Techniques for Living in the NOW

By PJ Zito

Living in the now is something that can bring joy and peace to every moment in your life. *Being fully present* in your life is easy when you understand how to master the three PLANES that we all live in. The three PLANES are the Physical Plane, the Mental Plane, and the Spiritual Plane.

Most people have a mental image of how living in the **NOW** "should" be. However, what you "think" might be different from what you discover on our journey together.

Let's Break Things Down ~ Why It's So Hard to Be Present

Being fully present in the ***NOW*** can be difficult to achieve because doing so requires a whole-body-spirit-change in our feeling and thinking and BE-ing.

When something does happen to shake your focus, (or make you pay attention to your life) it can make you feel like you've failed to achieve the coveted state of fully living in the ***NOW***. However, being present isn't something that has a success or failure scorecard. **Being present is simply learning how to pick up on the situations when you're not practicing *living in the moment* and gently course correcting.**

It can be hard to be in the present because you might get caught up in the mundane/routine. There's nothing peaceful about the stresses of life. When the dishwasher floods, the kids are sick or the car breaks down, it can be easy to start reacting, rather than focusing on what is currently going on in your life-plan for your ***NOW***.

Living in the NOW is something that requires discipline and purposed planning. It's easy to fall back into bad habits. You can find yourself handling life the way you've always done. Your habits are your "go-to"

response and your brain (the Mental Plane) can automatically fall back into the thought processes learned in a programmed life.

When this happens and you realize that your mind and your reactions are opposite of living in the ***NOW***, you can always hit reset. Just because you think you blew it doesn't mean that you did. Rome wasn't built in a day and change happens in small increments.

Everyone will have times when they forget to focus, especially when life gets hectic. However, as soon as you're aware of that happening, you can pause and start fresh.

It is hard to be present when you are in the middle of something that's stressing you out or trying to make you angry or sad. This is totally normal. It's common to have difficulty concentrating or focusing when you're in the middle of a crisis. That's why we have specific steps in place to help change our reactions to be more positive and under our control.

That's why you want to focus on learning to "***live in the NOW***" even if your life seems peaceful and calm at this moment. Then when difficult things happen, you will be able to maintain your peacefulness because ***you've spent time praying, planning and practicing awareness.***

Some people struggle to be present because they fear living in the moment means they are going to be handing over control. Sometimes, it's easier to think that if you worry about something or fret over it; you can prevent bad things from happening simply because you pre-worried.

However, living fully in the moment isn't about giving up control. It's about ***focusing your awareness*** so that you don't waste valuable energy worrying about what has happened or what might happen. Instead, you are ***experiencing the fullness of life exactly where you are***.

How to Become Aware of the Current NOW

Learning how to become aware of the current ***NOW*** is the way you can live in the present.

Begin by tuning in to your body (*the Physical Plane*.) You can do this by understanding how to connect with your body.

Breathe in and pay attention to how the air fills your lungs. Then slowly release the air. Notice how the oxygen makes your lungs feel as you inhale, then again as you exhale.

Then focus on the top of your head and move down or begin at your toes and move up as you focus on your body. During these body moments, you want to be aware of your breathing and posture.

Master how your body feels in each area. Pay attention to assess whether there is something that you need to address. Sometimes, you can get so busy in life that you miss important things your body is trying to tell you.

Perform a mental body scan (*the Mental Plane*) to help you become aware of the present and your body responses to various situations.

You can also check in with yourself as soon as you are awake. Do this every morning before even getting out of bed. Practice breathing, become aware of feelings of gratitude for being given another precious day. Bless those you love, those you have promised to pray for and stretch into the new day. We call the next phase our ***SIT AND SIP TIME***. Again, taking just a few minutes, write down whatever it is that flows into your consciousness. There is no page count to reach or limit to be had. You just write down your thoughts and your feelings. These

short, writing bursts can clarify how you are feeling and help put your day into focus.

