

MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION

It's difficult, if not impossible, to be fully present and give full attention to what is happening now in your life if you are under the influence of any drug, particularly alcohol.

An old Zen saying suggests, 'You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes every day - unless you're too busy. Then you should sit for an hour.'

DEFINING MINDFULNESS VS MEDITATION

Lots of books and articles talk about mindfulness and meditation but definitions are not readily available.

In fact, it is all pretty straightforward, and you don't have to meditate to be mindful.

Mindfulness is a non-judgmental awareness of your thoughts, sensations, surroundings and emotions.

Meditation is just one tool for developing mindfulness, but it isn't the only tool.

TYPES OF MEDITATION

There's no right or wrong way to meditate and there are several popular types of meditation practice to choose from. For me, movement meditation is my favourite as it fits perfectly with my 9KM BY 9AM morning walks.

Movement meditation is most famous for yoga but also includes walking, gardening, tai chi, and other forms of movement. This is an active form of meditation where the movement guides you into a deeper connection with your body and the present moment. Movement meditation is good for people who find peace in action and want to develop body awareness.

There are many other main types. These include guided meditation, mindfulness meditation or present moment meditation, spiritual meditation, focused meditation, mantra meditation, transcendental meditation, progressive relaxation or body scan meditation, loving-kindness meditation or metta meditation and visualisation meditation or vipassana meditation.



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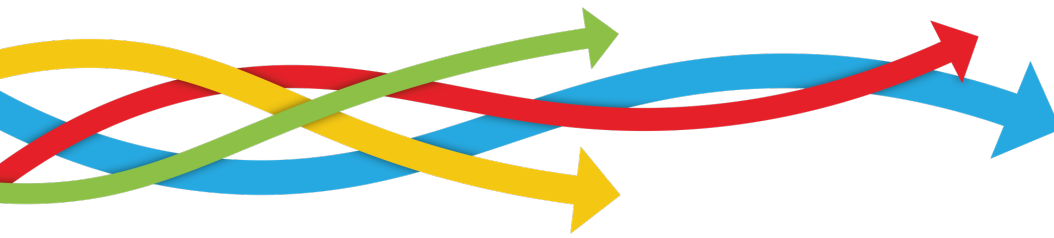
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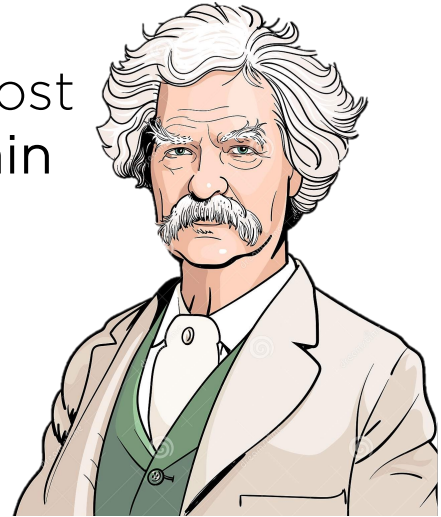
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CONNECT YOUR MIND & BODY

“I’ve had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.” **Mark Twain**

Studies show we spend up to 50% of our time either worrying about the past or anxious about something that has not yet happened!

Through meditation and mindfulness practices, I was learning how to control my thoughts and live more in the now – not the past or the future. By doing this, I could effectively save 50% of my time, thereby doubling the amount of time I have!

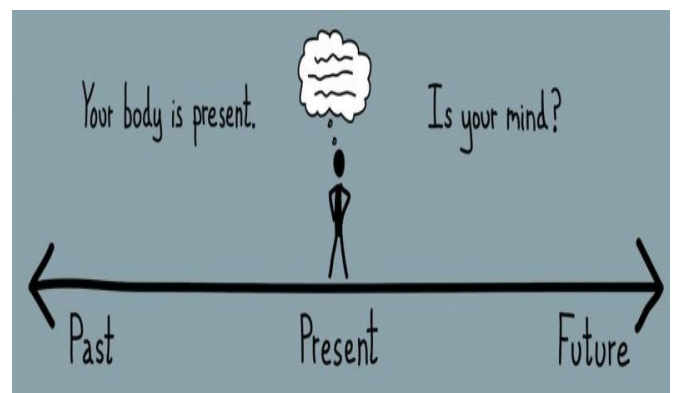


DOUBLE THE AMOUNT OF TIME YOU HAVE

A study by *Harvard University* researchers tracked the thoughts and activities of several thousand volunteers. It found that almost half the time their thoughts were not related to the activity they were engaged in. In other words, for 50% of our time, we are not present.

