

The Practicing Mind

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Introduction

L.71 "Real peace and contentment in our lives come from realizing that life is a process to engage in, a journey down a path that we can choose to experience as magical"

The Learning Begins

p.5 observing others practicing their golf swing: "...they were repeating the same lack of fundamental skills over and over again and expecting different results. To compare this to music, it would be like watching someone who had been playing the piano for twenty years get frustrated at his inability to play more than one note at a time because he didn't realize he was supposed to play with his fingers, not his elbows."

p.7 "Our culture today is one built on multitasking. Multitasking is emphasized not just to increase productivity (which never seems to be enough), but for survival. We teach it to ourselves, and we teach it to our children. We are always doing and thinking of more than one thing at a time."

p.8 "However, the practicing mind is quiet. It lives in the present and has laser-like, pinpoint focus and accuracy. It obeys our precise directions, and all our energy moves through it. Because of this, we are calm and completely free of anxiety. We are where we should be at that moment, doing what we should be doing and completely aware of what we are experiencing. There is no wasted motion, physically or mentally."

p.8 "We are convinced that because our technology is evolving, we must be evolving, too. We think that because we have cell phones with cameras in them, we must be more advanced than people who lived twenty-five hundred years ago; but in fact, those people in the past were much more aware of their internal world than we are because they weren't distracted by technology. We have all this technology, which is supposed to make our lives easier, yet it doesn't. They had none of the technology, but they had much simpler lives and perhaps a better understanding of how their minds worked."

p.10 "If you are not in control of your thoughts, then you are not in control of yourself. Without self-control, you have no real power, regardless of whatever else you accomplish. If you are not aware of the thoughts that you think in each moment, then you are the rider with no reins, with no power over where you are going. You cannot control what you are not aware of. Awareness must come first."

Process, Not Product

p.21 "We have a very unhealthy habit of making the product — our intended result — the goal, instead of the process of reaching that goal. This is evident in many activities in our everyday lives. We become fixated on our intended goal and completely miss out on the joy present in the process of achieving it. We erroneously think that there is a magical point that we will reach and then we will be happy. We look at the process of getting there as almost a necessary nuisance we have to go through in order to get to our goal."

p.22 "...the words practice and learning are similar but not the same. The word practice implies the presence of awareness and will. The word learning does not. When we practice something, we are involved in the deliberate repetition of a process with the intention of reaching a specific goal."

- p.23 "When you focus on the process, the desired product takes care of itself with fluid ease. When you focus on the product, you immediately begin to fight yourself and experience boredom, restlessness, frustration, and impatience with the process."
- p.23 "In order to focus on the present, we must give up, at least temporarily, our attachment to our desired goal."
- p.23 "When you shift your goal from the product you are trying to achieve to the process of achieving it, a wonderful phenomenon occurs: all pressure drops away."
- p.27 "Remember, judgment redirects and wastes our energy. One could argue that we must judge the outcome of each attempt to make a decision about how to proceed, but this is not true. Judgment brings a sense of right or wrong, good or bad with it. What we are doing here is objectively observing and analyzing the outcome of each attempt. This observation serves only to direct our next effort."
- p.35 "On the other hand, what choice did they have? Our culture is a bottom-line, results-oriented society. Corporations will hire a 4.0 before a 2.0 every time because they feel the 4.0 has more to offer. To them, the 4.0 is who you are and what your future potential is. With regard to this particular situation, if a student had instead said, "Forget the grade," and expended all her energy on just learning as much of the material as possible, she would have had no valid way to represent what she had accomplished. Our culture does not recognize the value of being process oriented, even though we see so much evidence for it in the work produced by countries that do."
- p.39 "The "get it now" perspective is not just an individual one. Our whole culture participates in it at many levels and in many ways. Corporations are more interested in short-term profits than the long-term health of their organizations and employees. Strangely, if you ask most people, they will agree that this attitude reigns in our society, but we seem to be on a runaway train."
- p.40 "In summary, creating the practicing mind comes down to a few simple rules:
- Keep yourself process-oriented.
 - Stay in the present.
 - Make the process the goal and use the overall goal as a rudder to steer your efforts.
 - Be deliberate, have an intention about what you want to accomplish, and remain aware of that intention."
- p.41 "The problem with patience and discipline is that developing each of them requires both of them."

