

“Meditation. Practicing meditation teaches us to slow down and focus.”

I had a random cancelation in the middle of my longest workday of the week. I decided to embrace this by ordering a coffee from across the street. When I opened the app, I was upsold a chocolate croissant. It spoke to me. I thought, this is going to be an indulgent day. I could go for some buttery chocolatey goodness. I picked up my order and remember the crumbs getting all over my yoga pants. By the time I got back to my office I thought, damn it – I didn’t even taste my croissant! My moment of indulgence was gone. Fortunately I could move on from this travesty after laughing at myself but a younger me would have ran back to the store to try to recreate the moment or beat myself up over it.

A \$3 croissant isn’t worth crying about. Odds are you might be overworked or overscheduled, so the precious time you do have with your family and friends, or even by yourself is just that – precious and limited. My yoga therapy practice sees so many parents and partners who feel guilty that they don’t have enough time with their loved ones, but when they do have it – their head is wandering, letting that monkey mind (as it’s called in Buddhism) rob them. Not being present is a conscious choice. Pause for a moment. Take a deep breath in and a long breath out. Take a moment and reflect on one incredible memory. Whether it’s a moment loaded with belly laughter, something incredibly sexy or a delicious meal, I would venture to guess you were present to it.

It’s easy to take something even as mindfully focused as a yoga class and tune out with the mind jumping around to your to do list, yesterday, an argument you’re replaying in your head, or next year. That ever-wandering monkey mind can pull us out of present and leave us foggy and disappointed instead of getting the full experience of something we love. Many think of yoga as just exercise, but this ancient practice actually offers us eight limbs and one of them is Dharana, concentration. Dharana lets you create a deeper connection to yourself and those around you by linking your mind and body in the same place at the same time. From a modern neuroscience perspective, we know the brain can’t actually multi-task, it just task switches which can leave us sluggish and burnt out. It’s like scrolling through your phone and trying to talk to your spouse, how effective is the communication and connection? What if you didn’t have to say, “repeat that?” on a regular basis? How much richer would the conversation be?

I was read this at my first yoga teacher training, and it always stuck with me.

“Do not ask your children to strive for extraordinary lives. Such striving may seem admirable, but it is the way of foolishness. Help them instead to find the wonder and the marvel of an ordinary life. Show them the joy of tasting tomatoes, apples and pears. Show them how to cry when pets and people die.

Show them the infinite pleasure in the touch of a hand. And make the ordinary come alive for them. The extraordinary will take care of itself.”

● William Martin, *The Parent’s Tao Te Ching: Ancient Advice for Modern Parents*

So, how can we harness the power of Dharana in everyday life? Here are some practices to try.

Using your five senses. This would have been an easy one to practice with the croissant. Looking, smelling, touching and then tasting – while hearing the crumble under my fingers - would have let me slow down and enjoy the moment. At a social gathering but your brain is somewhere else. Feel your feet on the ground. Look around and notice three things you hear and see, then focus on who or what matters there to you.

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Gratitude Practice. This one is particularly helpful. If you’re having a hard time sleeping at night. Make a daily practice of writing down everything that went well for you that day. Not every day will be the day you get a raise or buy a new house. The simple things like great coffee, a call

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from Mom or a belly laugh should all go on there. Be specific, maybe even overly specific. Use lots of adjectives. This will start to illuminate all the little bits of amazing that sprinkle your day – that easily get overshadowed by the to-do list.

One thing at a time. This is one you can practice at work to make the rest

of your life away from work easier. Try to complete a task before moving on to the next. If that seems impossible, the next time you're on your computer, complete the task on just one browser tab, before switching to another. It takes practice, but you can do it. It took me a lot of practice. Long term, it makes more time to enjoy your hobbies, and maybe even relax.

If you want to practice getting present, contact Kaitlyn at Penfield Yoga Therapy to enroll in therapeutic group yoga classes, Kaitlyn@tozziyoga.com call (585) 200-7209. Continuing education credits are available for yoga instructors.