Writing down what is going on in your mind helps to clear away the cobwebs, determine your focus, and prepare for the day. It doesn't matter if you skip from thought to thought. There is no grade to be had here.

You can write one word, one sentence or several pages. This is simply tuning in to your mind at the beginning of your day just like you tuned in to your body.

Another way to stay present is to meditate as you are going through your day. When you meditate on your day—on each task or action—it helps you to stay in the **NOW** regardless of what you are doing.

This practice helps you to keep your attention trained on the current moment rather than thinking about what happened yesterday or turning your focus to what you need to do tomorrow.

Take a second to *see yourself as you are going through your day*. Visualize your steps. This works to keep your focus on what you need to do rather than allowing yourself to *become distracted* by other things or *reacting to everything* rather than *controlling everything*.

When your day is over, pause to *reflect about the moments that you were fully present*. Think about how you felt *physically* (***Physical Plane***) and how you felt *emotionally* (***Mental Plane***.) The purpose for this brief exercise is to help you ***become more aware of the attention you gave the present NOW. It allows you to finish the day on a moment of reflection and gratitude.***

Obstacles that Keep You from Being Present in the NOW

Of course, there are obstacles that can get in the way and stop you from being fully present.

Distractions are one of these. You can set a goal to be more present, then it seems like one thing after another happens to get in the way of that goal. Sometimes these distractions can be problems at home or work. They could also be thoughts or habits that keep cropping up.

Closely linked to the problem of distractions is stress. When you're under stress, it can be hard to keep your mind's focus where you want it to be. That is because your brain is busy trying to solve the current crisis *– the uncontrolled Mental Plane*.

Your body starts to react to stress in ways that are not conducive to living in the ***NOW*** *– the uncontrolled Physical Plane.*

When your breathing and your body are not calm, it is much harder to soothe your mind and focus your thoughts. *We never discover the Spiritual Plane when the other two planes are out of our control.*

Too many demands on you physically can also be an obstacle to keep you from being mindful. When you reach the end of your physical strength, it can be hard to find the mental strength that you need.

If you are not feeling well, you are tired, or you are under stress, your mind will have a harder time keeping the focus where it needs to be. Any time that a physical need is present, it can be an obstacle. If you are thirsty, your mind might want to focus on that only. If you are hungry, your mind might not be able to focus on anything but food.

When a physical need nags at the back of your subconscious mind, you can have a lot of trouble centering your mind on anything else.

When you want to practice living in the ***NOW***, you need to be sure that both your *Physical Plane* and *Mental Plane* are *balanced*.

Having a time crunch is another roadblock to mindfulness. If your life is so packed with activities and responsibilities that fitting one more thing in it seems overwhelming, you will have difficulty obtaining the awareness needed for living richly within the present ***NOW***.

Your own thoughts can get in the way, too. Thinking that you are not good enough or that you can't keep your focus is a common obstacle.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that *living in the present* is something they can do just by wanting it.

However, *living in the* ***NOW*** is something that ***takes both effort and consistency.***

If you have completed the ***40-day journey of Living in the Now***, you are well on your way to deeply appreciating and honoring the steps, habits and priorities supporting your ***NOW***.

When times are difficult, many people give up. They want instant results and being mindful isn't something that happens overnight. ***We all must work at awareness and it is in honoring the abundance before us that life explodes!***

Whatever you are doing right now, try to stop a moment and truly pause. Take a breath and refocus. This is a simple way to calm your racing mind and body so that you can be fully present.

Mindfulness Practices to Keep You Engaged in the NOW

There are practices that you can put into place that will help keep you fully present. *Meditation is one of the keys to mindfulness*. Meditating can make it easier for your mind to learn how to course correct and keep out the distorted and distracting thoughts.

Meditation can be accomplished through meditation exercises such as learning to pay attention to your body, living in the moment and breathing techniques. These can be done alone, together or coupled with other ways of meditating that involve sitting, standing, walking or emotional and physical connection through scanning your body.

