

**EVERYTHING IS HOLY NOW**  
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To live life fully in each and every moment is a concept we are all familiar with. Strive for, can taste. We hear it call to us, maybe even taunt us, in our popular Hymn "Holy Now" by Peter Mayer. Most of us have probably all had a few moments when it feels like the clock stops. Moments when we feel at one and at peace with the universe, experiences for which there seem to be no words.

The best of life has a timelessness to it. Not the timelessness of a classic car. The timelessness of moments that seem special enough that they are to one degree or another separated from the flow of time. Maybe one might dare to say they feel eternal. These experiences stop us in our tracks. If you can think of nothing else, think about sleeping, or the moments when you look up and an hour has passed. My time driving across the country always has a few of those lost moments of time.

I take this topic on from time to time. It brings me peace, that I kinda get it, and anxiety that I am not fully living it. I think it might be fair to say that it remains for me a hope of something holy. The wisdom of the present moment does still seem a bit magical. The wisdom of presence might even offer us hope that there is a layer of eternal beyond the march of time. At least I hope for that. I think we all do.

All that does not mean I really get it. So today is a "Ted Talk" on a fascinating subject matter, but without the expert speaker to guide us forward. Today's lecture is from a wanna-be enlightened one probably like you.

There has been a lot of talk about "Flow" and "Living in the Now" that among many sources has come over the last decade from these two books, *Flow* and *The Power of Now*, but the experience is as old as religion.

Most of us probably encountered this type of thinking when they encountered Maslow, who although most famous for his theory on our "hierarchy of needs," also talked about "peak experiences." He described these as moments of tremendous concentration when there is the truest and most total kind of visual and aural perception. One of the key qualities of the situation is a mind that is perceptive, but not judgmental, a mind that is engaged, but unreflective, un-neurotic. A mind that is trained to the point it is not thinking.

One way to describe it as an attentiveness marked by a total lack of judgment, ego, or evaluation of any kind. In other words, the moment and all that it encompasses is completely accepted for what it is. It is ego-transcending and is marked by a feeling of blissful detachment. Big words and bigger ideas. Most of us kind of get it, and don't.

In sports, "peak experience" is often compared to being in "the zone." The book *Flow* talks about this spiritual, or psychological, side of athletics.

From the original Olympic Games to Michael Jordan, the pinnacle of the athletic experience is achieved not only in winning, but by entering an altered state of consciousness. I suspect Yoda is talking about the zone to one degree or another when he encourages Luke to close his eyes and use The Force.

The famous Celtics center Bill Russell described this zone as a mystical feeling where in his experience he said it almost felt like the game was being played in slow motion. During those spells, Russell said, "I could almost sense how the next play would develop and the next shot would be taken." He also said that when he had these experiences he felt that he not only knew all his Celtic teammates by heart, but also all the opposing players, and there, that they all knew me."

We step out of ourselves in these experiences.

Writer Larry Shainberg observes, "Our fascination with the zone, and indeed with sport in general, may be due to the possibilities it reveals, of being liberated from its ordinary neurological and psychological constraints."

Religious writings of course abound with references to such experiences. The moment celebrated as Pentecost when the Holy Spirit entered the ceiling of the gathered early Christians, or perhaps when Ezekiel witnesses his chariot flying up into the sky, feel like these moments. But I like to think so.

We humans have amazing experiences. The peak experience, what the Buddhists call one-mindedness, or perhaps what Christians mean when they speak of being filled with the Holy Spirit or living IN Christ.

I'm not smart enough to know if they are just in different poetic terms talking about the same experience. But I like to think so. I'm not smart enough to draw those distinctions. I'm not smart enough to know if Moses really did see a burning bush, or whether the bush a metaphor for Moses' state of heightened perception. Or if he even understood the difference. But it does sound like a moment out of time he will never forget.

Could it be the biblical references to the Garden of Eden, was not an actual place, but instead a state of consciousness void of thought? Could it be that Adam and Eve eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge God warned them about was the awakening of the thinking mind? I like to think of that as "The Fall." If we experience the story in this way then is not the idea of original sin a moment when we humans turn away from our souls, our very essence, and famously from the presence of God, to live in the world of our minds.? I like to think so.

These stories and analogies might be trying to tell us in the only way we might be open to getting such news that we don't have to wait around for that peak experience to sneak up on us. They are instructing us that a higher, more intense and more meaningful consciousness is there for us if we are open to it. I think they are trying to teach us that being in the moment is not an accident, but a somewhat hard truth about life

I want to try a little experiment now. One that won't fully work, the voodoo of being lost in the Now is more powerful and ephemeral than this, but indulge me. For one minute I want everyone in this room to just be present. To become-- as best you can--thoughtlessly be attentive to these people, these surroundings, and this moment. Try not to formulate thoughts or chase ideas. You may keep your eyes open and rather than focus on your breath, which you might think I am inclined to ask you to do, I want you to focus on being present right here and now.

Look around, out the window. Notice un-judgmentally the people here, the way the light filters in from the windows, the way these brown seats you're sitting on feel.

Now ask yourself the great Zen question, "What more this moment needs." Now see if you can feel a touch of the holiness in the relative cognitive stillness of that moment.

For what it's worth, I don't ask you to do this like some guru. Just a fellow confused traveler spinning on the edge of planet Earth in a life split between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

I hope that in this little exercise we can taste a little of how perceiving is not the same as thinking.

