

TEDx Talk Cincinnati March 5th 2022 FULL SPEECH

Introduction:

So, a couple of you might have seen me magically appear on stage and thought, “hmm, I don’t really care for that guy’s face.” Others of you might be thinking, “black buttons on a white shirt...niice.” Still others of you may be focused on something completely irrelevant from this Talk. You might be ruminating about a fight you had with someone recently, and thinking, “I can’t believe he said that! Well, if he says this...maaaan, I wish he would.” Whatever it is you’re thinking right now, the point is...you’re thinking!

So what happens when we’re thinking? We’re outside the moment (Bühlmayer et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Van Gordon et al., 2018). We curate reality through a preconstructed worldview (Shonin et al., 2014; Van Gordon et al., 2018). A silhouette. Our judgements, attachments, and expectations, have us living someone else’s life. Who we were told to be, versus who we were born to be! Living on the outskirts of the moment, we know we’re missing out. We just can’t put our finger on what. So we live our lives fearful, angry, depressed...constantly chasing the next thing.

But that’s not how it has to be. What would happen if we relaxed into this Moment right now? That space from which thoughts and feelings arise. We discover our Peace...and then we are Free (Shonin et al., 2014; Van Gordon et al., 2018).

Let me tell you how Surrendering in the moment changed my Life.

Back in ‘06 I started a nonprofit when I moved to San Diego. Chance for Hope. Its mission was to help people get off the streets and into jobs and houses. In 2009 a friend approached me with the

idea to expand and create Aware. We used the money generated from recycling to build community programs. We had a Youth Empowerment, Labor to Recover, and Community Garden programs to name a few.

Overtime my time, my Life and the charity became indistinguishable. My world was in shambles, and I had no idea. For example, one day I was sitting outside Horton Plaza. Taking a break from recycling; leaning against a wall soaking in some sun. All of a sudden, this guy in a business suit walks up and hands me a dollar! I jumped up and chased him down, “no, no, no man, you don’t understand! I actually RUN a charity!” I had to argue with him for a couple minutes trying to convince him I wasn’t living on the streets...I did keep the dollar though.

In January, 2014 the charity came to a crashing halt.

I fought tooth and nail for another six months to keep the doors open. But by then, I was spent. Those eight years were some of the hardest of my life. I faced death threats, theft, political corruption. I nearly lost a limb. The woman I was madly in Love with for over three years turned down my marriage proposal and moved in with someone else. There’s way more to the story than that, and it was largely my fault, but that didn’t make it any less painful.

One morning, two IRS agents showed up at my doorstep to discuss the back taxes our charity owed...and see what they could take from my place. By that time, I was over three hundred thousand dollars in debt. I couldn’t even talk with a potential funder without tearing up. My gums bled for weeks on end, and were beginning to fall off in pieces. I was having a nervous breakdown every couple of hours. Large chunks of the day would pass where I couldn’t even move. If I

finished half a bowl of oatmeal for the day, confetti should've rained from the sky. I lost over 30 pounds. I couldn't live in my van, because I had already promised that to a title loan company. A last-ditch effort to keep the dream alive, a hopeful moment longer.

Then one day in June a ray of hope came into my Life. This woman I met a few years ago reached out. "Hey, I'm in town for a couple days, I'd Love to meet up." And just so you know, that was a pretty spot-on impersonation. Now, maybe some of you have experienced this. You meet that special person, and you know instantly, "that's the one I want to be with". I'm not gonna oversell it, so we'll just leave it at this...at that time, I probably would've given up a toe to be with her.

Remember, I'm barely hanging on by a thread when she reaches out. I pieced myself together as best I could and we met up. During the two days of hanging out, I came to realize, and so did she, that I'm not the man she deserved to have in her life...and worse yet, I'm not even happy with my Life!

On my way back home, I'm sitting at a red light screaming inside. The water's far past boiling at this point. The thoughts are deafening. Each one fighting to be heard at the same time. Blowing it with the woman of my dreams, the debt, rejected marriage proposal, failed business that I put my Heart and Soul into...everything! All of it! I tightened my grip around the steering wheel, ready to rip it from the dash. It was the lowest point in my Life.

A week later, I closed the doors to the charity and began my PhD.

Research:

For my research, I conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study. I explored the experience of healing and meditation in practitioners of the Wim Hof Method (McKinney, 2022). This was developed by Wim Hof. His method is based on three pillars. Breathwork, cold immersion, and mindset (Hof, 2020).

Nine of the ten participants I interviewed were certified instructors (McKinney, 2022, p. 68). This included world-class athletes, navy seals, engineers. People in sales. I was extremely privileged to have access to such a wealth of knowledge.

The data was coded using a narrative analysis (McKinney, 2022, p. 9). Basically, exploring the participants' lived experience before, during, and after their first workshop.

All 10 Participants reported profound and transformational changes occurring through the method (McKinney, 2022, p. 105). For instance, while talking with Participant Four, I confirmed, "now it sounds like you've become more compassionate towards others, is that accurate?" His response, which is still one of my favorites, was, "that my friend is a dramatic understatement. Before this, I thought the world needed to be drowned in a toilet" (McKinney, 2022, p. 81). Bear in mind, **he was** a bartender for over 17 years. So he had a front row seat watching humanity's finest every night!

So a logical question you might be asking yourselves right now is: What does any of this have to do with Surrender? I'll give you an example.