It's How You Look at It

- p.43 "Most of the anxiety we experience in life comes from our feeling that there is an end point of perfection in everything that we involve ourselves with. Whatever or wherever that perfection may be, we are not. We continually examine, consciously or unconsciously, everything in our lives, compare it to what we feel is ideal, and then judge where we are in relation to that ideal."
- p.44 "We watch all these perfect-looking people on TV and in the movies living their perfect lives. In TV advertisements, this illusion is presented even more strongly: "Buy this and your life will be great," or, worse yet, "Without this, your life is incomplete.""
- p.46 "We make a major detour on the road to happiness when we adopt an image of perfection in anything. This is because an image or ideal is frozen and stagnant, and limited by nature. An ideal implies that it is as good as a particular circumstance or thing can get. True perfection, in contrast, is limitless, unbounded, and always expanding."
- p.49 "At any point in the day when you notice you are feeling bored, impatient, rushed, or disappointed with your performance level, realize that you have left the present moment in your activity."

- p.50 "Any high-level performers in any sport or art form will tell you this: Their idea of perfection is always moving away from them; it is always based on their present experience and perspective. When we learn this truth, we really get on the path toward true, authentic happiness."
- p.55 "I have found that the only difference between the two sorts of activities is that we prejudge them. We make a conscious decision that if we enjoy an activity, it is not work. So we must temporarily suspend our definition of work as referring to our daily vocation. Work, in this discussion, refers to any activity we don't feel like doing, and though it could certainly include our job duties, or at least parts of them, it could also include any activity that we think is "undesirable.""

Creating the Habits We Desire

- p.63 "You cannot change what you are unaware of. This truth is nowhere more important than in the world of self-improvement. We need to be more aware of what we are doing, what we are thinking, and what we are intending to accomplish in order to gain control of what we experience in life."
- p.66 "...when we say that something is a habit, it means that it is the natural way we do something. We do it intuitively, without having to think about it."
- p.66 "What is required is that you are aware of what you want to achieve, that you know the motions you must intentionally repeat to accomplish the goal, and that you execute your actions without emotions or judgments; just stay on course. You should do this in the comfort of knowing that intentionally repeating something over a short course of time will create a new habit or replace an old one."
- p.69 "...a trigger is a device that serves to start the creation process of the new habit. It's sort of a wake-up call, a whistle blow or a bell ring, that alerts you that you are in a situation where you want to replace your previous response with this new one that you have chosen."

Perception Change Creates Patience!

- p.77 "Experiencing impatience is one of the first symptoms of not being in the present moment, not doing what you are doing, and not staying process-oriented."
- p.79 "The first step toward patience is to become aware of when your internal dialogue is running wild and dragging you with it."
- p.80 "The second step in creating patience is understanding and accepting that there is no such thing as reaching a point of perfection in anything. True perfection is both always evolving and always present within you"
- p.85 "Progress is a natural result of staying focused on the process of doing anything. When you stay on purpose, focused in the present moment, the goal comes toward you with frictionless ease. However, when you constantly focus on the goal you are aiming for, you push it away instead of pulling it toward you. In every moment that you look at the goal and compare your position to it, you affirm to yourself that you haven't reached it. In reality, you need to acknowledge the goal to yourself only occasionally, using it as a rudder to keep you moving in the right direction."
- p.88 "Cheating discipline doesn't work."
- p.89 "Credit cards, though convenient and certainly necessary at times in the modern world, are a form of instant gratification, but perhaps they should be called insignificant gratification. Credit cards allow you to jump to an end result without any effort. You can easily purchase anything you want without having to work or wait for the necessary financial resources that ownership of the object calls for. They even allow you the luxury of excusing yourself for not waiting, as you promise yourself you will pay the bill off when the statement comes at the end of the month."

p.90 "The real thrill of acquiring anything, whether it is an object or a personal goal, is your anticipation of the moment of receiving it. The real joy lies in creating and sustaining the stamina and patience needed to work for something over a period of time."

p.91 "Getting the goal and achieving it are worlds apart. Most people spend their lives on an endless treadmill: they get one thing after another, but they get no experience of lasting joy or personal growth."