It doesn't take long blocks of time to meditate. You can accomplish it in as little as five minutes.

When you are ***ready to meditate, find somewhere that's relaxing and as quiet as possible.*** Less noise is important if you are just now learning about living in the ***NOW***.

As you are relaxing, block thoughts that are about anything you need to deal with such as work, your to-do list, or other tasks that weigh on you.

You can perform a mental block by "capturing" these thoughts as they come and mentally picturing yourself putting them behind a locked door.

Choose a meditation phrase to help keep yourself focused. It can be something as short and simple as "I choose to be present."

Pay attention to the sensations you feel.

Tune in to how it feels to sit where you are. Become aware of the sofa, the chair, or the place on the floor. Embrace the feel and the perceptions

of your body, the fabric of the sofa, the carpet, or the wood floor. These sensations can be experienced physically or emotionally.

In this meditative state, let the thoughts enter as they will and observe them without judging. Pay attention to the depths of your breathing. Focus on how you feel as you breathe out and again as you inhale.

As you are meditating, you will have certain emotions arise. Let them pass in and out of your consciousness without judging yourself for what they are. Think of your thoughts as waves on the ocean. You are not trying to control them; you are simply acknowledging them as they come.

With meditation, keep in mind that you don't have to sit in one place. You can meditate as you go for a walk or while you are running errands. Meditating on the go is perfectly acceptable and a great way for beginners to become more mindful, more grateful, and more receptive.

Calm Racing Thoughts & Enjoy the Peace of the Present

*Living in the **NOW*** is something that takes practice. You may struggle with being present because of racing thoughts (*the Mental Plane*).

People have this issue because of over-thinking. There are common areas where people tend to over-think. One of these areas is money. A simple thought that you'd like to make more money can quickly turn into worrying that you may not have enough in the future. It could turn into worrying about what you will do if you lose your job or your ability to work. The thought trail can be endless!

Relationships are another area where over-thinking often happens. This is usually due to projecting. You don't know what someone is thinking

or feeling, and it can make you second guess. You might think someone is feeling negatively toward you when they are not even thinking about their relationship with you at all.

If you take a situation or a problem and you over-think it, you can spin it into a huge problem that seems overwhelming. Then you feel paralyzed and unable to take action. Now, racing thoughts keep you spinning your wheels and wasting time.

When you learn how to control your *Mental Plane*, you live fully present and acquire a feeling of power as you realize what you can do. To calm racing thoughts and experience the peace of the present, you can take several steps to reach your goal.

First, remember to breathe. When you pause to breathe, it effectively lowers your heightened response as well as your stress. Focus on inhaling and exhaling and slowly count to three as you do so. You will instantly feel calmer.

Second, don't look at situations that aren't real. Many people create worst-case scenarios in their minds. For example, if someone is late coming home, you might assume the worst—that your loved one was injured or in an accident. However, this thought doesn't serve you. It only adds unnecessary stress and fear to your life.

If you realize that a thought is based only on anxiety, let it go. You might say, "I know Brian is running late. But I release my fear over it and choose to believe that everything will be fine."

Next, don't allow yourself to get caught up in the past. Focus on the moment, rather than what used to be or what could be. The only time that you have is right ***NOW***. If you focus on the past, your thoughts will

race about things that happened to you or how you could have done things differently.

You may also find it helpful to *adopt a mantra*. Having a word or phrase that you can turn to, to refocus your attention, can calm a racing mind. This could be something as simple as “Everything is fine” or “I walk in peace.”

Sometimes racing thoughts happen because you are trying to hold on to important information. You fear what might happen if you forget to take care of something.

Calm your racing thoughts by creating a “thoughts” list & a “to do” list.

Write down all the thoughts that are bothering you. Once they are written down, you will discover that your thoughts are no longer racing. That is because once you write something down, your brain believes it has dealt with the racing thoughts and will begin winding down.

