

REALIZING PURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Week #2 of a 5-Week Series, "The Power of NOW"

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So how many people have ever felt like you didn't have enough time, and you needed more time to do things in your life? How many people have ever felt that your life was run by time? And you always feel the pressure of time? Anybody have those experiences?

You know, the fact is: so often in life we are running around rushing, because we feel like we just don't have enough time. When you think about it, time is precious, because it is limited. It is a limited resource. And so that's why we're always kind of working hard to save time; and to make time; and to buy time; and invest time, because we want to be on time; and get there in time. [Congregants laugh] Sometimes we want to get there ahead of time, because wondering if we might hit the big time. [Congregants laugh] But all in good time. All in good time! It's good to have down time and free time; then we won't kill time or end up doing hard time. [Congregants laugh] There are all kinds of time: you know, full-time; part-time; half-time; over-time. But eventually, every single one of us will run out of time.

Benjamin Franklin said, *"Do not squander your time, for time is the stuff that life is made of."*

Last week, we started a five-week series on Eckhart Tolle's book, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. And he said in the book that the greatest obstacle to enlightenment is actually our minds ... and, specifically, how we so identify with everything in our minds. That we believe everything we think is true; everything we think is real. We believe that everything we think about people is how people are. Everything we think about ourselves is how we are. And everything we think about life is how life is.

We are obsessed with our thoughts! And he said the most dreadful affliction that we all suffer from is our inability to stop thinking. Because it is our thinking that sometimes blocks our spiritual connection. And it is our thinking that blocks us from the present moment and feeling a sense of peace.

Tolle said that the more that we identify with our thoughts, the more we suffer. And so the more we disidentify with our thoughts, the more free we are. Interestingly, he said that, unfortunately, 80 to 90% of the thoughts we think are obsessive, negative, or even destructive, and cause the majority of our suffering and unhappiness.

You know, it's not surprising that 80 or 90% of the thoughts we think today, we thought yesterday ... meaning we are trapped in our minds. Our minds actually limit our experience and enjoyment of life.

Last week I entitled the talk, "Freedom from Your Mind." Because, as great as our minds are, they really can disrupt and get in the way and prevent us from being fully present and truly being fully alive and fully engaged. And so, the three practices we looked at really are the fundamental building blocks for the entire process of the power of now and moving towards enlightenment.

And they are: to observe our thoughts. Sometimes we are so consumed by our thoughts, we don't even realize it. But to begin to observe the thoughts that we're thinking brings a level of awareness. And he says that awareness is the very first step we need to change or transform any area of our lives. So, the first thing is to begin to observe: become the observer of the thoughts that we think.

The second is to accept what is. Instead of resisting or fighting against or hating what has happened, to make peace with what has happened. And to find that level of acceptance.

And then the third thing is to embrace stillness. One of the greatest things we can do to utilize our minds in a more effective way is to learn to quiet our minds on a consistent basis. Even something as simple as focusing on our breath as we breathe in, and focus as we breathe out, is an incredible, simple way to quiet our mind.

Let's do that! Everybody, when we're going to breathe in, I want you to feel the air as it comes into your nostrils going in. And be aware as you feel the air as it exits. Just feel it in your nostrils.

Okay, together: everybody, let's just breathe in. Feel the air as it comes into your nostrils And feel the air as you exhale. Feel it leaving your nostrils. Again: feel the air as it comes in through your nose. Feel the air as it exits and releases. Again: feel the air as it comes in. Feel the sensation as you breathe in; feel the sensation as you breathe out. One more time, nice and slow: breathe in; feel in the air; put your awareness on it. Again, your awareness again as you exhale; feel the air as it leaves.

You know, even simple exercises like that begin to quiet the mind. And it renews and refreshes. But there are all kinds of different ways. We can listen to guided meditations. We can just sit in the silence. We can just be still. But all the ways that we can quiet and embrace stillness will actually help us use our minds and be more present and engaged in our lives.

