Dear Diary,

It’s important for me to take some time every once in a while for reflection.

I am almost at the end of an absolutely *crazy* last few months. I feel like it might actually never end. I thought that last weekend was the end, until I remembered I had many deadlines for classes this week, and the tech ethics competition yesterday, and the Silicon Flatirons conference today, and a few more deadlines this week…. And I began to realize that the deadlines and the conferences and the meetings may never end.

In fact, I practically signed an agreement to make them not end at least for the next 4.5 years.

There’s something that has been on my mind lately, especially today as I was reading the Thich Nhat Hanh book about Buddhism. If I continue to think so far into the future, with thoughts like “all I have to do is make it through this month” or “all I have to do is get through this week of deadlines” or “wow I can only imagine how relaxed I will feel in 2 weeks when all of this is over…” then I worry I will always have a reason to look forward to the future, rather than the present. There is nothing wrong with being excited for the future (especially when that future involves a break, or more sleep) - but I think there is something not great about taking myself so far away from the present to imagine a reality that isn’t the one I am currently residing in time and space.

I remember meditation and how much it transformed my life, and how it continues to do so - especially the more time that I put into it. Two verses from the book today had me really thinking:

1. “We are so busy we hardly have time to look at the people we love, even in our own household, and to look at ourselves. Society is organized in a way that even when we have some leisure time, we don’t know how to use it to get back in touch with ourselves. We have millions of ways to lose this precious time—we turn on the TV, or pick up the telephone, or start the car and go somewhere. We are not used to being with ourselves, and we act as if we don’t like ourselves and are trying to escape from ourselves.”
2. ““Dwelling in the present moment.” While I sit here, I don’t think of somewhere else, of the future or the past. I sit here, and I know where I am. This is very important. We tend to be alive in the future, not now. We say, “Wait until I finish school and get my Ph.D. degree, and then I will be really alive.” When we have it, and it wasn’t easy to get, we say to ourselves, “I have to wait until I have a job in order to be really alive.” And then after the job, a car. After the car, a house. We are not capable of being alive in the present moment. We tend to postpone being alive to the future, the distant future, we don’t know when. Now is not the moment to be alive. We may never be alive at all in our entire life. Therefore, the technique, if we have to speak of a technique, is to be in the present moment, to be aware that we are here and now, and the only moment to be alive is the present moment.”

I think back to yesterday, when I chose to take the afternoon off from work after the competition (because my mind was so tired that I literally couldn’t think straight when I sat down to do work at the coffee shop), and as I got home, I wondered what it was I should do with my free time. I had so many thoughts fill my head: take the night off for a self-care night! Paint your nails! Finally edit something for SciFi iRL with free time! Journal and catch up on your own thoughts and life! Call mom and dad or wesley and eric or sam and yeng or claudia! I didn’t do any of those things… I watched tv most of the afternoon/evening.

Not that there is anything fundamentally wrong with that. Taking time off, especially mental time off, when I am in desperate need of it is entirely okay. What isn’t okay though, is if I am doing this in fear of having time alone with myself and in fear of sitting in nothing but the present.

I haven’t meditated in so long. I even considered mediating yesterday. Last night the full moon was so brilliant. Usually I try to take some time to do a full moon meditation on nights like last night, but yesterday the thought of doing that was kind of *difficult*.

I feel uncomfortable at times in my own home if I don’t have my phone or my laptop in front of me. I don’t really know how to act there if I don’t have something that I need to be doing. I haven’t really learned how to be at home and to just *be*.

It’s one thing for me to work hard because I have the imperative and the want to get many things done and I have lofty goals that I work hard to achieve. It’s another thing for me to use my work as an excuse to get away from the present.

Even in yoga last night as I sat in long positions during Yin practice, I found my mind constantly wandering to the future. What will I do when I get home? What will I do on my way home? What will I do this week? What are my plans for next weekend? Where will I be this summer?

It’s not bad to think about these things, but if it is at the cost of sitting in the current moment, I need to assess if they are appropriate for my thoughts in that moment.

I think that in lieu of this month of self-care and health, I will try to really focus on my meditation and presence practice again. So far I’ve been doing the best that I can with my crazy schedule, but I think that going forward as my craziness draws to a close mid-week, I can really start to remind myself about some of the incredibly important practices of solitude, reflection, and presence.

Not only with myself, but also with others.

The first step was to be mentally with myself, others, and the world around me. As I am now 19 days into my THC break, I can say that I have successfully brought my mind back into the world around me. Now, it is time to keep pushing this notion.

I will work to really *be* with those I am around. I will give them my attention and my energy, as much as it makes sense to anyway. If I feel uncomfortable, I will sit in that feeling, and I will feel *content* with it.

Yesterday I was frustrated after not placing 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in the competition. I was so frustrated at the thought that the one judge from the second round had hated us and given us a bad score (something I entirely made up in my mind and have no evidence of) that I didn’t even appreciate the fact that my team had made it to the final round, or that I had *killed* it all day, and in front of Casey.

In fact, she even bragged to Robin (and Robin must have bragged to Roshana) about how well I did! My advisors are bragging about me behind my back! Apparently Casey sat next to the one “scary” judge from yesterday at dinner and he himself even complimented me!

This is why it is important to sit with uncomfortable emotions. I was so wrapped up in my own thoughts that I didn’t really take a step back to have perspective of the entire day as a whole.

Even today, an hour ago, as I left the Silicon Flatirons conference and walked to Starbucks (where I am sitting now), I ran into Robin, Roshana, Casey, and Matt, and I was constantly being talked to …. This was something that I wasn’t expecting at this kind of event. To have so many people that I know who want to talk to me, to make me feel appreciated and welcomed. Even some of the girls in the competition yesterday (the ones who won!) told me I did a good job and wanted to introduce themselves today and sat next to me!

It feels really good to have my hard work pay off. I try to remind myself as much as possible that I need to be patient with myself and with the universe. I don’t always need to be going so fast and so hard and trying to make so many things happen for me *right now*. It’s the little baby steps that, over time, build and cumulate into what my life will become.

And I don’t say this as to go completely against Thich Nhat Hanh (in the idea of “once I finish my PhD all will be well!”) but actually the exact opposite of that - I think that as I revel in every day of my PhD, and as I become more patient with the process, I will have a perspective both of what the future might become, but also a happiness and genuine contentment with myself as I live in every moment that it takes for me on my path towards a future.

I feel myself growing so much every day.

Socially, emotionally, mentally, cognitively…

I am so glad to be experiencing #2020clarity.

I feel myself emerging from who I was and into who I am becoming. Every day takes me a step closer to my best self. Where will that take me? I don’t know, and I... don’t need to know. As long as I remain *present* for every step of the way.

And that, is beautiful to me.

~ Jess

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PS - what an appropriate time to reflect on the ideology of Buddhism and thoughts of meditation/presence… on this 1 year anniversary of the beginning of my YTT journey <3