

HOW TO BE HAPPIER

All you need to know
about the mind

 30 MINUTE READ



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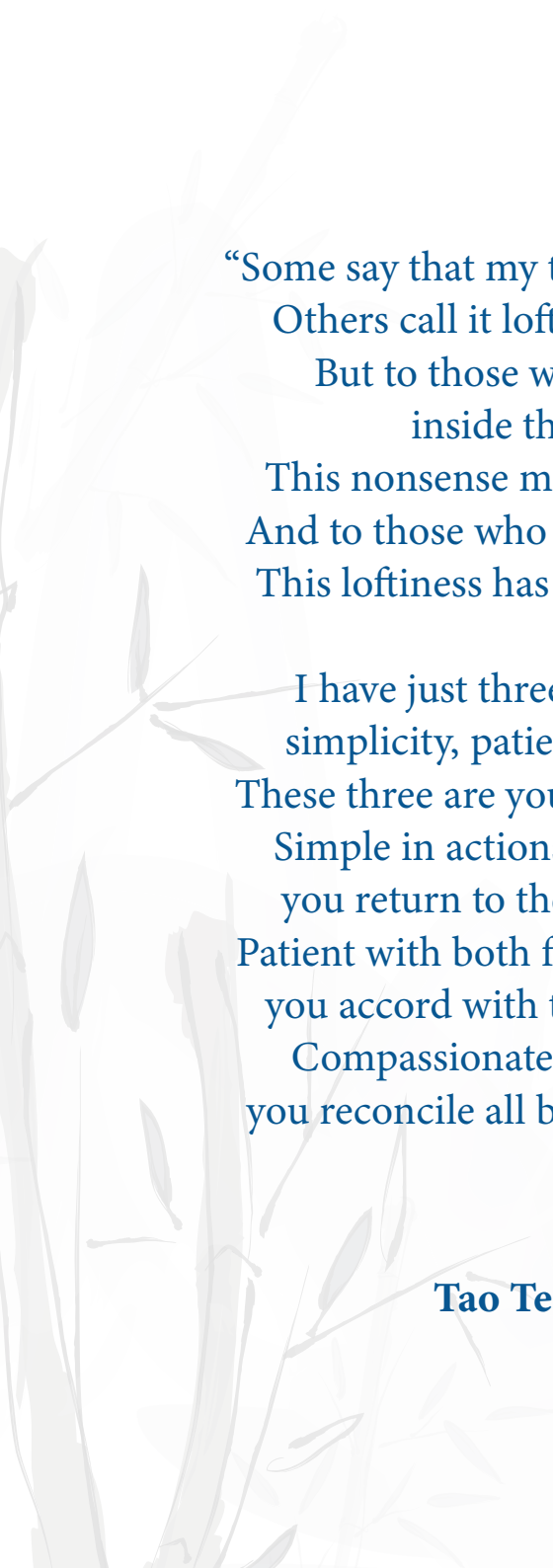
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The content of this ebook is inspired by the teachings of Eckhart Tolle and S. N. Goenka, two of the most influential teachers in my life.



“Some say that my teaching is nonsense.
Others call it lofty but impractical.
But to those who have looked
inside themselves,
This nonsense makes perfect sense.
And to those who put it into practice,
This loftiness has roots that go deep.

I have just three things to teach:
simplicity, patience, compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures.
Simple in actions and in thoughts,
you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies,
you accord with the way things are.
Compassionate toward yourself,
you reconcile all beings in the world.”

Tao Te Ching

Introduction

Why are anxiety and stress common in humans? Why is struggle part of everyday life? Why can't we just be at peace? How can we **break out of inherited collective patterns** that keep us in bondage with suffering? How can we gain the freedom to do what we want and express our true potential?

We pursue physical and psychological pleasures because our mind believe those things will make us happy or free us from feelings of fear or lack of something. But more often than not, **we are stuck in an endless loop, chasing an illusion**, left with a hunger that is never fulfilled.

Our mind continuously sends thoughts to us, some of which are unhelpful or even harmful. So how can we **prevent these from draining our vital energy?**

Some people use this expression: "I cannot live with myself any longer". But if we cannot live with ourselves, **there must be two of us...** The "I" and

the “self” that I cannot live with.

In this short ebook, I aim to provide answers to the above questions, among others. However, since our mind wants to categorise and compare, I recommend **reading it without judgement or prejudice**. Let’s not allow our mind to set a barrier between what we already know and anything we are about to discover. Let’s be open.