It is sacred even to try.

If your mind wandered away, and it possibly did, it likely wandered to another thought. Not to nothing. So, this begs the question, "Why?" Why is staying mentally present in the moment, why not thinking, is so bleeping hard?

Why is it that our brains want to be anywhere other than in the present. Are our monkey minds the result of an innate survival instinct that keeps us focused? Fear? The simple way our frontal cortex works? It's unclear.

Some of the way people answer this question is to talk about there being a dichotomy between our mind and our sense of self. This is referred to as the mind/being dichotomy. In other words, we have a mind, that reasons, thinks, fantasizes, has memories and is capable of forethought but is also separate from our being, our essence, our soul, our consciousness, or whatever you want to call it. I would like to think so.

This dual experience we have, of what we might call our self, informs us that for all the amazing things that our brains are, they are not all of who we are. This is part of the mystery of consciousness we hear about.

Eckhart Tolle, in his book *The Power of Now*, states, "You can't think without consciousness, but you can be conscious without particularly being aware of thinking anything in particular. This presence, this awareness is a highly prized way of being."

Emerson said, "What we commonly call a man, the eating, drinking, counting, planting man does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect, but his soul, would he let it appear, through his action, would make our knees bend. When it (referring to the soul) breathes through of a human's intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his or a human's will, it is virtue; when it flows through his or a human beings affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself." (And I am adding, without an acknowledgement of this, "soul.")

And it's no small wonder that this is hard. After all, we have been conditioned from our earliest days to rely completely on our thinking mind. We have been told to "think before we act." To think about the consequences of our actions.

Naturally, this requires us to ride the vehicle of the mind out of the present and into some mind projected future. We tell ourselves that we want to THINK about what we have done. In doing this, this act we are so well versed at, in fact built to do with these big brains of ours, we must ride our minds back into a moment that no longer exists, and dwell there for a time. I'm not saying that this is wrong, because we can't function well without planning and without reflecting on our past actions. We after all have to worry about taxes, whether there is mercury in that tuna, and or if we have saved enough for retirement.

Not surprisingly a lot of us instinctively seek out a respite from the noise of our minds and attempt to return to the simple act of being. I like to think we do the more social and intellectual version of this when we choose to go to church."

It is a peace from the very timeliness of life that makes engaging in sports, playing music, or engaging in some other hobby that consumes our attention so pleasurable.

Think about the best moments in your life. Time stands still. You lose time when you are lying with a lover, or lost staring into the stars. I can get lost preparing sermons. Paul Tillich says "... There is no present if we think of the never-ending flux of time." He goes on to say, "Whenever we say 'now' or

'today' we stop the flux of time," and we accept the present. Remember that earlier quote by Bill Russell, the basketball player describing being in the zone? He said, "...time slowed down."

Maslow noted that in peak experiences, there is a disorientation of time and space. Tillich calls this the "eternal now." Not a chronological, linear sense of time that stretches on to infinity, but the absence of time in the present, that is always available.

In Thornton Wilders's play *Our Town* where Emily, who at this point in the play is dead and regretting that she had not been more conscious during her life, asks, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?"

"No." replies the Stage Manager. Then, after a pause he adds, "The saints and poets maybe—they do some."

I had a Great Uncle who was from early childhood epileptic, in fact unofficially quite possibly the first person to regularly be treated with phenobarbital. And although he was a difficult personality to manage, full of dysfunction and grandiose stories, frequently when in his presence time would slow down and I would enter an almost trance-like state.

The mind, like a child with ADHD, is always darting off somewhere other than the present. We can practice pouring our concentration into every action, even the most routine, and then use our senses for feedback. For example, when getting dressed notice the fabric, notice how it feels on your skin, notice its smell, and take note of how it looks in the light.

When I have done this successfully, I am surprised by a more vibrant world. Colors when I actually notice them really do appear ever so slightly brighter. When we do this, we don't move to a higher level of consciousness so much as we descend deeper into the reality of the moment with ever greater awareness.

Done well attempting to stop to be in the moment is a bit of a vacation.

The lesson of today is to focus on experiencing rather than thinking. Hold in your hearts Paul Tillich's thought that God is not so much defined by height as by depth. That helps me at least.

I think we fear that our lives as we have known them, with our appointments and clocks, will disintegrate if we live in the moment.

I don't think there is a more tangible sense of what faith actually is than to try to let go of the effort to live in the present.

I want you to consider that your mind and your "you" are not the same thing. You are not your mind. If you were your mind, you would never have problems sleeping cause your mind is racing. Your life would improve, be peaceful, to the degree that your mind is your tool. That to your capacity you train like you would a good dog.

I have at least some faith that my life will improve to the degree that I can live in the present.

We are well trained in knowing that we have to plan for the future, try to plan to save some money for retirement, eat kale, cardio enough so that we have come to associate living for the moment with binge drinking, speeding, or just laying around, we resist that as reckless or slothful.

I can only ask that you consider two disparate, difficult things. That there is a virtue in planning for tornados, not smoking, and charting a career path, and that the positive way of living is exactly the opposite learning to live, breathe, perceive deeply. They are different, they are both true.

Couldn't it be that preparing for survival and success is not the same as learning how to best experience reality?

Could the take-away line from this sermon be that preparing for life is not the same skill as living?

Could it be that we need to understand that planning our lives is not the same as living them?

And then at the end there is a moment to think about what that might mean for you.

**AMEN**