

Stop Suffering with Present Moment Awareness

The present moment holds the key that unlocks your freedom from suffering.

You can only feel free, peaceful, content, safe, or happy NOW. This Now moment is, in fact, all that exists. The things we dream of and the ones we fear are nothing but a figment of the imagination. There is no “future” within which we will experience them. When we do experience the dream or the situation we fear, it will not be in the future, it will be NOW. Thinking of the future can have positive or negative consequences. Dreaming of a future experience of joy can make us feel better now, however worrying about anticipated pain or fear in the future makes us experience that suffering now.

The key to understand about the “future” is that whenever you think about the future, you experience whatever you EXPECT the future to be NOW.

This also applies to the past. There is no such thing as the past. By definition, the past means everything that has happened previously. This means it is NOT happening now and it never will. Yet, we can re-experience the past by thinking about it. Just as with the future, this can be good or bad. If we remember times we suffered, we re-live that suffering. Yet, if we recall positive memories of happiness—we get to re-live that happiness now.

The trick, then, is to learn how to use the mind to PURPOSEFULLY recall memories or imagine future possibilities in a way that makes us feel GOOD, not bad.

And when can we access this ability to CHOOSE our thoughts of future or past? You guessed it, NOW.

IMAGINARY SUFFERING: Going to the future in our imagination can cause suffering. In fact, this mental time-travel is ultimately the cause of anxiety. Having your mind off in “la-la-land” while the rest of you is living in the here and now separates yourself from your experience of life. It separates your mind from your true self. One of my favorite teachers, Eckhart Tolle, refers to this distance as the “anxiety gap”. Think about it in your own life. When you feel anxious, isn’t it usually about something in the future rather than something that’s happening right now?

2 ways that thinking about the future that can cause anxiety and suffering

1. Thinking about the future can benefit your now if it feels good, as I mentioned. But sometimes thinking about the positive things we anticipate in the future can backfire. For the untrained mind (which refers to most of us) it is really hard not to think about what we want in the future without being acutely aware of the fact that it isn’t happening yet. This leaves us feeling lacking, impatient, disappointed.

2. When we imagine the negative things we fear MAY happen in the future, we experience worry and anxiety because of the uncertainty. We also experience the emotional turmoil we believe will happen if what we fear comes true NOW, as if it were real. Worrying about the future causes unnecessary suffering. It's good to be aware of things that may come so that we can plan for how to avoid or deal with them, but when we're thinking and worrying about the future beyond what we can actually deal with, we're wasting our now moment feeling bad for no reason.

REAL LIFE SUFFERING: In some circumstances, an actual experience you find yourself in, at the moment, is causing suffering (you've broken your leg, you're trapped in quick sand, you're being mistreated or abused by another person). In these case, you will be free from the suffering once you've healed, been rescued, or the person goes away or stops. However, there is another LAYER of suffering that happens because of our thoughts or judgment about the situation. In the moment, we are judging the situation as bad and we are often projecting this suffering into the future as well, expecting it to continue. These thought processes add to our suffering. In these "real life" situations, we may not be able to do something to make it stop, but we CAN do something about the thoughts that are making the experience worse.

We can bring our awareness to the present moment. When we look at the pain, the fear, or the hurt that are happening while also paying attention to our physical body, our breathing, and other sensations—rather than allowing our mind to judge the experience and conjure things to fear in the future. By becoming aware of the present moment we minimize the suffering we experience.

Whether you find yourself experiencing imaginary or real life suffering, become aware of the present moment.