You can also choose to do a calming activity when you are struggling to be present. This might be something like playing a game, reading, or writing, going for a walk or a run, gardening, coloring, drawing, or listening to music. Calming activities stop racing thoughts because they change your focus from being immersed in anxiety or regret to actively doing something.

Calming exercise is another activity you can do that will help you control your racing thoughts. As you exercise, endorphins flood the body. This boosts your mood and can help you get fear or worry back under control. For the best results, choose a low-impact exercise that will calm you. For example, you might choose a slow walk around your neighborhood or a series of gentle yoga poses.

Listen to the birds outside your window or put on some nature music. You could turn on a white noise machine or listen to instrumental music as well.

Mindfulness Exercises to Bring You Back to the Present

Despite how much you might want to live in the ***NOW***, it is easy for your thoughts to drift. However, there are ways that you can become mindful again.

Change your habits to retrain your brain. In all the business of today's lifestyles, it is easy to fall into the trap of trying to do several things at once. While multitasking might make you feel like you are accomplishing more, it is teaching you to become distracted and lose focus.

In your daily life, concentrate on doing one thing at a time until it is complete. This will help to retrain your mind to focus on what is at hand in the present rather than trying to get started on tomorrow's to-do list.

When you handle something, make sure that you are calm when you do it. If you are feeling peaceful when you're completing a task, it's easier to remain gratefully in the ***NOW***.

Bring your thoughts under control each time they wander. For example, instead of thinking "Tomorrow I have to start on a new project." think, "Right now, I'm cooking dinner." or "Right now, I'm driving in my car." Always focus on what you are currently doing.

Beware of autopilot. Your thoughts can wander if you are performing a habit you do automatically, such as taking a shower. If you've completed a task, had to pause to ask yourself if you did it, it's a clear

sign your mind wasn't fully present. You were moving on to something else rather than staying in that moment.

A simple way to overcome this "autopilot" mode is to shake up your old routine and formulate a working plan. If you normally take a certain route to work, choose another route instead and be aware of the ***NOW***. If you usually do a specific activity at a certain time, like always eating lunch at noon, rearrange the time and see what happens.

Don't forget to check in with yourself periodically during the day.

When you find that you are **not in the present**, you need *to* ***reorient your mind.***

Do this by ***pausing and touching base with your five senses****. Listen to the sounds you can hear. Focus on what you can see. Pay attention to what you can feel. Inhale through your nose and try to name the aromas in the air.*

Remember that you don't want to waste your energy on worrying. It doesn't solve anything and just makes you feel worse.

When a concern pops into your mind, say something soothing. For example, you might tell yourself, "There are no action steps to take at the moment."

When there is nothing you need to do, it frees your mind to return to the present.

Stop dwelling on anything that you feel is lacking in your life or within you. This causes a sense of dissatisfaction and makes you think about what you don't have or what you're not.

Instead, focus on what you have in the moment and who you are in the moment. You could say something like, “Today, I delight in who I am and what I already have.”

A grateful heart is a happy heart!

Activities Help You Connect to the Present

Activities can help you live in the ***NOW***. These activities can be painting, knitting, sewing, pottery, photography, playing an instrument, singing, writing, journaling and more. Take to the golf course if you can afford the time or go for a swim!

When you involve yourself in some type of artistic activity, the world around you will cease to intrude on your mind. If you were engaged in pottery, you would hear the spinning of the wheel and feel the cool clay rising into formation between your hands. You would smell the wet sensation of the damp clay and ***BE.***

The artistic activity becomes a part of you as you immerse yourself in it. Time can fall away, and your only thoughts are ***at the moment.***

This often happens when you engage in something beyond self. It puts you in touch with the part of your brain that focuses on visualizing and on being creative and your ***NOW*** expands.

This also allows you to exist without judging.

It teaches you to accept the ***NOW*** without holding on to the past or worrying about what might come in the future.

The link between you and the artistic activity you engage in pulls you into the present. It causes you to become meditative and connect with the internal.