They also found that we’re happiest when we are present and focused on exactly what we’re doing, whether that’s having a conversation, walking down the street or doing the dishes

It is your body that is always in the now. It can’t be in the past or the future. So, it is only your mind that wanders and takes you backwards or forwards.



You can control this through mindfulness and meditation.

THOUGHTS ARE N'T REAL – THEY ARE VIRTUAL REALITY.
WHAT'S REAL IS WHAT IS IN FRONT OF YOU NOW...

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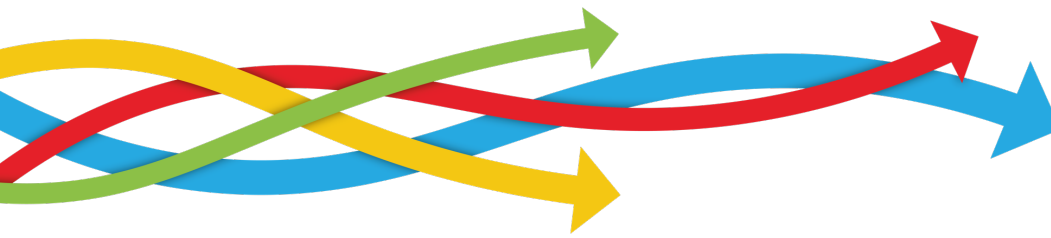
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USE IT IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

Meditation works for me so I wholeheartedly recommend giving it a try. You will have a richer experience of the world, improve your well-being, have more and better connections with others, and gain an understanding of those negative patterns that hold you back from achieving your full potential for happiness.

I learnt how to do it, so you can as well. Once you have mastered this, you can use it in your day-to-day life. If you feel yourself worrying about the future or having anxiety over the past – take yourself to the now. The now is where things happen. They don't happen in the past!

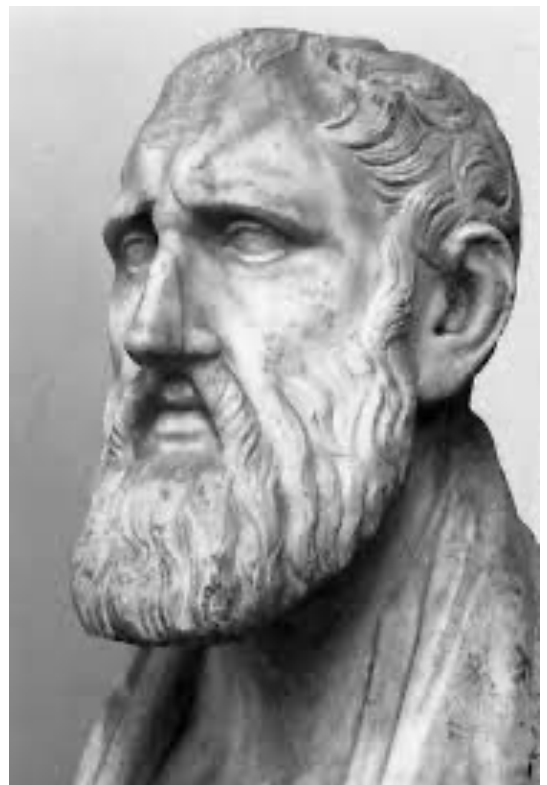
Mentally, I would now label myself as a calm person – certainly not a term I would have used before I stopped drinking. Without a doubt, the effects of alcohol made me short-tempered and on edge. It's amazing how, even after one or two days not drinking, these effects start to subside.

The deeper I go into this alcohol-free journey, the more contemplative I become. Anger and quick-reaction responses become less and less. The way I respond to the things that happen to me has become more controlled, calmer, more thoughtful and more empathetic.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CONTROL

The Stoic philosophers said that we don't control the world around us but we do control how we respond. The saying, 'It's not what happens to you, it's the way you react that matters', or versions of it, have been used by many great minds over the years. Being alcohol-free definitely makes you calmer, and practising mindfulness and meditation makes you the calmest you can possibly be.

I experimented with meditation, once or twice a week, in the early months of going alcohol-free. But it was not until around six months in, that I started to meditate as I walked 9KM BY 9AM every day. It became second nature to walk down the country lanes or along the country paths focusing on my breath and clearing my mind, finding the space between my thoughts.



