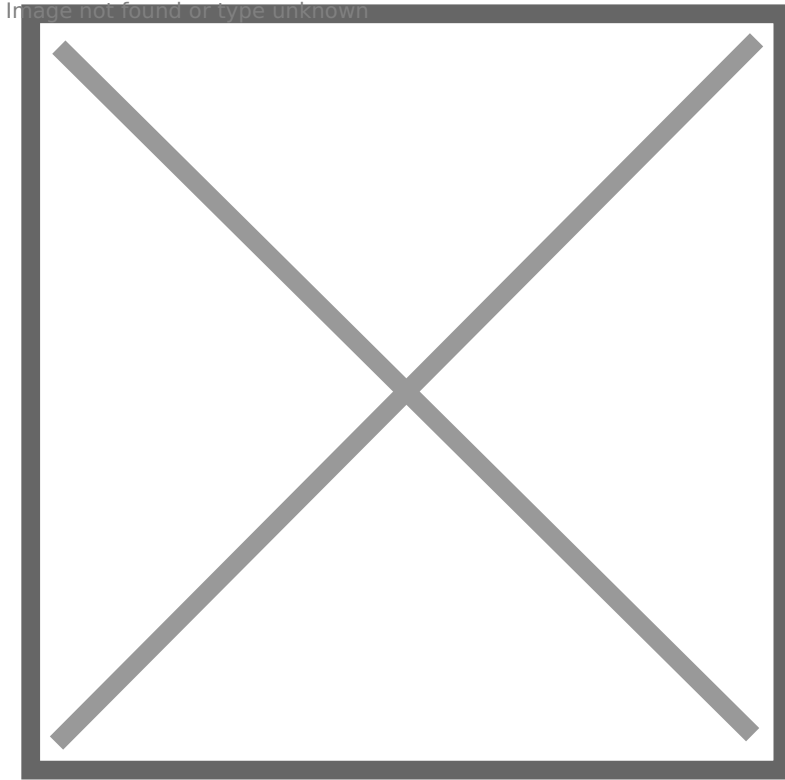


How to live in the moment

Post by "Don" of October 27, 2021 at 9:44 AM



[How to Know That You Know Nothing - How to Build a Happy Life](#)

Staying Present and Breaking the Illusion of Stability

pca.st

I thought this podcast episode had some very Epicurean tips. Discuss 😊

Post by "Joshua" of October 27, 2021 at 6:36 PM

I haven't listened yet, but my gut response is something like John Mulaney here at the 1:40 mark:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=pIVZpzvduZ4>

But I suspect that my time as a near-Buddhist has colored my perception! I'll put that one in the hopper.

Post by “Joshua” of October 27, 2021 at 8:01 PM

One thing I find interesting is the connection that she's drawing between mindfulness and curiosity. I think I probably spend quite a lot of my time 'zoned out'. I also think that its in those moments that my mind forges the most interesting connections;

"...hmmm...I wonder if that word has a Latin root..."

"Hmmm...If you put a tiny stirling engine in a mechanical watch, you might be able to make it self-winding just off of body heat..."

"Hmmm...that would make an interesting framing device for a poem..."

"Hmmm...that jobsite I'm going back to tomorrow presented a few challenges, but I might have fewer problems if I try it this way..."


"Hmmm...I could probably make my own canoe outriggers if I can think of a way to attach [x] to [y]..."

You get the idea. Discursive thought seems far more pleasurable to me than 'trying hard not to think'.

However, I'm well aware of the fact that human minds differ substantially in their interests and obsessions. I certainly know people who compulsively ruminate on things that I can see are making them miserable. The best example is the obsession with politics, whereof the symptoms are 1.) Endless frustration, and 2.) The tiresome tendency to relate every conversation back to politics.

Maybe mindfulness is, for many, a useful therapeutic retreat away from self-imposed mental aggravation? Whereas for some people an energetic and wandering mind bears fruits that are pleasing, rather than irritating?

The deep irony here is that the people I know for whom mindfulness might be well-advised, are exactly the kind of people who will dismiss the idea out of hand.

After all, they've got things on the internet to get angry about! 

Post by “Don” of October 27, 2021 at 8:35 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Whereas for some people an energetic and wandering mind bears fruits that are pleasing, rather than irritating?

See, I thought her point was to have an energetic mind. To notice novelty, e.g., riding in a car and looking out the window at all the changing vistas and new sites to see.

Or did you get another take?

Post by “Don” of October 27, 2021 at 9:27 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

I haven't listened yet, but my gut response is something like John Mulaney here at the 1:40 mark

First, LOL. I like John Mulaney.

Second, I found interesting in the podcast that she disassociated mindfulness from meditating. I also liked the discussion about retrospection (and finding pleasure in it) and propection (and getting pleasure in the pleasure moment while realizing your plans may not come to fruition).

Post by “Joshua” of October 27, 2021 at 9:39 PM

Early on she mentions Thich Nhat Hanh; if I had a "guru" when I was deep in Buddhism, it was certainly him. I loved his books, sought his dharma talks, and followed the goings-on at his Plum Village retreat in France. There actually *was* a Buddhist temple in home town, which I enjoyed going by but would never have considered going in—theirs was a cultural emphasis, and my interest was solely on the 'dhamma'.

My memory of Thich Naht Hanh's mindfulness is best represented by the dish-washing she mentions on the podcast. When you're washing the dishes, you're not thinking about Cicero's *De Finibus*; you're not thinking about work, or an interesting podcast. You're not listening to an audiobook—you're really not even thinking about the dishes! Your whole attention is trained on

to the motions, sensations, the *experience* of dishwasher.

A thought will arise; you will acknowledge it, and then let it go. There will follow a moment of mental 'blankness', but inevitably, another thought will arise.

You will acknowledge it, and let it go. Your project is to clear your mind of the *whole process of cognition*. Your mind does not want to be clear—it has aeons of natural selection and a whole lifetime of habit driving it toward this singular purpose—it wants to *think!* But you are going for mindfulness, so you clear it again. You are trying to be in the present, fully awake to *experience* and *sensation*, but not to thought. Thought is a distraction from the present moment, and you are trying to be present.

Here's the thing; after a few thousand hours, or tens of thousands of hours, this training will result in a few empirically verifiable changes in the brain. The brains of long-practicing monks look different under brain imaging scans, and *function* differently; they've aged better, have more activation in the "good" areas (happiness, altruism) and less activation in the "bad" areas (fear, selfishness, anxiety).

Mindfulness in the early attempts can be really frustrating, and most people give up. In some individuals, where the mind is especially troubled, mindfulness can exacerbate existing mental health problems. But the biggest problem for me is the discipline required, and the colossal time-sink involved.

Personally, I got to a point where I chose to rely on the hope that there exist other pathways to happiness, and I abandoned that one. I'll never have the brain of a master meditator; but I like to think I've still got a fair crack at long-term happiness.

But you know what? For the sake of experiment, I may give it another try!

Post by “Joshua” of October 27, 2021 at 9:41 PM

My phone is dying, but I will have more to say! You are certainly right that she separated mindfulness from the apparatus of Eastern spirituality, and that is worth talking about.