

Being Fully Present

Being fully present means having your focus, your attention, your thoughts and feelings all fixed on the task at hand. If you are speaking to somebody, then your attention and energy is focused on him or her and what he or she is saying. If you are doing a task, then your entire being is focused on the task.

This is a rather different way for people to function. Often people feel that they should be doing many things at the same time. Multitasking has been considered a healthy skill. In fact, for some time, people were encouraged to multitask because the theme of the day was to do more with less (but we'll provide you with the information technology so you can do it all the time). Indeed, having multiple tasks simultaneously on the go was seen as a badge of honour and a sign of productivity.

Unfortunately, we have found that multitasking is stressful, exhausting and, typically, unproductive.

The opposite of being fully present is being "up in your head". Most of us can relate to this experience. Here are some examples:

- Reading but then realizing that you can't remember a good portion of what you read.
- Speaking with someone but then you notice you have been thinking of something else and don't know what the conversation is about.
- Starting one task and then switching to another without finishing the first one.

The above scenarios are examples of not being fully present. Often they are a function of being under pressure. When we are overloaded, preoccupied or emotionally upset we tend to revert to our head and don't experience the present moment. Thus we don't give the situation at hand our best attention and effort, and deprive ourselves of the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Aim to be fully present with everything you do. It is a fundamental shift from doing five things simultaneously to doing five things in sequence. Instead of giving 20% of your attention to five things at once, you give 100% of your attention to five things in a row. Let's try an experiment to experience being fully present.

The key to this experience lies in getting grounded, centred, and then connected. Here's how.

- 1. Get Grounded:** Feeling connected to the ground or feeling solid is important to feeling strong and centred. Try sitting upright in a comfortable but firm chair. The point is to feel alert and aware of your body. As you sit in the chair, notice your buttocks pressing against the chair. Feel your back on the chair. Plant your feet on the floor, wiggle your toes. Put your hands on your thighs. Notice how strong you feel. Try this standing up. Move your feet about shoulder width. Wiggle your toes. Feel yourself solid on the floor or ground. Now pay attention to world immediately around you. Things look a bit different when you are coming from a place of strength and connection, don't they?
- 2. Get Centred:** This means paying attention to the immediate experience of the moment. A quick way to do this is to follow your breath. Let's try. Get grounded first. Then close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breath. You may notice it in your belly as it moves with each breath. Or you may notice it in your chest as you breathe. Or you may notice it at your nostrils as you feel the air move in and out. Just follow your breath. Don't try to make it change. Just simply watch the way it is.



During this time of attending to your breath, you may notice thoughts of all sorts running through your mind. In particular you may notice thoughts saying, “this is silly” or “I can’t do this”. You may find your thoughts wandering to a task you need to do or what you are having for dinner. These kinds of thoughts are natural; the trick is to not get distracted by them. Just acknowledge them, let them be and bring your attention back to your breath. These thoughts will move on. Sit like this for a minute.

Now try this with your eyes open. You will notice that you will likely find this is more difficult as there are more visual stimuli to distract us. But do the same. Focus on your breathing. Try this for one about one minute.

- 3. Get Connected:** This means truly engaging with what you are doing at this time. If you are talking with someone, give him or her your full attention; if you are reading give your full attention to the book or article and, if you are engaged in a physical task, pay attention to the experience and purpose of what you are doing.

These exercises may seem simple, or simplistic, but will only occur, and get easier, if you practice and are intentional. The goal is to give your full attention to the task at hand by being grounded, centred, and connected as much as possible. Over time you will see a pay-off as you will find your communications are clearer, your relationships are improved, you are more adept at solving problems and you have a greater sense of personal enjoyment and satisfaction.

Can you imagine living like this on a regular basis? Being fully present works to restore us, helps us really listen and understand, and brings our full mind to each and every task. It is a gift we can give ourselves, and those around us.