So, other than paying attention, and being attached and identifying ourselves with our minds, the other thing that causes us some difficulty in being present is also how we identify ourselves with time.

I don't know about you, but numerous times a day, I say, *"What time is it? I wonder what time it is ..."* Anybody obsessed with time? And feel like everything is driven by time, structured with time? We think time is very, very important.

Interestingly, Eckhart Tolle says the opposite. He said time is the cause of our suffering and our problems. And it's not just him! Let's go back to the 13th century. The Sufi mystic, Rumi, said, *"Past and future veil God from our sights; burn up both of them with fire."*

Meister Eckhart, also a 13th century individual who was a Dominican monk, said, *"Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."*

My question would be: Why would they say that? Why would they say that time is an obstacle to God? An obstacle to being present? And it is because we are so compulsive in our thinking and our relationship with time that we are always living in the memory and the past, or we are living in anticipation of the future. We are so strongly dependent on time, we absolutely resist making NOW a priority ... Instead, choosing to believe that the past or the future is actually a more valuable way for us to invest our time. You know, the past gives us our identity and the future gives us promise of something better.

But he says that both are absolutely illusions. He said time is not precious. NOW is precious. NOW is the most valuable and important thing. NOW is the only point that we could experience the timelessness of now and our oneness and our awareness of the Divine presence and our true spiritual nature.

You see, the past is just reactivating what has already happened. It's reactivating a memory. And the future is imagining and projecting something from our minds. And the only reality that the past and the future has is what is borrowed from now. In fact, the past and the future are actually robbing us of now as we continue to dwell on either or both of them.

Eckhart Tolle says that we all have a pattern of denying the present by living in the past and living in the future. So, our work is actually to withdraw energy from the past and the future so that energy could be right here with us in the present, in the NOW.

And the greatest way to do it is to pay attention to where our mind goes when it thinks of regrets; when it thinks of being upset about something that we didn't like or someone said or did in the past. Or dreams that we have about the future: whether it'll get better or whether it'll get worse. And he says, once you realize that you are not in the present moment, that you are in the present moment. And that we're not actually trapped in our mind when we're aware that we aren't present.

And so, what we need to do, he says, is: we need to step out of the time dimension; step out of the past and step out of the future. And he differentiates time in two ways. He said there's clock time, and then there's psychological time. So, clock time is making appointments. It is about planning a trip. It is about setting goals. It's about learning from the past. So, time is good in that sense: when we utilize it in that way.

But he says psychological time is identified with ourselves. And it is when our mind looks into the future and thinks, *"Well, doing this is going to help me get this; that I will make it then."* *"That I will be a success then."* *"I'll be happier then."* That when we are so compulsively thinking about the future, he said, it is our psychological attachment to it. And he said that that is not good, because it is always trying to be somewhere other than where we are right now.

And so, it is a constant chasing; it is a constant yearning; and a constant desiring. And that psychological time, you know, really traps and imprisons us. And he said the most important thing is to free ourselves from psychological time of the past: of trying to identify ourselves with it; or the future: of trying to find fulfillment in it. He says, *"Being free of time is the most profound transformation of consciousness that there is."*

And what we begin to realize that ... How many people have ever been talking to someone, and you could tell that they weren't really listening to you? They weren't really ... How many people have ever been at work, and your body's at work, but your mind is somewhere else? Anybody? [Congregants laugh]

I think if we're all really, really honest and check in, we'll realize that we are rarely fully in the present. And it is one of the most important things for us to do that work: to get ourselves to that present by releasing our attachment to the past and to the future.

Eckhart Tolle says this. He says, *"All negativity is caused by the accumulation of psychological time and the denial of the present moment."* He says, if you have resentment; if you have blame; if you have unforgiveness; or holding grudges in any way, you are living with too much past. And he said, if you have anxiety; and if you have worry; and if you have fear and stress, you are living with too much future. The more we withdraw them, the more we have presence; the more we are present. And the more that we are able to experience the power of NOW and move towards a greater level of enlightenment, which is really awareness of our oneness with Spirit, our oneness with the Divine.