Brace yourself! In the next thirty minutes, you are not only going to learn all you need to know about the mind, but most importantly, **you will also learn how to be happier!**

Let us begin.

Sorry, but you are not your mind

First thing first, let's start with a bit of terminology.

Enlightenment is considered the ultimate spiritual destination. But what is enlightenment?

Enlightenment is a word very often misunderstood. It is a state of complete connectedness and awareness within you and with everything that surrounds you. However, since most of us cannot experience this connection, we think of enlightenment as a supernatural power.

Our mind is programmed to categorise and compare. As a result, we struggle to grasp concepts we cannot define with words or labels. Yet not everything can be explained with language. Words are limited and can be used to explain concepts, but to understand a mental state, you need to feel it (try to ask someone that has never been in love to describe the feeling!).

With these limitations in mind, let's define **mindfulness** with words: a mental state in which we are fully present (i.e. our attention is in the now, neither thinking about the past nor the future) and completely conscious of our sensations, feelings and emotions, which we acknowledge and accept without judgement.

Although **everyone experiences now and then a moment of mindfulness**, it is usually a brief instant that stays unperceived and quickly vanishes as soon as the mind takes over our thoughts once again.

The fact is that **we are unable to stop thinking**. We don't consider this a problem because everyone is suffering from it. It's considered normal. But the reality is that our mind is incessantly distracting us. Once we become aware of and slow down our thinking, we start liberating ourselves from the slavery of our mind.

WE ARE NOT OUR MIND

We can use it to solve problems, but **we cannot be free of our mind whenever we want**.

Can you stop thinking for a few minutes or a few hours? No, you can't. So is the mind you? How can it be you if you cannot control it? We identify ourselves with our mind and thoughts, but we are two different entities - that which experiences (the self) and that which is experienced (the mind).

Sounds crazy, I know, but acknowledging and accepting this truth is the first step to a happier life.

Training the mind requires working out

The second step is to consciously observe the mind. Yes, observing the mind. The fact that **we can observe our mind** proves that our mind and us are different entities. Otherwise, how could we observe it? The moment we start observing the mind, we immediately reach a higher level of consciousness. This is the beginning of the awakening process.

The mind continuously talks to us, bringing memories of the past or speculating about the future. Unfortunately, it often makes us worry about situations that might never materialise.

This voice in our head can be so strong that it causes depression or chronic anxiety, ultimately compromising our happiness. Thus, **mastering our mind is imperative** to achieve a stable state of joy and peace.

How can we do it? **Listening to the voice in our head**, listening to it impartially, and not judging or condemning what we hear.

Once we start observing the thoughts in our mind, not analysing but just watching, we will notice that **the thoughts start losing strength** and begin to fade. This happens because we are not identifying ourselves with our mind anymore. But instead, we are trying to disidentify ourselves from it. This is how we slow down involuntary thinking.

After the observed thought fades, **we will experience a brief thoughtless state** that will last longer the more we practice. Our consciousness grows stronger as we train ourselves to discipline our mind. In this thoughtless state, we are truly awake, truly present, and genuinely conscious.

The same process applies to emotions. **Emotions** (which means “disturbance” from the Latin word “emovera”) **are just body reactions to our thoughts.** Our thinking feeds our emotions. Observing our emotions is very similar to watching our thoughts, where the more we

disidentify from them, the more the emotions lose strength and start to fade, and the more we gain consciousness.

Fear, threat, abandonment, incompleteness, resentment, self-pity, anger, hatred, guilt, depression, and jealousy are unpleasant emotions and sources of pain that we can manage by disidentifying ourselves from our thoughts. Remember, **just observe, watch, and do not judge or analyse your thoughts or emotions.** Disengagement will happen naturally.

Okay, we have learned the basics about the mind. But how do we get better at managing it?

The best way is to focus on the present moment. In other words: meditating. **Meditation is the mental version of a physical workout.** If aerobics contributes to our fitness, meditation contributes to our mindfulness.

While **focusing our awareness on the present moment**, we prevent the mind from taking control of our emotions. At that moment, we are experiencing a thoughtless mental state, free from involuntary thinking. We are in control of

ourselves, highly alert and aware.

This mental “workout” can be practised anytime throughout the day.

The goal is not to remove thinking altogether.