Let's stick with Participant 4. One day, he was at home taking an ice bath. Despising every second, but toughing it out. You know, the whole "no pain, no gain" mentality. If it doesn't hurt, you're not doing it right. That's how he approached every ice bath. And really, up until that day, anything difficult in life. As he's finishing up, his wife comes in and asks if she can try.

He gets out, and she jumps in. As she submerges herself in the tub, she lets out an, "ahhhhhh..." His response was...now I won't cuss for the TED Talk but, "what the F was that?! What just happened here?!" She responded, "I Surrendered into it." To which he replied, "I don't know what that means!" She explained, it's just like giving Birth. "I have to accept it, and relax into it, in order to get through it." He reported this healed a toxic masculine wound he was unaware of. Realizing he Always had the ability to Accept the moment. That enduring and powering through something, wasn't always the answer leading to his greatest good.

For some, the transformative experiences were physical. Reducing diabetic inflammation. Eliminating sciatic pain. Improved strength, endurance, immune function, and so on. For others, it was mental and emotional. Entering the Flow State with ease. Reducing stress, building confidence, and even preventing suicide! (McKinney, 2022, p. 105). Participant Six disclosed "there were definitely moments where I think I was going to end my life. And I didn't, because I had a moment to do the breath work" (McKinney, 2022, p. 109).

Eight of the 10 participants reported some form of a spiritual transformation (McKinney, 2022, p. 105). A feeling of universal Oneness. Receiving life changing insights and guidance in a single moment. Living their lives with greater compassion. The list goes on.

So how does all of this occur? Even though the Wim Hof Method does not directly incorporate meditation into their practice, they are still utilizing meditative techniques (McKinney, 2022, p. 110).

Funny enough, 6 of the 10 participants reported an inability to meditate prior to doing the method (McKinney, 2022, p. 73).

My research revealed two meditative techniques at play here (McKinney, 2022, p. 110). The first, Focused Attention Meditation. Second, Open Monitoring Meditation. Through Focused meditation, we hone all of our attention on a single object (Boorstein, 2000; Lutz et al., 2008). For instance, our breath...The flame of a candle...A mantra. Something we can bring our awareness back to, if we find ourselves getting lost in thought. Open monitoring meditation, is just watching the thoughts (Boorstein, 2000; Lippelt et al., 2014; Sedlmeir et al., 2012; Cahn et al., 2009).

Nonattached Awareness and acceptance of the moment.

Like clouds in the sky. The clouds are just the thoughts, feelings, experiences, whatever. And our Awareness is the Sky! Anybody ever see a cloud stain the sky? It's impossible. A cloud can't even block out the Sun. It's just our limited perspective from where we're standing.

Now here's where things get interesting, practitioners usually begin with some form of Focused meditation, prior to **advancing** into the Open Monitoring technique (Lippelt et al., 2014). When the thoughts have stilled, or at least there's no identification or attachment to them, this is when a transpersonal experience can occur (Lo et al., 2003; Louchakova, 2003; Khoury et al., 2016; Vespa et al., 2018). The research further indicates that transpersonal experiences, are **precursors** to transformation (Kass, 2015; Khoury et al., 2016; McKinney, 2022, p. 111; Van Gordon et al., 2018).

Takeaway:

So how can we take the **Power of Surrender** and apply it in our Lives? The answer to that, may be found in another question...How **deep** are we willing to let go? It's not about gaining some new knowledge or acquiring a new skill. It's about letting go. Surrendering. Accepting and relaxing into the moment (McKinney, 2022, p. 96; Shonin et al. 2014; Van Gordon et al., 2018). Becoming comfortable in our discomfort. Let's do a real quick exercise.

We're all gonna take 3 deep breaths. For these, they'll be in through the nose, down into the stomach, then back out through the nose. We'll inhale for 5 seconds, and exhale for 7. Like this, 2...3...4...5. Exhale, 3...4...5...6...7 (demonstrate). Alright. Ready? Let's go.

(count along and move with the crowd for the complete cycle of 3 breaths).

Not bad huh? Anyone feel more calm or Peaceful? We can do that anywhere. Anytime. It's always with us. Look how quickly we altered our physiology just by breathing 3 conscious breaths. Play around with your breath. It's your compass. How we breathe, is how we live (Brown et al., 2005; Seppala et al., 2014).

When in this Moment, we function with greater clarity and focus, we become better listeners, more attentive and responsive lovers, our inter and intrapersonal relationships improve, our productivity increases, and we're better equipped to deal with stress (Bühlmayer et al., 2017; Kass, 2015; Magalhaes et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2018). Or rather, we Witness it, unattached, as it passes through. I know this, not only from my research, but because I've lived it.

Remember that moment, when I was about to rip my steering wheel off the dash? Just as I was breaking, something amazing happened...instead of fighting or trying to control it, I entered a meditative state, and Surrendered to it. I witnessed it. Unattached, recognizing all of it as just thoughts. And it passed. In that moment, I touched that place within me, that place within ALL of us, known as unconditional Love. Ever Present Peace. You ever go crazy looking for your keys around the house, just to find they were in your hand or pocket the whole time? It was like that!

I'd like to leave you with this: **real Peace** is not achieved through conquest. It's already Here, right now, for all of us. **And in this sense**, Surrendering isn't a sign of weakness. It's the ultimate testimony of Strength. Thank you very much for your time. Much Love.

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