

What is the meaning of "Living in the Moment"?

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Note: As I always maintain, everything I say below is only my opinion, which is based on my own experiences and observations. – Swami Devanand

Why should I bother with this idea?

I think *living in the moment* is one of the easiest ways to be happy. If you find that compelling enough, please read on! 😊

"Living in the moment" is a way of thinking.

It is a general approach, and NOT a literal piece of advice. It would be nonsensical (not to mention impossible) to try to completely ignore the past and the future. After all, nature would not give us memory and imagination for no reason!

If we think about it, the past is what has already happened, it is done with; there is nothing we can do about events that have already happened – whether good or bad. The future is unpredictable. We don't really know how "tomorrow" will unfold. There are too many factors that are out of our control. The only way we can *probably* influence our future is by doing something now! So, if you want to truly "live your life" it makes sense to focus on the present moment. Doesn't it?

It first of all means being aware of the present.

Too often, we are lost in past memories or in daydreams of the future. So, becoming aware of the present moment – which means your surroundings, the food you are eating, the people who are with you, the falling leaves, the wind that's blowing through your hair – everything deserves your attention. We are so often not alert to the sounds, sights, smells around us. We are not aware of the taste of the meal we are eating. So often we get these sensory inputs but do not process them. The first step is to become more aware, more conscious of these inputs. Certain meditation techniques teach you the exact same idea: of tuning in to the present.

Living in the moment also means being alert to the signals coming to you right now, being ready for the opportunities opening up for you right at this moment. Beautiful friendships happen when you are alert to the signals coming from people (and from your heart), interesting insights are obtained when you are listening to the person next to you, personal growth happens when you are alert to the opportunities at work, disasters are avoided when you are alert to events. Being alert to the present is so important for a happy and successful life that that is probably the most important reason to adopt the philosophy of living in the moment.

It includes both space and time.

With increased connectivity and constant availability of communication devices, we have the capability of being with someone who is somewhere else. Indeed, so many of us are constantly

with someone far away – on a video/phone call, on a texting device or a chat. Often, we are just taking photos, recording events, and creating memories, but not bothering to notice anything. We need to understand these fallacies of modern life and make an effort to be aware of both the present *space* and the present *time*.

It means you should accept the present the way it is.

It is about not missing things/people that are not part of the present moment. It's easy (and indeed common) to wish that things were different, that you were somewhere else, with someone else, doing something else. That's again no different than going into fruitless, inconsequential day-dreaming about the future.

And, even if you wanted to change things, it is more effective to first accept them the way they are.

It means immersing yourself in the present moment.

It means immersing in all the things you become aware of, enjoying them to the fullest, appreciating their power, beauty, significance or lack of it, whatever. A successful and happy man was interviewed on his 90th birthday and asked for advice for the youngsters. He said, "I have only one advice. Enjoy every sandwich!" In the pursuit of success we often do not get time for comfortable dinners and long lunches. That is fine, according to this wise man, as long as we take the trouble to be mentally present at the time of putting our teeth into that sandwich! Every moment in the outdoors (whether on foot or in the car), every conversation with a loved-one, every clip of music that falls on our ears, every bite of food - all these things are sources of great wonder, pleasure and happiness if we are alert to them.

It means being grateful for the present.

It means being grateful for the relationships you currently have, for the comforts you presently enjoy, for the good health you presently possess. Often in the ambition to make new friends we forget to appreciate the current ones; in the desire to get love from strangers we forget the love we already have; in the pursuit of a better lifestyle we ignore the undeniable pleasures of the current one; in the dream of buying a palace we miss the warmth of our present dwelling, and so on.

It means your commitment is limited to the present moment.

It includes commitment to the things you are doing, to the person you are with, everything. There is no question of future commitment – that is a business of future! For example, if you are with a friend, you give your total attention to him/her. If he/she says, what about tomorrow? You say, tomorrow is a new day, let it unfold itself! You are not refusing to be committed in the future; you are simply pointing out that the future is unpredictable. I think this is a subtle but important point: it relieves a lot of stress we feel about future commitments, which takes away from being committed to things/people in the present moment – which in my opinion is more relevant than future commitments.

It does not mean that goals, objectives, plans are meaningless.

Goals and objectives are extremely important because they help you decide how you will spend the present moment. If there was no destination, you would not even hop on the train. If winning a medal wasn't an objective you wouldn't even be motivated to play. If becoming successful in your career wasn't an objective, you would not work hard. But, it is crucial to remind ourselves that that is the only purpose of goals: to create enjoyable action for the present. Achieving a goal itself is immaterial, unimportant; in fact it's out of our hands.

Just like a mountaineer has a goal, he/she looks up once in a while to check the orientation and assess progress, you, the average person, should do the same: set goals and objectives, make plans, dream dreams. But, once that is done, get back to action – to the present, and look up only once in a while – to check progress, to make course correction. This "once in a while" depends totally on how long it takes for you to do the setting, assessment, and correction. You decide how often and how long to peek into the future.

It also does not mean forgetting the past completely.

Our memory is our biggest asset – we just need to use it prudently and wisely. Our knowledge and wisdom are stored in our memory. We must access it as often as required. When the present is not really fun at all – for example, when we are sick – we should certainly dip into our sweet and pleasant memories. On the other hand, our past mistakes/debacles are not to be dwelt upon too long, because they only make us sad and angry; but, they might be helpful to make course corrections, to learn from our mistakes, to improve ourselves.

Conclusion:

"Living in the moment" is not so much about ignoring the past and the future, as it is about NOT ignoring the present. So many of us live every moment as if it did not exist: we fail to watch the sky and the birds, we fail to enjoy our food, we fail to listen to the person talking to us, we fail to notice the gifts of life around us, we fail to enjoy what we are doing at the moment. "Living in the moment" is simply a philosophy that constantly reminds us to awaken to the present moment. Because these very moments create the sweet memories you might need some day and build the happier future you aspire to!

Last updated: 15 August 2016