

The Power of Now Summary

By Eckhart Tolle

Do you believe in the idea of time travel, or do you think that it's a fictional concept? According to Eckart Tolle, a renowned spiritual teacher and author, we time travel daily, sometimes without even realizing it. In fact, we spend many of our waking hours in a state of mental time travel, which causes us to be trapped in thoughts about the past, or the future.

The Power of Now explores the mind as a great tool, but also an obstacle to experiencing the present moment. We fret about the past or the future, and these negative feelings and false beliefs pull us out of living in the present. Hence we waste precious time, and squander potential moments of joy and wonder.

These negative emotions about ourselves, and how our lives should be, prevent us from experiencing the fullness of life, and enjoying who we really are. This is problematic on two fronts. Focusing too much on the past, or the future, means that we often miss out on the enjoyment of the present moment, and, what's more, these thoughts don't always take us to pleasant times. Our thoughts are often negatively charged, and we get trapped in feelings of regret about the past, or experience anxious worries about the future.

Eckart Tolle is a well-known and popular spiritual teacher and author. His central teaching focuses on the now, so that we can move beyond the noise and clutter that come with overthinking. His teachings come from a place of authentic experience because his own ability to "live in the now", has been a long journey. Tolle's enduring sense of peace, and present moment awareness, was a process that took time, and up until his 30th

birthday, he lived with constant anxiety, interspersed with periods of suicidal depression.

Changes often happen overnight, and this is what happened in the case of Eckart Tolle. At the age of 29, he awoke one night with his usual feelings of dread and despair. These were not new feelings, and he'd woken up like this before, but then something very strange happened. Tolle experienced a transformative epiphany, triggered by a profound, yet simple insight. He suddenly realized that he wasn't the voice in his head. He also realized that rather than over-identifying with the constant stream of negative thoughts and difficult emotions, he could choose to connect to a deeper level of conscious awareness beyond thought. Hence, he could bear witness to his thoughts and feelings, and notice them for what they are; simply fleeting mental and emotional events. He no longer felt attached to his thoughts, and he was no longer defined by them. This was less a cognitive experience and more of a felt-realization, but nonetheless, this miraculous spiritual awakening ended his lifelong psychological suffering, and suicidal thoughts. And not only that, but it left him with an unshakable sense of peace that's been with him ever since. Over time he has become a renowned contemporary spiritual teacher, whose ideas have enriched the lives of millions worldwide.

We'll briefly explore why focussing on the present, and being in the now, enables us to reclaim a deep sense of peace and well-being.

Furthermore, we'll examine the mental roadblocks that keep us from experiencing the fullness of the moment, and we'll look at some ways in which we can return to the present. *The Power of Now* isn't only a guide to help us on our paths towards spiritual enlightenment, but it also enables us to become more conscious, allowing us to govern our minds so that our minds don't govern us. We're told to embrace pain and suffering, and to be more alert. We're also taught to understand our egos, and to listen

to our bodies rather than our minds. If we put these things into practice, and we truly begin to live in the present, it'll have a lasting impact on our lives and how we view our place in the world.

Enlightenment Is the Treasure Within

We tend to think of enlightenment as a superhuman quality, available only to a select spiritual few. However, enlightenment is actually an ever-present state of being, which focuses on experiencing a joyful oneness with life. The problem is that we often turn to the outer world in search of it. For instance, we may focus on our accomplishments, possessions, and experiences as a source of happiness, but a lasting and profound sense of peace, actually comes from within.

There's an insightful parable about enlightenment that may help to explain this further. A beggar had spent the majority of his life sitting by the side of the road, and on one particular day, a stranger walked past. In his usual way, while holding out his old baseball cap, the beggar asked if the stranger could spare some change. The stranger replied that he had no change, and then instead of walking on by, he asked what the beggar was sitting on. The beggar replied that it was just an old box, and he had been sitting on it for as long as he could remember. Once more, instead of moving on, the stranger asked another question. He wondered whether the beggar had ever looked inside of the box, to which the beggar responded, 'What's the point? There's nothing in there.' The stranger paused for a while, and then told the beggar to look inside the box. The beggar looked quizzically at the man, before prying open the old box. What the beggar found was utterly astonishing; the old box was filled with an abundance of gold. The moral of this story is that we need to look inside ourselves to find the gold, instead of looking toward external factors, because happiness comes from within.