As you are engaging in your form of artistic activity, you can notice how your body feels during the engagement. (Your Physical Plane) You can be aware of your breath as you exhale and feel the inhale as it floods your body. You can visualize the stress as it leaves your body.

This is what awareness is. It's when you take what you're doing externally and connect it to what's going on inside of you. This lets you focus your attention and remain observant as you create. It also helps to establish a pattern of mindfulness. (Mastering your Mental Plane)

Artistic activities allow you to become present because they teach you to focus on where you are.

When you begin to create, you can create without expectation. You're simply working on something in the ***NOW***!

With any creative endeavor, you must realize that messing up is inevitable but starting over is possible.

These setbacks teach you that you can always begin again. As with *living in the* ***NOW***, losing your focus is just one step in the progress.

It doesn't mean you lose the entire journey or miss the meaning within your ***NOW***.

These artistic activities can help you become mindful by showing you that the beginning is not what the finished project will be.

You might see only obstacles when you first start *living in the **NOW***. Persevering trains you to overcome the obstacles that you encounter. Creating habits and realizing the value within personal-supporting journal-work becomes your strength.

In the book "Living in the NOW," we spend 40 days together learning how to make each day our best.

Love Your Life Right Now

When you're not fully present, you can find yourself wishing that you were someone else. You can become jealous, bitter, and become focused on what you feel is a lesser version of yourself.

Until you learn to love your life right ***NOW***, you won't see how accomplished you really are.

Focusing on what you love about yourself and your life will enable you to become more aware of the blessings, gifts, and abundant opportunities that are (and always have been) right within your ***NOW***.

Let go of the expectations of what your life should have or could have been.

Don't focus on what you have or haven't done in life.

This will lead to feelings of anxiety, sorrow, and sometimes depression.

Release any guilt you feel over choices you made or didn't make.

Everything brings us to where we need to be.

Be who you are in the precious moment that is your gift to use right ***NOW***.

See the good that you have done and all that you have achieved.

This pulls your focus from the negative and puts it on the positive.

A powerful redirection of the *Physical and Mental Planes* can be ***liberating*** as it ***empowers awareness*** of the *Spiritual Plane* that is always available to us when we are free.

Be thankful. Look for the good that is going on in your life and be grateful. Focus on the blessings you have, like a place to sleep at night, a roof over your head, food to eat and people who love you.

Stop letting the little irritations in your life become big things. Whether it's an appliance that stopped working, a long wait in traffic, a missed deadline or the supper that burned, don't allow these things to have your focus to the point that they make you feel upset with life in general. Things happen. Take it in stride and don't let these afflictions burrow under your skin and fester.

Part of being mindful and *living in the **NOW*** is learning to take care of yourself too.

Before you can handle the things that go on in your life or be there for someone else, you must first be there for you. This means taking care of yourself, both physically and emotionally.

It's hard to focus and stay present when the *Physical Plane* and the *Mental Plane* are out of control. Learning to be ***present in the NOW*** is a process.

Keep Trying to Be Present in the NOW and Be Happy

Life is a journey with no actual destination.
Some days, you'll feel like you did well, and you'll want to celebrate. Other days you may not do so well and struggle to be mindful of the **NOW** at all. This is part of the process, the journey we are all on together, and it doesn't mean you've missed your **NOW**.

You simply try again tomorrow because ***each new day is a fresh start, another gift, an endless blessing and your exposure to the ever-available Spiritual Plane that we are all blessed to discover as Companions Living in the NOW.***

CLICK HERE FOR INFO on our **Living in the NOW community** where we traverse the path and meet the challenge of ***Living in the NOW*** together, growing in grace and wisdom, mastering our *Physical* and *Mental Planes* to bask in the ever- present *Spiritual Plane* that holds and honors our **NOW**.

LIVING IN THE NOW: The Secret to Making Each Day Your Best
40 Days to Deeper Prayer and Greater Self-Awareness
Patricia Jean Smithyman-Zito

The NOW is all we have. The NOW is all we need.

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