Of course, we need to use the mind to deal with everyday life situations. But the thing is, when we are not actively engaged in solving problems, our mind doesn't go to sleep. Instead, it continues to pop into our heads with repetitive and often useless thoughts, some of which can be very harmful if we identify with them. It is an endless drain of vital energy.

By learning to better manage the mind, **we can avoid most of the discomfort we experience.** Suffering is usually a self-created form of non-acceptance or nonconformity derived from the mind's judgement or desires. The stronger we identify with our mind, the more we suffer. The more we can live in the present, the less pain we experience.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE MIND STRUGGLES TO OPERATE IN THE PRESENT

The mind is mostly projected into the future or stuck in the past, leaving us unable to live in the now. However, living in the present in a non-judgmental fashion is essential for serenity.

Almost every form of **tension is related to either the past or the future.** Fear, anxiety and stress are generated by speculation about the future, while anger, resentment and guilt are produced by rumination about the past.

You are not a prophet

Every time our mind drifts into the future, it creates a gap from the present moment. This gap is what generates anxiety.

We cannot control the future or predict it accurately; therefore, we get anxious.

Anxiety will accompany us during the time our mind stays projected into the future. Anxiety is fear. **We fear that the future will not unfold as we expect.** But does it make sense to get anxious about something that we cannot predict and might never happen?

The more we disidentify from our mind and shift our attention to the present moment, the more our anxiety will fade. **There is no reason to be anxious about the now.** It is not even possible. The now is already happening. Can you be anxious about something that happened in the past? Of course not. Neither can you be anxious for the now.

TIME AND MIND ARE INSEPERABLE. IF WE REMOVE THE TIME, THE MIND STOPS.

As long as we keep mindlessly living between memories (the past) or in anticipation (the future), we won't find peace. But why are we so attached to the past and the future?

The past gives us our identity, but it can also feed our ego. The future is what we plan for, but it can also lure us into an illusion of fulfilment, creating space for cravings and desires. **So we keep switching our focus between what was and might be**, missing the most precious moment we have, the now (what is).

Even though this might sound like a revelation to some of us, this knowledge is as old as history. People throughout the centuries have philosophised about the challenge of being present over and over. Here is an example from Meister Eckhart, theologian and mystic from the 13th century:

"Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."

To break the old pattern of present-moment denial and resistance, we must **withdraw our attention from the past and future** whenever it is not needed and step out of the time dimension whenever possible in everyday life.

The moment we realise we are not present, we are present.

Watching our thoughts, feeling our emotions and observing our reactions without making a personal problem out of them (i.e. judging or categorising) is what allows us to disidentify from our mind and be present.

Meet our upgraded version: **our mind is sharper and more focused in this state, its qualities enhanced.**

Don't miss the most precious moment you have

Being present allows us to enjoy every moment of every journey, not just the culmination of it. **The present moment is all we have**; if we focus on the future, we will live an illusion, missing out on the reality that is passing by.

Our cravings and desires incessantly distract us from the now. The more we focus on what we don't have or what we would like to achieve, the more we generate anxiety and frustration.

Acceptance of the present moment as it is, not as we would like it to be, is the key to happiness.

By focusing on the present moment, **we are not trying to escape the challenging situations we face in life.** On the contrary, by avoiding becoming overwhelmed by multiple tasks, we give ourselves space to focus on the one thing we

can do right now.

Is worrying about the future of any help in performing the one action we can focus on now? Definitely not!

Worrying produces anxiety, and anxiety prevents us from thinking clearly. The less clearly we think, the more we struggle and delay the completion of the tasks. This, in turn, causes us to increase our worries and anxiety, further impairing our ability to get things done.

I believe you can see where this is going. It's a snowball effect: overwhelming thoughts about the future > anxiety > inability to think clearly > struggle and delay completing our current task > more anxiety. It's a vicious circle.

The great news is that we can avoid this cycle by **entirely focusing our attention and effort on the single action we can do right now**, without thinking about what comes next.

Seems more difficult than it sounds, doesn't it?

Becoming present is a process. **It takes effort to train our mind to do the opposite of what is normally used to do.**

In the beginning, it's a matter of moving back and forth between rarely having our attention on the now and mostly thinking about the past or the future. At times **we will realise how seldom we are in the present**, but right then, we will be present.

Then, with time and practice, **the strength of our consciousness will grow**, as will the length of our visits to the now. In other words, the proportion of time we spend in the present versus the past and the future will increase.