And you know, sometimes we think, *"Oh, this sounds pretty easy! We should be able to just knock this out and go from unconscious to conscious."* And he said it doesn't work that way. We have glimpses of conscious, but he said, for the most part, we go from one level of unconscious to another level of unconscious. That most of us live at a low level of unconscious -- that he calls ordinary unconscious -- and then sometimes we have some deeper dysfunctional levels of unconscious.

And so, what he says is: ordinary unconscious is when we live with a consistent level of unease, of nervousness, of discontent and boredom. And sometimes we are fine to just live that way and think that's the best life we can have: not being fully present a lot. But he said sometimes we can utilize things like money or shopping or sex or drugs or alcohol or TV -- or whatever it is -- to distract us from that unease.

And then he said it can go into deeper levels of unconscious when something major happens in our lives that we really don't like: that we resist, that we hate, that we're angry, and we fight against it. And he said, that takes us into deeper levels of unhappiness and deeper levels of pain. Because then our mind is just living in the past, and more and more attached to it, and more and more attached to time. And it can trigger depression. It can trigger aggression and other things.

So, this morning, I want to look at four things that we can do to help us go from unconscious to help us realize pure consciousness. And some of these, again, we'll repeat, because these are some of the basic fundamentals we need to do to master our minds and be fully present in the now.

So the first thing we need to do is **SELF-OBSERVATION**. Again, awareness is the number one thing that helps free us so we can change and transform. And what we need to monitor is our mental/emotional state.

And so he said what we need to do is ask ourselves some questions throughout the day from time to time, just to check in to do some self-observation. Like: So what is going on inside of me right now? Am I feeling ease or unease? What thoughts are my mind creating right now? What is it that I'm feeling in my body? Is there any tension? Is there any resistance? Is there any resentment?

And what he says is: as we do this throughout the day on a consistent basis, over time the power of self-observation will get stronger and help us liberate ourselves more and more from the past and future; to bring ourselves to the present.

And observation is really an important technique, because sometimes we confuse our life situation with our life. So, let's just say we have a problem or an issue going on right now; let's say at work. That we kind of balloon it by thinking so much; of thinking that's our life, when it's only a portion of our lives. But our mind perspective gets skewed, and all our minds have space for is what's not working; what's not right.

And so, he says one of the things of self-observation to help us go from being aware that a life situation is not our entire life is just being aware of our senses. He says that, in a moment, to just stop ourselves and say, "Okay, so what am I seeing right now?" Just look. And just pay attention to how things look. And don't just look at them; look at them for a few seconds so you can feel their energy or their essence. And whether it's a picture; whether it's a flower; whether it's a piano; whether it's a purple chair -- whatever it is -- just take a moment and just be with it.

And then move on to listening. What are you hearing? Don't judge; just hear. What are you hearing? And even if it is just being aware of your breathing rhythm, just noticing it. Any time that we just ...

Or touch something: feel a sense of texture. He said that will just bring us back to awareness and make whatever life situation that is seem much smaller. Because we have a clearer perspective that there's a lot of good going on in our lives if we are just present to it; if we just tune in to it.

Eckhart Tolle says this: *"Ultimately, it is not about solving your problems. It is about realizing there are no problems. Only situations -- to be dealt with now, or to be left alone and accepted as a part of the 'isness' of the present moment until they change or can be dealt with. Problems are mind made. They cannot survive in the actuality of now."*

See, because the mind sees problems, but BEING and PRESENCE sees situations.

And so, the first thing to go from unconscious to realize pure consciousness is self-observation. It is hugely more liberating. It's not easy, but it's a vitally important practice if we are serious about discovering and being in the presence and the power of now.