The Four "S" Words

p.95 "Simplify. When you work at a specific project or activity, simplify it by breaking it down into its component sections."

p.96 "Small. Be aware of your overall goal, and remember to use it as a rudder or distant beacon that keeps you on course. But break down the overall goal into small sections that can be achieved with a comfortable amount of concentration."

p.97 Short: "You have simplified the task by breaking it down into small segments and asking yourself to focus for only a short period of time."

p.97 "Slow. Incorporating slowness into your process is a paradox. What I mean by slow is that you work at a pace that allows you to pay attention to what you are doing. This pace will differ according to your personality and the task in which you are involved."

Equanimity and DOC

p.105 "Equanimity is defined as even-temperedness and calmness. It would certainly seem to be a quality necessary for happiness in life. Equanimity is a virtue worth every effort to develop. How do we work at equanimity? How do we bring this quality into our experience of life, and how do we maintain it? A sign that someone possesses this virtue is that they are undisturbed by the moment-to-moment ups and downs they experience in daily life. Things just don't seem to bother these people. Why is this? It is because equanimity comes from the art of nonjudgment. Nonjudgment quiets the internal dialogue of our mind."

p.106 "Judgment requires the process of evaluation, the process of comparison. This requires a point of relativity, an ideal."

p.106 "When you are unaware that judgments are happening, they become self-perpetuating, and the "ideal" is always evolving."

p.109 "The emotions attached to a judgment stem from a sense that "this is right, and that is wrong." "This is good, and that is bad." Right and good make us happy, while wrong and bad make us upset or sad. We feel that right and good things at least approach the ideal, while wrong and bad things move away from it."

p.110 "We must work at being more objectively aware of ourselves. We cannot refine any part of our daily thought processes if we are not separate from those processes."

p.111 "When you are aligned with your true self, you are immune to other people's behaviors. When you feel that someone is acting inappropriately toward you, that feeling comes from a judgment of the ego."

p.113 "As you practice meditation, you become more aware of the silent Observer within you. Through your effort, you realize that meditation is a process of quieting the mind and your attachment to the external world by going deeply within yourself."

p.115 NOTE: DOC = Do, Observe, Correct. This is intended to be an objective, non-judgmental method of developing better habits

Teach and Learn from Children

p.123 "...there is a large difference between children's and adults' perspectives on life. And I do mean our perspectives, not our priorities. I don't think we differ as much as we might think in the latter aspect. Kids basically want a sense of security, lots of free time, and experiences that are fun and free from stress. Do adults want anything different?"

p.124 "Time perception is an integral part of the difference between adults and children. In general, children don't seem to have a sense of where they are going in life. There is today, and that's it. They live in the present moment, but not really by their own choice; it's just how they are. There is a paradox here. What's frustrating as an adult, with regard to teaching them to stay in the present when they are engaged in something that requires perseverance, is that kids can't see the point. Why work at something that requires a long-term commitment, a perception of time outside the present moment? All they know is their perspective as children. They have no concept of what lies ahead. They don't see how discipline and effort can pay such great dividends over time, but we do."

Your Skills Are Growing

p.134 "...you will, no doubt, experience moments of frustration. These are, however, just the result of holding imaginary ideals of how quickly you should master any new endeavor that you undertake. We are taught this crippling mindset by almost every aspect of our culture, from the educational system, with its grades, to the marketing media, with its unreachable ideals. Everyone wants to be number one, to have the best, to be an A student. This mindset can be unlearned, though, and we must take on this challenge if we are to achieve any real happiness in life. Remember, this mindset is nothing more than a habit. Through our efforts, we can make present-mindedness into a new habit that is much more conducive to our overall well-being."

p.137 "We need to get off the self-destructive train that runs on the tracks of instant gratification. All things of lasting and deep value require time and nurturing and come to us only through our own effort."