This shift back and forth between consciousness and unconsciousness will eventually subside, leaving us predominantly focused on the present moment. **We will be mostly free of thoughts about the past and the future.** At this stage, we will be disidentified with our mind.

But we have to be careful! If we start intensively desiring this final state, our mind will shift its focus to the future, making the whole process

much harder. Instead, **we have to accept whatever state we are in** to keep exercising and enjoying the journey.

Okay, we learned how to avoid feeling anxious. But how should we behave when we disagree with a situation presented to us in life?

We have three simple options:

1. Take action (e.g. speak up and express your feelings with compassion);
2. Leave the situation (if you can);
3. Do nothing and surrender.

In any case, **it's fundamental that we ACCEPT the situation and drop the tension** that our mind has created around the event.

Resistance will only get us stuck in the situation. We must recognise that it's not worth feeling frustrated or miserable just because the situation is not unfolding as we would like. Let's just accept it.

Given a choice, **would you choose to be happy or to be sad?**

The great news is that you can make this choice at any moment. So choose to be happy. **Do not let external events compromise your inner state.**

Also, **stop complaining!**

When we complain, it is because we do NOT accept things as they are. **Complaining is not going to change ANYTHING.** Either take action, leave the situation, or do nothing. Choose one of these three options, and accept the situation and the consequences. But no more complaining. It is useless, wastes energy, and only spreads tension.

If fear prevents you from taking action, observe the feeling consciously until it loses strength, then take action.

Don't let your fear control your mind.

Don't worry, be happy

How about stress? What is it? And how does it get generated?

Stress arises when **we use the present as a means to get into the future.** We are here in the now, but we want to be there in the future.

Are our goals continuously projecting our mind into the future? This is when stress emerges. Seems like everyone, at different levels, is affected by stress. But why is this?

Why can't we just focus on the present moment and drop those thoughts about the future? Why do we always want to be somewhere other than where we currently are? Let's observe and let go of these thoughts. Let's not allow them to steal the present from us.

WE CAN BE HAPPY NOW

The future is an illusion, and an illusion can be as pleasant as our imagination can dream of it.

If we compare the (illusionary) future with the (real) present, **we risk that the present will never be pleasant enough**, while the future gives us the impression to be somehow more enjoyable. Let's not be fooled by this false impression. Let's move away from this mindset, or we'll take away the joy of living from ourselves. We will be chronically dissatisfied while waiting for situations that might never materialise.

Instead, why not be grateful and appreciative for what we are and what we have right now?

Enjoy the journey

Don't get me wrong. I don't mean to say that we should not plan or have goals in life. **Setting goals is an important strategic activity** that provides us with a direction to follow.

But once our goals are set, we should only focus on the small step we can take now to achieve them. Nothing else.

We must not let the destination prevent us from enjoying the journey.

We might never reach the destination, and we should acknowledge that. But as long as we keep taking small steps in the right direction, enjoying and being conscious of the present moment, we will be happy.

At this point, we have gone through many concepts and theories. I was not planning to write such an extended essay, but I am passionate about the subject, so here I am, figuring out a way to keep your attention level high.

How about a bit of actual practice? A brief, simple taste of it.

Let's go for it!

Meditation is not rocket science

We are going to **shift our attention away from thinking and channel it towards the body** with a simple exercise. Just read through all the following steps, then give it a try:

- Make sure there are no external distractions (phones, loud sounds, etc)
- Sit in a relaxed position with your back straight
- Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths
- Observe how your chest or belly expands and contracts with each breath
- Direct your attention into the body, feeling it from within
- Can you feel any vibration/tickling in your hands or feet?
- Can you feel a subtle energy that flows within your body?

- Keep focusing for a few moments on the feelings of your inner body, don't think about it, just feel it
- The more attention you give it, the clearer and stronger the feeling will become
- Be patient, just focus on whatever you feel

Now close your eyes, relax and go for it.

...

How is it? Does it feel like your body is slowly becoming alive? If you have trouble feeling the energy of your inner body, **you can alternatively focus your attention on your respiration.** The breath coming in, and the breath going out. Feel your chest or belly expanding and contracting, following the rhythm of your respiration.

If at any time during the day you feel stressed, overwhelmed or anxious, try pausing and taking a minute or two to observe your respiration. You will feel fresher and more at peace when you resume your activities. You can also use this practice when you need to solve a problem or generate new ideas.

After calmly observing your breath for a few minutes, your creativity will be enhanced.