The second one is to **ACCEPT WHAT THE PRESENT MOMENT PRESENTS**. You know, sometimes in our lives, the present moment does not present to us things that are ideal or enjoyable. Sometimes we get presented situations that are challenging; that are painful and difficult. And our usual response to it is resist: fight against it; hate it; dislike it. But unfortunately, that creates more pain; it wastes so much life energy trying to fight against what has already happened; and it reduces our ability to invest time in the present to actually do something about it.

The important thing about acceptance is it does two things. Number one: it helps us make a wiser choice. Because acceptance is saying, *"I choose peace over pain."* Because it's about making peace with what has already happened. It may not have been your choice, but we make peace with it because that is what happened. It is about making a choice about willingness versus reluctance. And it is about making a choice between acceptance and resistance.

And we can make that acceptance even more when we realize ... How many people believe that everything happens for a reason? And how many people believe that all things are working together for our highest good? So, wouldn't that help you be more accepting of "what is" when we realize that? Not just as a choice of pain versus peace, but also that it is a choice of realizing, *"Oh, all things are happening for my highest good; that this will bring some good, even though it is not something that I would have preferred or chosen."*

He said that the greatest way to test your level of unconsciousness or your level of consciousness is: look at how you deal with life when it does not go your way. Think about it: when life doesn't go your way, how do you handle that? And how do you show up in those situations? Is it with resistance or is it with acceptance?

So, this week life gave me a few things that I probably would not have chosen. And here they are. And so, the first one is: after Sunday, I realized I still had an issue with my leg brace. And so, in the past, I would have gotten upset, frustrated, embarrassed about it. But I was able to actually accept it quickly; realize I got to work with it. Saw my brace guy once; I'm going to see him again this week. And I actually had a fabulous and wonderful week, and it wasn't dragging me down. And I wasn't thinking about it.

On Wednesday, my pool turned green ... [Congregants laugh] A lovely shade of green, I might say! [Congregants laugh] And then I called my pool guy, who said he couldn't be there for at least a week, if not a week-and-a-half. But I found acceptance in that situation. And so, what I did was I tossed in three chlorine tablets, and then I put another two in the skimmer basket and turned on the motor for 18 hours. And miraculously, it was no longer green the next morning. And then a dear friend of mine – who is my house angel – came over and gave me some assistance. And we're setting a plan to make sure that does not happen again.

Then Thursday, I had four sets of plans: a couple to do with house stuff and errands, and two of them to do with being social. And everybody canceled, or we had to reschedule all of it. However, I had a level of acceptance and was able to do several loads of laundry ... [Laughs with congregants] Empty the dishwasher; things I usually would not have done.

And then later – about 4 in the afternoon – someone called, and we did a spontaneous dinner thing. And this person surprised me and brought over chicken parmesan with garlic bread and a wonderful salad and prosciutto and burrata. And a bottle of wine! And we watched the Chiefs and Ravens game, and I had a fabulous Thursday, even though nothing went my way. [Congregants applaud and cheer]

And so, the thing is ... So when life hands you a moment -- or maybe you've got a moment right now that isn't one you would have chosen -- are you willing to use the power of acceptance and to choose peace

versus pain? You know, to choose willingness instead of reluctance? Because it truly is the path to peace, and it is a way for us to fully step into the power of now.

And now, the third thing we can do is to **CONNECT WITH THE INNER PURPOSE OF OUR LIFE'S JOURNEY.** Tolle says that our life's journey has two purposes: the outer purpose and the inner purpose. And he said the outer purpose is to achieve the goals and the dreams and the desires and the things that we set out to achieve. That is the outer purpose.

But he said the inner one happens ... When we are so focused on what the outer is going on that we miss what it is in front of us. He said then we totally miss what the inner purpose is. He said, there could be a thousand steps to the outer, but the inner is about only one thing, and that is how you show up and give your attention to the thing that is before you to do.

