

Changing the Focal Point of Our Lives to the Present Moment

by Alice Gardner

On the second web-cast of Oprah Winfrey's phenomenally large online class with Eckhart Tolle, one of the moments of impact was when Eckhart talked about making the present moment the focal point of our lives. Eckhart has a wonderful way of saying inspiring things using such plain language that we can all get it, no matter what our spiritual or religious background might be. We can see into the meaning of his simple words, and connect with the reality that they are pointing to.

We heard in his earlier book "The Power of Now" about the importance of the present moment—about how the past and the future are not real in the same way that this present moment is real—past and future are just ideas that are programmed into our minds. This must have resonated with many of us, because the Power of Now has been on the best seller lists for so long. Now Eckhart has written A New Earth and it has already sold 3.5 million copies, even before Oprah started this class. We must have an abiding interest in this message! And we want to know—after exploring our interest and enjoying these wonderful books, is there a way that we can actually experience this reality that Eckhart is talking about in the midst of the commotion of our busy daily lives?

What would it really mean to change the focal point of our lives to the present moment, and to stay living in the world? If we are willing to really have that happen for us, what would it mean for our lives? The content in each of our lives is different obviously, so the exact details of what would change would be as unique as we each are as people. On the other hand, there are universal patterns about this inner shift that Eckhart is referring to. One of these is expressed so succinctly by the description he uses of having a space develop between our sense of self and our thought processes. This space occurs and expands as we disidentify with our thought processes, and relate to them instead as a wonderful tool that we (an identity outside of them) use. In our lives up to this point, we have been fused with these thoughts that go through our minds, as if our ideas about ourselves are actually equivalent to who we are. When we stay in the present moment and notice that our thoughts are arising and are something quite separate from who we are, then a space is appearing. At first it may seem vague and fleeting, but over time if we keep giving this our attention, the space seems to widen and become permanent and "normal". We notice our thoughts as if from a slight distance, as only being thoughts and not having anything to do with who we are. We no longer look to our thinking processes to provide us with crucial information about who we are, and so are freed in a wonderful way from reliance on our thoughts, feelings or circumstances conforming to our preferences. They no longer affect us in the same way.

This lack of reference to thinking for clues about our identity, doesn't leave much possibility for using the past and future as focal points for our daily living. Past and future turn out to not exist outside of our thought processes. We can watch our thoughts creating both. Meanwhile it is all happening in a present moment that seems to be pregnant with possibility and vitality. When we stay with it enough to recognize the

incredible beauty of the life force expressing itself around us in a myriad of forms, it can feel quite overwhelmingly and radiantly beautiful, no matter what the content of it is.

If what we are going to do today or how we are going to behave in a particular situation has been a compulsive recreating of the past (making today be much like yesterday and projecting that into tomorrow) we become freed from that. Although such freedom from the past is generally felt to be wonderful, what is sacrificed to get there is the knowing of what will be happening in the future. To the mind, this tends to be a profoundly unacceptable situation because of its need to control life, and mind may be making noisy complaints about that. The noise, however, is occurring on the sidelines of awareness once we are experiencing the space that we have been referring to. It is just mind doing what minds do, making noise and being a tool that is trying unsuccessfully to retain control over its rightful master, you. It no longer is needed for that particular job. You already know who you are.

As we allow the present moment to be the focal point of our lives, we are freed from the domination by our thoughts that has been the normal human condition for thousands of years. We are freed to live our lives without compulsive referencing to ideas about what is possible and the world opens up to us. We use the mind to reference practical things—we don't want to forget our phone number, or forget how to cook dinner. Mind is the most amazing and practical tool when it comes into its rightful place of serving something beyond itself. And when it is not needed, it can rest. What is here in this focal point of the present moment then, is the simple yet vitally alive world that surrounds and includes us. We feel the wind in our hair again. We see the incredible vitality in the world around us—we see God (or call it Life, or Love) peeking at us out of everything. We experience the joy that every birdcall has all along been offering us. The veil of thinking has been lifted off of the world, and life as it is, including our own, can now be experienced.

Experiencing the world in this way is such an overwhelmingly wonderful experience that once it is felt, it forever remains as a motivation for the sometimes time-consuming process of learning to live it in the midst of everyday life. At first it may be that even little disturbances like a harsh word or a traffic jam with jump-start mind into such compelling noise that the experiencing of the present moment may not be possible until that event is long passed. But gradually over time, with steady attention to who we really are, we are able to stay conscious in the little things and only more charged and potent events can throw us. Gradually we come to live our whole lives in this new world. We have changed the focal point of our lives to the present moment, and our world reflects back to us the incredible gift of the Life that we have been given and that we are.

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