Mindfulness is about staying in a permanent state of interconnectedness with our body, feeling it at all times. This way, **we are anchored in the now and not run by our mind or the external world.** Of course, thoughts and emotions are still there, but they are not taking us over.

We are ourselves, aware, living the present to its fullest. We experience fulfilment and peace. **Our joy is no longer depending on outside factors.** We are free from fear, suffering, and the feeling of insufficiency that generates our cravings. Free from compulsive thinking and resistance. Finally able to live in the present, free from past and future.

Here and now is the only point where we can be.

Resistance and peace are enemies

Acceptance of what is, generates peace in ourselves. When we are not reacting with resistance to life situations but instead going with the flow of life, we bring harmony to our being.

Of course, there will always be ups and downs. There will be times when we will feel blue and low in energy, but there will also be times when we will feel fantastic and full of vitality. These cycles can last from hours to months. So let's not resist them; **let's allow ourselves to be. We cannot be at 100% all the time.** That's not how our body works, nor is it meant to.

The quicker we learn to accept life events for what they are, the more peaceful our existence will be. Free of drama, free of suffering, free of judgement.

Resistance generates tension, and tension creates resistance. The two concepts are

analogues. Examples of disruptive reactions include resentment, anger, fear, and depression are just a few examples of disruptive reactions. **The mind wants to make us believe that we can dissolve undesirable conditions through resistance.** In fact, instead of improving them, resistance and tension always make life situations worse.

Can you solve a complex problem faster by expressing anger or keeping calm? Can you focus 100% of your attention on a task when you experience fear? Can you forgive when you feel resentment? We must simply let things pass through us and offer no resistance. It is useless to get angry and let external events jeopardise our mental state.

RESISTANCE AND TENSION ARE NOTHING ELSE THAN DISTURBANCES OF INNER PEACE

Accepting our life situation doesn't mean we cannot strive to improve it. On the contrary, if we can accept our life situation as is, without letting our mind generate resistance, we have a greater chance of changing things.

Acceptance doesn't mean doing nothing but **consciously taking action to fill the gap between the current and desired situation.** Doing nothing is resignation, which is a different concept from acceptance. The more conscious we are, the easier it is to find the solution to the situation we want to change.

Acceptance prevents tension from overwhelming us, therefore keeping our mind clear and able to use its highest degree of creativity to achieve our goals. **Offering no internal resistance and staying conscious of the present moment without being permeated by fear of the future allows us to work with enhanced quality.** This increases our chances of changing things for the better.

How can we measure improvements in acceptance?

By observing our reactions to everyday life situations. When we realise that our disruptive reactions are losing intensity or getting shorter in time, we can quite confidently say that our acceptance has gotten stronger.

And what about improvements in consciousness?

Consciousness makes us stay present. The more we are conscious, the less our mind wanders in the past and the future and the less we are stressed and anxious.

Well, we have covered A LOT! What about an effective bullet point list to tie all of this information together?

Sum up

Sorry, but you are not your mind

I hope you are convinced by now, otherwise, just try to close your eyes and stop thinking... (how long did you last?)

Training the mind requires working out

Can you improve your fitness without physical activity? Not really. The same is true for mindfulness: no workout = no improvement.

The mind struggles to operate in the present

Time and mind are inseparable, if we remove the time, the mind stops.

You are not a prophet

The more you try to control or predict the future, the more anxious you get.

Meet your upgraded version

Stop your mind from wandering like a crazy monkey and your thinking will become sharper, more focused, its quality enhanced.

Don't miss the most precious moment you have

We must avoid switching our focus between what was, and what might be, or we will completely miss the now (what it is).

Don't worry, be happy

Avoid focusing your attention on what you don't have, or on what you would like to achieve. Stress arises when we use the present as a means to get into the future.

Enjoy the journey

Don't let the thought of reaching a destination prevent you from enjoying the journey.

Meditation is not rocket science

Wanna give it a try? Visit [headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com)
Three minutes is all you need.

Resistance and Peace are enemies

Accept the present moment as it is, not as you would like it to be. Offer no resistance and you will be free from frustration.

I hope this short ebook will make you a happier person (at least 1%).

Please share it with others and feel free to write to me at info@simonecoaching.com.
I'd love to hear from you.

Good luck!



Simone Della Chiesa

Be present

Be aware

Accept

Offer no resistance

Let Go

Enjoy the journey

Smile :)



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