He said it's not about what the final product is. It's about the consciousness you have in that moment. It's about taking the step -- or whatever it is that you're meant to do -- and investing your heart and your mind and your full spirit in doing that, and that alone. Not thinking of the consequence; not thinking of the results. Just being fully engaged; being fully present; being centered in the power of now.

It is the inner purpose of all life, he said. It's just to do what is before you with all your heart and mind, without drifting to the past or future. Just do it! And it could be washing dishes. It could be studying for an exam. It could be having a conversation or time with your loved one, whether your partner, or whether your kids or grandkids. But wherever you are, be fully present to that thing. Give your heart and your mind to it. And he said that will give us levels of joy and fulfillment. That will give us levels of peace and happiness.

And then the fourth one, kind of related to it, is about **EXPRESSING THE JOY OF BEING IN ALL THAT YOU DO.** You know, he says that the more we are in the now -- the more that we are present -- the more joy, our natural joy, just flows through us in all that we say, in all that we think, and all that we do.

You know, the fact is: life is a gift. It is an incredible opportunity. And even if the things before us are not the things we've chosen, we get the gift and blessing to be here and to live through it. And to utilize the spiritual resources and gifts and powers that God has given us to handle that in a way that will bring us blessings and bless the other people in our lives, as well.

And, again, even if it's not ... If it's a family issue; if it's a financial issue, we still get to show up and invest and infuse our spiritual resources and power and our levels of awareness in that thing. Joy is our natural state that we express through all things.

In the Book of James, it gives us a fabulous example of the point I'm trying to make here. And it says, *"Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of any kinds. For the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have its full effect in you that you may be whole, complete, and lacking in nothing."*

And what that's basically saying is: whatever life gives you -- whatever shows up -- count it joy. Because you get to live through it; you get to express it, And you get to become even more and expand the fullness of who you are by getting that opportunity. Everything that is in our lives is in our lives for a reason. You know, it is not a mistake that we are given; it's actually for our highest good.

The universe is actually conspiring to expand us and grow us into the fullness of who we came here to be; to fulfill our divine potential. And we need to embrace that as a joyful and wonderful opportunity and blessing for us to experience. We're already "whole, complete and lacking in nothing." We just get to expand and express the fullness of that goodness in all that we do.

“Count it all joy” -- express the joy of being, and it will allow our lights to shine brightly to bless us. But I guarantee it will bless all the people in our lives, as well.

An efficiency expert shared a lecture in which he shared with his class that he had recently given some tips to save time to his wife in how efficient she was in making breakfast. [Congregants laugh] He had watched her routine for years, and noticed she would go from the kitchen to the table to the cupboards and to the stove carrying only one thing at a time. But he shared with her she could be more efficient if she doubled up and carried more things, and to have fewer and fewer trips to make ... therefore, save time.

One of the students said, “Well, did it work? Did it save a lot of time?”

And the man said, “Yes, it did! My wife used to take 20 minutes to make breakfast. Now I do it in 10.”
[Laughs with congregants]

Time. Time! Saving time!

The Apostle Paul said this. He said, *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* And Paul said that because he knew that our minds needed to be renewed. That our minds – as human beings – have a tendency to go to the past; a tendency to go to the future. We tend to be consumed with our own thoughts, and we tend to be consumed with time. So, renewing our mind is a powerful thing to step into the power of now and to move towards enlightenment.

And here are the four practices. Again, use the power of self-observation. Ask yourself that question: What am I thinking right now? Or what am I feeling right now? What's going on inside of me? And then, secondly, accept whatever the moment presents. Be willing to say, “Yes.” Be willing to choose peace over pain. And then third is the inner purpose. Connect with your inner purpose, which is to be fully engaged in that one thing you are supposed to do right now. Be fully engaged in it. And then the fourth is: express the joy of being in all that you do. Express; let your light shine, because it will bring more light for you, and it will bring more light for everybody in your life.

Practice these four things! I guarantee you they will help us go deeper and help us realize pure consciousness.

God bless you all!