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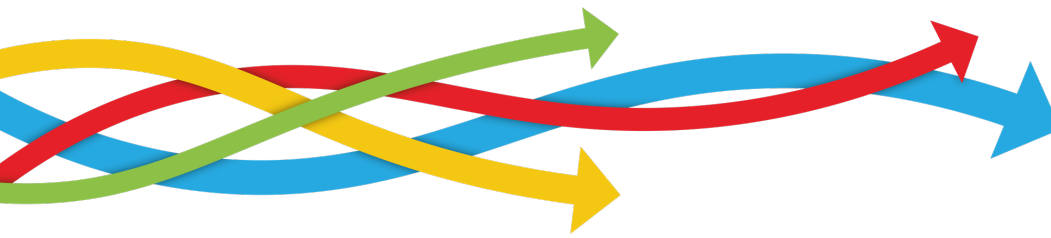
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STOP THE CAR, GET OUT, LOOK AROUND



Life is like a car journey. We are all in our own cars traveling along the road of life.

If our habit is to be on our way somewhere else, we miss out on whatever is in front of us.

The car forms a bubble around us and each day we have over 65,000 thoughts whilst in the car

We are living in our minds, lost in thought, distant from our bodies, missing out on the parts of our life we really cherish and what is really happening along the road - the sound of wind in the trees, the touch of a loved one.

We have no idea of the landscape we are passing through, let alone the millions of things that are happening along the road.

BE PART OF THE BIGGER UNIVERSE



Perceiving the size of your mind as the size of the universe allows you to deal with all thoughts and not let them cloud your mind or take over.

A drop of dye in a glass clouds the whole glass.

A drop of dye in the ocean has no effect at all.

When you realise your size, everything becomes small and manageable. You are in control of all your thoughts.

When you realise you are part of something vast you see that you have plenty of space to exist in.

The universe does not make itself small so neither should we.

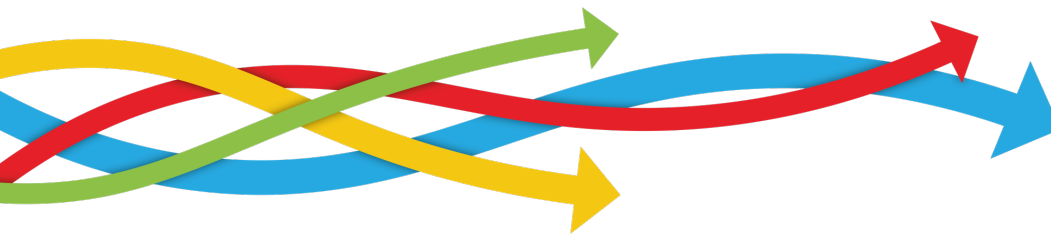
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BE PART OF THE BIGGER UNIVERSE



When you connect with the universe, you no longer see yourself as a suffering self you're no longer just the space between your ears.

You start to see and understand that you and your mind are part of the universe and there is a realisation that your mind is as big as the universe.

Once this happens, everything becomes manageable.

It is like you are looking down from above at the top of a large building. Everything seems small, it is all in perspective there's a feeling of wow / of awe.

It's when you get to this state that you truly understand who you are.

This is the mindset for you to best manage your life journey and find true happiness and live your best life.

You see the impermanence of life, you see that the pursuit of perfection only leads to suffering you see the beauty in imperfection (WABI SABI)



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ILLNESS & WELLNESS IS "I" & "WE"...

THROUGH CONNECTING TO NATURE & REROOTING.... WE MOVE FROM A SUFFERING SELF FOCUS TO BEING PART OF THE WHOLE

"It's 'I', the separate self, and that experience of 'we', that sense of collectivity that really brings us home to our belonging. Our healing comes when we start enlarging our sense of what we are to that sense of community."
Indian Yoga Guru, Swami Satchidananda

"The birds have vanished in the sky, and now the last cloud drains away. We sit together, mountain and I, until only the mountain remains." Li Po,