Within each of us lies a treasure, far greater than the world can offer. Inside all of us is a joy of being, and the unshakable peace that comes with acknowledging our inner selves. It's hard to understand, because it can't be mentally understood or explained. It's intuitive, and we can only know it when our minds are completely still, and when we're focused on the present. Hence, the more we live in the now, the more we can connect with our enlightened self, and experience life more fully.

Obstacles Keeping Us From Living in the Present

Have you ever found yourself getting completely lost in thought, or over-identifying with the ego, or simply carrying around pain from the past?

This way of being, often makes us feel anxious, and prevents us from experiencing the oneness of being.

Let's start with those pesky thoughts, those thoughts that often keep us up at night, or whirl around in our heads making us feel overwrought and uneasy. Many of us set exciting future goals, but a lot of the time these goals spiral out of control and we start fretting over whether we'll achieve them or not. And, even worse, what if we fail? Welcome to what's known as mental time travel, and it's something that we all do. The problem is, that such thoughts prevent us from being positive and present, making it more difficult to achieve our goals. It's even harder to remain in a peaceful and present state of awareness, when so much of our cultural obsession is bound to clock-time, instead of psychological time.

Psychological time is those moments when we get lost in our thoughts about the past, or the future. And there's nothing inherently wrong with this, because mind-wandering is an essential part of the human experience. In fact, thoughts about the past provide us with a sense of identity, and the future often holds hope. But there's also a dark side to mind-wandering. While many of us reflect on the positives, it's also human nature to focus on the negatives. For example, the things that went wrong, or those things that could still go wrong. So often, too much focus is on the adverse effects of the past, which brings out feelings of pain or regret.

Similarly, focusing on the negative aspects of the future, leaves us with anxiety and tension. What's more, even if we have hopeful anticipation of what's going to come, all too frequently we skip over experiencing the present moment. Waiting is a psychological time trap, because it creates stress. This stress is created by an inner split, which occurs because you're in the present, but not experiencing it because you're waiting for

future things that will supposedly make you happier. There's a line from the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, which summarises this beautifully, and that's, 'Get busy living. Or, get busy dying'. The point is that none of us should be waiting backstage for our lives to begin. So, while goals are vital, we need to be mindful of how we perceive them, and interact with them.

The Trouble With Ego

One of the many problems with overidentifying with our ego, is that the ego is actually our false-self. The ego prevents us from being truly present, because our minds tell us stories about who we are, and the events that happen in our lives, and we tend to believe them.

According to the author, the problem began with statements such as, 'I think; therefore I am.' Descartes gave into a fundamental error where we equate thinking with being, and where we believe that our thoughts are our identity. Overidentification with our thoughts can taint the lens through which we view ourselves and the world. So the ego, or false-self, is an interpretation of the world, and not a true reflection.

The ego is frequently tied to markers such as social status, material possessions, our jobs, receiving recognition from others, our belief systems, and so on. The ego traps us at the surface level of these identifications, which means that we never engage with our authentic selves, because the ego is always in a state of flux. For example social status can change through one bad investment, we could get retrenched tomorrow, our looks will change over time. The things that drive our egos are not permanent, and are not about our inner selves or living in the present. The ego makes us wish things could be different, and when we think and feel in this way, we cling to thoughts about the past or the

future and resist the chance to live in the here and now.

Furthermore, our ego can be the source of great suffering. By nature, the ego has us feeling lacking and incomplete. It's the voice that makes us believe that once we obtain certain things, we will be happy. It also does whatever it can to protect itself. It's why we might get irrationally upset when we're told that we're in the wrong. We have such a strong belief that our thoughts are our identity, so our sense of self is under threat if our thoughts are proven wrong. This mindset prohibits us from being in the now, and therefore being truly happy.

The Power of Ego

The ego's power isn't just confined to our minds. Our thought patterns produce emotions, and our bodies have physical reactions to these thoughts. For example, when we experience mental pain, it often manifests as physical pain.

The pain-body, as the name implies, is accumulated suffering that remains stored in the body. It's a type of vibrational energy that emanates around us, and when triggered by another similar pain, it rears up and reacts. For example, you might notice your pain body rearing its head when you feel a painful emotional reaction to a specific event. Hence, negative emotions need to be dealt with because otherwise, they become a remnant of the pain we carry with us throughout our lives. As with our thoughts, strong negative emotions can also distract us from the present and keep us disconnected from our true being.

The ego should never prevent us from dealing with suffering, because suffering is often where we learn the most about life, and ourselves.

