVE PRESENCE

Mindful presence involves choosing to orient ourselves in the world in accord with a certain outlook or set of teachings, whether we have them available as sayings and instructions or have embedded them in our awareness in some other form. We can only act in the present, not the past or the future. When we practice active presence, choosing how to act in this moment, we also choose who and what we will be.

Active presence—choosing how to act in this moment—takes mindfulness out of the range of sitting meditation and inserts it into daily life.

In this sense, active presence includes the other three forms of present-moment attention already identified here. In therapeutic presence, you actively choose where to focus your attention. In joyful presence, you actively choose how you react to your experience. In mindful presence, you actively choose how to make sense of your experience.

Active presence has the potential to go further, for it invites an open-ended engagement with experience. When I am actively present, I choose the whole: what values I will enact, what commitments I will make, what understanding I will bring to bear.

Potentially, it makes available for questioning each and every ordinary, taken-for-granted structure of my experience. It puts everything into play.

What is my relationship to the objects I encounter in the world, or to other beings?

How do my moods and emotions affect the ways I engage the world?

What happens when thought carries me away from direct experience?

Can I be attentive *within* thought?

Each and every dimension of experience is available; nothing is presupposed. Each position I take is more a provisional positioning than a fixed structure.

TAKING THE PRESENT-MOMENT PLUNGE

Seneca wrote, “*Toti se inserens mundo*,” a phrase translated by Hadot as “plunging oneself into the totality of the world.” Taking this plunge could be understood as the heart of active presence, of “being here now.” “Taking the plunge” means fearless presence, total involvement, holding nothing back. If it is difficult for the self to do this, if it clings to and defends its own positions and wants, that only underscores the need to challenge the self and the conditions it imposes on experience.

From the perspective of active presence, neither therapeutic nor joyful presence is sufficient to turn us toward the existential transformation that the Buddha asked of us. Mindful presence is the right place to start, provided we are ready to respond to what we call to mind. It is really a question of how we live in the world. When we engage the present, we engage the whole of our lives. When we plunge into the world, we accept the whole of what is.

The present moment is more than we imagine it to be. Active in the present, we act on our intentions and our values as well as our perceptions and our attitudes. Ready to question our ordinary concerns, commitments, and understanding.

SOME EXERCISES TO PRACTICE

Mindful Observation

This exercise is simple but incredibly powerful because it helps you notice and appreciate seemingly simple elements of your environment in a more profound way.

The exercise is designed to connect us with the beauty of the natural environment, something that is easily missed when we are rushing around in the car or hopping on and off trains on the way to work.

1. Choose a natural object from within your immediate environment and focus on watching it for a minute or two. This could be a flower or an insect, or even the clouds or the moon.
2. Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at. Simply relax into watching for as long as your concentration allows.
3. Look at this object as if you are seeing it for the first time.
4. Visually explore every aspect of its formation, and allow yourself to be consumed by its presence.
5. Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its purpose within the natural world.

Mindful Awareness

This exercise is designed to cultivate a heightened awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve.

Think of something that happens every day more than once; something you take for granted, like opening a door, for example.

At the very moment you touch the doorknob to open the door, stop for a moment and be mindful of where you are, how you feel in that moment and where the door will lead you.

Similarly, the moment you open your computer to start work, take a moment to appreciate the hands that enable this process and the brain that facilitates your understanding of how to use the computer.

These 'touch point' cues don't have to be physical ones.

For example: Each time you think a negative thought, you might choose to take a moment to stop, label the thought as unhelpful and release the negativity.

Or, perhaps each time you smell food, you take a moment to stop and appreciate how lucky you are to have good food to eat and share with your family and friends.

Choose a touch point that resonates with you today and, instead of going through your daily motions on autopilot, take occasional moments to stop and cultivate purposeful awareness of what you are doing and the blessings these actions brings to your life

Mindful Appreciation

In this exercise, all you have to do is notice 5 things in your day that usually go unappreciated.

These things can be objects or people; it's up to you. Use a notepad to check off 5 by the end of the day.

The point of this exercise is to simply give thanks and appreciate the seemingly insignificant things in life, the things that support our existence but rarely get a second thought amidst our desire for bigger and better things.

For example: electricity powers your kettle, the postman delivers your mail, your clothes provide you warmth, your nose lets you smell the flowers in the park, your ears let you hear the birds in the tree by the bus stop, but...

- Do you know how these things/processes came to exist, or how they really work?
- Have you ever properly acknowledged how these things benefit your life and the lives of others?
- Have you ever thought about what life might be like without these things?
- Have you ever stopped to notice their finer, more intricate details?
- Have you ever sat down and thought about the relationships between these things and how together they play an interconnected role in the functioning of the earth?

Once you have identified your 5 things, make it your duty to find out everything you can about their creation and purpose to truly appreciate the way in which they support your life

References:

<https://www.pocketmindfulness.com/6-mindfulness-exercises-you-can-try-today/>

<https://tricycle.org/>

Interesting reads:

The art of Living -Thich Nhat Hanh