

FIRST HIT PAUSE THEN STOP, THEN PLAY

By Eva Starr

A Japanese warrior, captured by enemies, was thrown into prison. That night he remained sleepless out of fear that the next day he would be interrogated, tortured and executed. Then the words of his Zen master came to him, “Tomorrow is not real. It is an illusion. The only reality is now.” Heeding those words, the warrior became peaceful and fell asleep.

I start with this story to illustrate the simplicity of the phrase *in the moment*. The Zen story above suggests that it is indeed a simple task to be in the moment. But unless you’re a certified Dali Lama devotee, a Zen master or a Buddhist Monk, I beg to differ with the ease and simplicity of the above story. Is there anyone else out there beside myself who may be more than just a little bit troubled in knowing that you could be tortured and executed upon awakening? I thought so.

Many of us strive to live in the moment, don’t we? But challenges can get in the way. Since my relocation to California, I’ve experienced far more dark nights of the soul than I care to count. Don’t get me wrong, I absolutely love California, and it’s everything I’ve heard it to be: God’s country, the land of milk and honey, and yes, it is 72 degrees and sunny every day. That is a weather pattern that is never boring or tiring.

My point is, I have thought about what tomorrow is going to bring, and yes, I’ve read the books, attended the lectures and know that I need to live in the moment. Some days I’m better at it than others, even on the sunny West Coast.

Let’s look at it this way, the past was in the moment when it was happening. Today is definitely in the moment and tomorrow will be in the moment when it comes. If I’m understanding myself correctly, then aren’t we always living in the moment? This reminds me of another Zen story. During a book tour in which Roshi Bernie Glassman gave a reading, a woman stood up and asked him, “What does it

take to live in the Now?” Glassman answered, “Would anyone who is not living in the Now please stand up?”

Allow me to share some times in my life where I feel I am in the moment, and hopefully this will engage your thinking processes for your own self examination. I actually think we can make this more difficult than it needs to be. For example, when I’m doing the dishes, I’m totally lost in the moment of scouring whatever grease or grime coats a skillet or pan. The same thing happens when I’m on my hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen or bathroom floor with a toothbrush. Not much room to start visualizing about a trip to Tahiti in those scenarios is there? Those experiences are not necessarily exhilarating either, but definitely in-the-moment living.

Why do you think the Zen monks have only two chores - sweep the floors and rake the sand? Now you know why those little Zen gardens you buy only come with a little rake and a bag of sand.

Let’s quit all this multitasking that we do, day in and day out and just be in the moment. A friend of mine came over the other day and was performing surgery on my severely blistered feet, the result of a barefoot, five-mile hike. I was amazed that while he was trying to lance my blisters, he was talking on his iPhone and taking notes at the same time. I was hoping that my blisters were getting most of his attention and not the guy on the phone. Now, you tell me, was that living in the moment?

Let’s look at this process from the perspective of awareness or being mindful. When we are mindful of what we are doing, we are actually *in the moment*. This being said, one could easily hypothesize that we are in the moment when we agonize over “spilt milk,” are troubled by the past or fantasize about the future. When we are mindful of being angry, then we are indeed in the moment, *if* we are observing our irritation and recognizing that we are reacting in an angry manner. The situation would be improved, and we would be more in the moment, *if*, after recognizing anger, we then chose peace.

Here’s a question. Are we in the moment when our actions are robotic? Not so much. Think of the old film “The Stepford Wives.” There wasn’t anything close to resembling mindful behavior or in-the-moment experiences in the robotic town depicted in that movie.

Compare that to your last drive through at a McDonald’s or Burger King. You scarfed down a Big Mac or Whopper while speeding down the freeway. Please don’t tell me you were *in the moment*. I don’t think so. Let’s face it, if you were really being mindful of the moment, and of your health, when you ate fast food, you wouldn’t have ordered it and



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then tried to inject it intravenously, figuratively speaking, while going seventy miles per hour.

"It would be best if you could practice being in this moment and then in the next moment and so on. Try to be here, right now. Focus upon a leaf fluttering, light reflected on the waves. Things are more beautiful, afterwards. Make it your own experience. Things will taste, feel better. Colors will be brighter and you'll feel more alive." ~ Kuan Yin

Let's try some visualization. I am a huge brie fan. I am totally in the moment when I seductively spread it on my French bread, take a bite and then slowly savor the melted brie with almonds and butter. I feel the sensation of every taste bud in my mouth as it comes alive. Some of you may do this with chocolate. I can also experience this same type of Nirvana with a vintage Cabernet.

The bottom line is that we have many opportunities during our daily lives to pause and reflect on what we are doing, saying or feeling. Let's quit hitting fast forward and instead hit pause, then stop and then play.

Eva Starr's spiritual journey has taken her coast-to-coast to study the various schools of thought. Starr has recently relocated to San Diego, CA. Visit reachforthemoon.net for up-dates & to be added to her mailing list. Contact Eva Starr at evastarr24@yahoo.com 440-930-8865 for speaking engagements.

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