Learning From Obstacles

We've covered the three roadblocks that prevent us from being present and re-connecting with the deepest part of our being. The first thing is that we get lost in thought. Secondly, we over-identify with the ego, and thirdly, we hold onto lingering pain.

Now that we know what the obstacles are, how can we overcome them? The first step is learning to watch our thoughts and emotions without attaching to them. We can do this by grounding ourselves in the present moment.

The beginning of true freedom, is the realization that we're not our thoughts. A critical practice to start implementing is to become a witnessing presence. This entails becoming a watcher, rather than a thinker. To do this, we need to observe and listen to our thought streams, without identifying with them. This practice will allow us to achieve a higher level of consciousness and enlightenment.

Close your eyes and ask yourself what your next thought will be.

This seemingly insignificant question will have a considerable impact on your thought patterns. What's more, you'll find yourself being able to live in the present if you practice this exercise; particularly when you're caught in a train of past or future thoughts. By adopting a state of permanent alertness you'll no longer be a passenger to your thought

processes. So the idea is that whenever you're experiencing a wave of thoughts, you need to ask yourself what your next thought will be. You'll find that this blocks off the previous thought, and replaces it with a blank moment where your mind readjusts to your question.

This practice of being patient and waiting for the next thought to arrive, allows us to simply be alert, and separate from our thoughts. It's likely that by doing this it'll take some time for the next thought to pop into our heads, because we'll have created a gap in the flow of thought, this allows us to take control and be present. The key is that thinking is, after all, only one tiny aspect of consciousness. In other words, there's a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, and thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence, once we truly realize this, we begin to awaken.

Stay Grounded in the Present

To stay with this awakened presence, we need to stay grounded in the present. And, to remain rooted in the present, we need to shift our attention from our thoughts, to our bodies. We should all be aware of our bodies' signals because they help us to notice our emotions and the repetitive thoughts that perpetuate them.

How often do you think about your breathing and your breathing patterns?

A simple way of bringing a state of presence to our bodies, is through our breath. Try to pay attention to your breath right now. Don't force it into a particular rhythm, just be aware of it for a few moments.

Often this practice may be difficult because painful experiences could

arise as you're trying to focus. The point is to just try and pay attention to your body, without judgment. Once you've gone through this experience you should approach it with an attitude of forgiveness and acceptance.

When we notice our jaw is clenched, or feel the tension in our shoulders, we can stop and notice that the source of this may be stress or anger. Just as we can become a witness to our thoughts, so too can we begin to witness our emotions, rather than being sucked in and overtaken by them. If something is difficult, try to drop the negativity, and if you can't, try to practice witnessing it as a separate mental and emotional process.

As soon as we begin witnessing our emotions, instead of taking part in them, we're able to separate from them. But tuning in to the present and being with whatever arises isn't always easy. This is why we need to cultivate an attitude of acceptance, forgiveness, and surrender.

Cultivate a Deep Awareness of Reality

Acceptance of the present moment, is about cultivating a deep awareness of reality as it actually is.

It's about seeing clearly, and seeing through negative motivations and false identifications. It's also about seeing, and feeling life as it is, which helps us to respond instead of reacting to life situations. This allows us to act in accordance with our deepest self, and to acknowledge what truly matters to us. It's important to remember that acceptance towards the present, isn't passive resignation. Paradoxically, it's about being alert, and action-oriented.

There are many ways to handle difficult present moment situations. For

example, if we're in a situation we don't like, we have three choices. The first choice is that we can try to remove ourselves from that situation. The second choice is that we can see if we can change the situation. And, finally, the third choice, is can we truly accept the situation, as if we chose it ourselves? The last option may be hard to digest, especially when we're in challenging situations. For example, dealing with the death of a loved one is never easy. However, accepting death as an inevitability, can help us to move towards acceptance, and focus on the present. The challenge is to become an alchemist... i.e., are you able to take stress and suffering and alchemize it into something positive?

In Conclusion

Beyond the mind and our restless daily doings, lies the indestructible essence of our being. However, in order to feel it, we need to make the journey into the now. This means abandoning and leaving behind our analytical minds. This process sounds counter-intuitive, because humans are inherently thoughtful and analytical, but we're given insightful practices to reset how we think about thinking. This book's message is that our minds can be a trap, and they can set us in a loop where we live in the past and the future, while never really experiencing the present.

At the core, we all need to realize deeply, that the present moment is all that we have. Therefore it's our duty to make the present, the primary focus of our lives. If we're able to do this, and our inside being is happy, then the rest of our lives will fall into place.