

The mind is beautiful.

Our capacity to strategize, plot, and plan, is what allows us to build cities, invent amazing technologies, and coordinate vast interactions across the network we call the Internet. The human mind is indeed amazing.

And, yet, it is also true that the human mind can be obsessed with its job. It's like a workaholic—one who doesn't want to take downtime or weekends off.

The mind wants to keep on calculating and planning even when we lay down our heads at night. It wants to plan our to-do lists while we make love or watch a sunset. Rather than enjoying our lives and being in the present moment, the brain steps in and tries to control, strategize, and predict future outcomes—it can seriously get in the way of life!

Truly, this is an exhausting way to live.

I speak of these things from personal experience: I am in the process of healing from **PTSD**, and I have come to realize that my brain has especially adapted to worrying, as it is a highly-attuned and impeccable danger-sensor.

Most of us, regardless of whether we have dealt with trauma or not, struggle with some amount of anxiety and stress.

Many of us have turned to **meditation** or **yoga** as a path to freedom. We sit motionless on a cushion or we move our bodies on a yoga mat, and we come into present moment awareness. We breathe in and out; we say affirmations and mantras; and we remind our minds to calm down.

Yet, for so many of us, when we return again to our lives, when we stand up from the cushion or put away our mat, we are confused on how we stay with the feeling of presence—the feeling of peace. How do we remain in the relaxed state?

Last week, I began the process of applying for a teaching position that I very much want. I sat down at my computer, fresh from a beautiful night's sleep, ready to begin the process. I felt excited and good.

First, I began to write an application letter—all was well, I was smiling. But then I encountered a snag: as I scanned the application materials list, I realized I needed to submit student evaluations from my previous years of teaching. My breath became shallower, as I searched my home in vain, only to confirm the sinking feeling that yes, indeed, all the documents I needed had been lost when I'd moved the previous year.

I began to panic, my palms began to sweat, and my heart began to race. Minute by minute, moment by moment, my sense of well-being disappeared, and I began to feel my body tighten, and my breath contract. The inner critic began her

relentless tirade: *Why are you such an idiot, Anya? Why aren't you more organized? Why are you so sloppy? What the hell's the matter with you?*

At this point, I was way too triggered to take the time to roll out my yoga mat or find my meditation cushion. No way. I had to do something—now.

So, I tried a new method I've been practicing, which, lately, has been a real life-saver for me. I closed my computer, remained seated right there at my desk, and asked myself a simple question: "What is happening right now?"

I took a few slow breaths and then repeated the question.

"What is happening right now?"

Then, slowly, I began to talk to myself, aloud, "Well, I am a woman who is 33 years old, and I'm sitting in a chair. I am a woman who is wearing blue jeans. A woman who has a roof over her head and food in the refrigerator. I am a woman who is unable to find some documents. That is what is happening right now."

In asking and answering the simple question mantra—*what is happening right now?*—I was able to move my brain out of past and future mode—out of overwhelmed, panic mode. I moved a bit closer to a calmer, observation mode, and a bit closer to inner peace.

Asking yourself a question mantra, such as "What is happening right now?" or "What is the reality of this moment?" (or something along those lines) can help you detach from the swirl of mind-stress, and help you enter the reality of the actual present moment, aside from any emotions and the stories the brain likes to tell.

Even if the outward conditions of your life seem to be crashing down around you—you are still alive, you are still breathing, and you still have blessings to count, and the answer to your question mantra can always be: I am here in this body, breathing, and alive on planet Earth.

While I was living in Puerto Rico a few years ago, I once got lost in the jungle and I was totally alone. My water was running out, my cell phone had no signal, and daylight was running short.

After screaming, "Help!" at the top of my lungs for about an hour or so, I sank down in the dirt, exhausted, and utterly panicked.

Then I took a breath. Then another shaky breath. And then I asked myself the question:

"What is happening now?"

"What is happening now?"

"What is happening now?"

In that moment, my eyes were instantly drawn to a purple patch of flowers a few feet away—they were gorgeous! They were delicate, with yellow centers and

petals that looked like clouds. Next, my eyes were drawn upwards, up the trunk of a majestic palm tree.

Coconuts were hanging from every branch, and tears of joy began rolling down my face. It was in that moment that I woke up, and realized the sheer beauty of my surroundings. I realized the beauty of life. Whether I would die that day was unknown. What was known was exactly what was happening in that moment. Such beauty—such wonder.

Just a few hours later, I was able to find my way out of the jungle. By bringing myself into the present moment, I was able to, when the time was right, rise up from the dirt, take a deep determined breath, and move forward, renewed. My intuition felt stronger, calm, connected, and I was able to sense how to get out. As you say your question mantra in times of trouble, allow yourself to see what is really happening in that moment. Allow yourself to see, feel, and perceive. Allow yourself to relax and trust.

And you will see—time and time again—that all is well. All is beautiful. There is nothing wrong and nothing to fix. You are you—and you are alive. So beautifully alive!

There is so much to be thankful for.

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Image: Taia Butler