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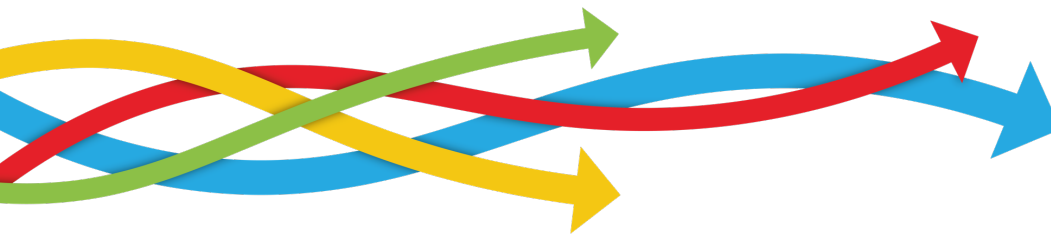
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BUILD IT INTO YOUR DAY

Here are just a few examples of how you can be mindful in every situation you find yourself in. By doing this, you start to control how you react to the things that happen to you. I've tried all of these and they work.

DRINKING TEA OR COFFEE

Smell and examine your tea or coffee before taking a slow sip. Close your eyes and wholly feel and taste the liquid on your tongue before swallowing. Feel the warmth of the cup in your hands.



TAKING A SHOWER

Think about what the water feels like as it hits your skin. Scanning your body: Take a moment to close your eyes and tune into your body. Start at your toes and move up, observing each body part until you reach the top of your head. Be curious about what you find, noticing any tension, lightness, heat, pain or other sensations. Notice if the mind wanders and creates stories about those feelings. If so, see if you can bring the mind back to the sensations without judging them.



SUNRISE OR SUNSET

Take in the unique colours and try to notice something you've never spotted before. Is there a cloud shape that reminds you of something or someone? What colours do you see? How does the air temperature change once the sun dips below the horizon?



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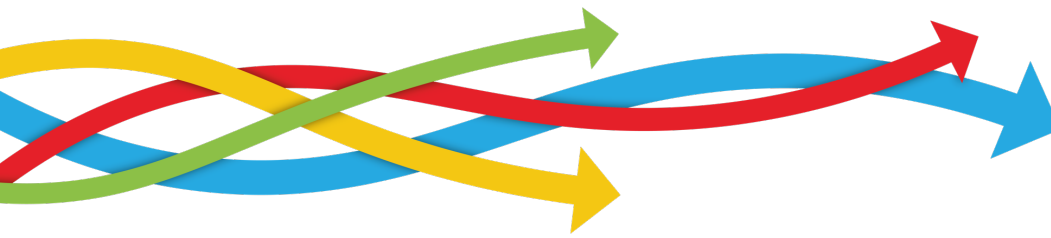
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DECIDE YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE IT A GO

Meditation is like a workout for your mind. I think of it as building my mind muscle. Just exercising my mind for five to ten minutes per day has a massive effect. The ability to train myself to clear my mind of past or future thoughts, and just think of what is now, helps me think before I react.

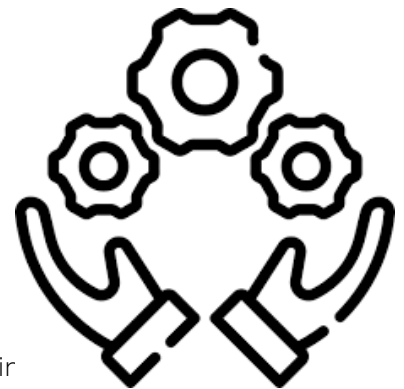
It's best to start in small increments of time, even five or ten minutes, and grow from there. Pedram Shojai, author of *The Urban Monk* says, 'Sit consistently for 20 minutes a day and do this for 100 days straight. Couple that with an additional two to five minutes of meditation throughout the day to break up the chaos, and you will soon be feeling the benefits.'



PRACTISE! PRACTISE! PRACTISE!

Practising mindfulness throughout your everyday life can help to train the mind to focus on the present.

Once you've installed meditation, you can go to it any time and build your mind muscle. So, if you get stuck in a queue at a bank or in a traffic jam, or you simply have a spare five minutes – meditate!



BRING 'RAIN' TO YOUR MEDITATION

When you're meditating ask yourself the simple question 'What is happenir right now in my life?'

This is a great way to bring to the front of your mind the issues you think you might have. This could be drinking. It could be addictions or it could be relationships.

Try Tara Brach's RAIN approach to meditation. This is an acronym for:
Recognise the issue you have.
Allow whatever it is to be. Don't brush it under the carpet.
Investigate what's causing it. Have an open discussion with yourself about
Nurture the issue and explore ways of dealing with it.



By using the RAIN method, I changed my beliefs not only about alcohol | about all my anxieties.