

LIVING A PEACEFUL LIFE

By Dr. Robert Puff

Some people are able to find peace and inner happiness even in the humblest of circumstances, while others who seemingly have everything -- financial security, success, good marriages, and the like -- are miserable much of the time. How is this possible?

Believe me. You don't need to run off to a tropical island or visit an expensive spa to find what you're looking for. Everything you need is already inside of you. By listening to this Podcast or reading the accompanying article, you'll learn how you can achieve the peace you seek.

Hello, I'm Dr. Robert Puff. Everyone wants to have a completely satisfying, calm, and relatively stress-free existence. In this Podcast, I'll tell you how you, too, can live a peaceful life, no matter what's going on around you.

Before we begin, if you haven't already done so, I urge you to listen to the free download of my book, *Anger Work: How to Express Your Anger and Still Be Kind*, at my website, www.DoctorPuff.com. Thousands of people all over the world have read *Anger Work*, and have successfully used the methods I've suggested to heal themselves from past emotional wounds. Doing Anger Work is actually the first step towards living a truly peaceful life and eventually discovering the ultimate state of contentment that all human beings seek.

Once you've done that, then you're ready for the next step: finding your path to inner peace.

MY PERSONAL SEARCH

I've always had an innate curiosity about what brings people true happiness. Was it religion? Spirituality? Material things? I had my first epiphany while on a trip to Egypt when I was a graduate student at one of the finest universities in the world. At school, I was surrounded by the wealthiest, smartest, and, potentially, most influential people in the world. Yet by living in this environment, I had discovered these factors did not equate with happiness and peacefulness. There was pain, insecurity, and fear, along with a drive that was insatiable. I had arrived at the Ivy Tower, and all wasn't well.

It was during this awakening, that I visited a village where some of Egypt's poorest people lived. They were the garbage collectors, the lowest societal class in the country. Their small houses were constructed from pieces of discarded wood, cardboard, corrugated tin, and other items rescued from the piles of garbage strewn around the area.

I was welcomed into the home of a family of twelve: husband, wife, and ten children. I remember thinking that here was an impoverished family, who sorted through garbage as a way to barely earn enough money to survive. They lived in a tiny, ramshackle shack. And yet, they were kind, loving people. In spite of their circumstances, this family – seemed to be extremely happy and enjoying life.

FINDING PEACE OF MIND

After decades of working as a therapist and studying what brings human beings real happiness, I know that the words “peace of mind” can mean different things to different people. For some, it’s getting the approval of others. They believe that if everyone loves and thinks highly of them, they will be happy. Others equate peace of mind with possessing a lot of material things, like cars, expensive clothes, or a fabulous house.

What does peace of mind mean to you? Perhaps you feel that if you could land a high-power job; earn your college degree; find the perfect mate, get married and have children; retire with plenty of money in the bank; or...well, you fill in the blank...then you could enjoy self-satisfaction and, ultimately, peace of mind.

But if it’s true that external things could bring about peace of mind, then why are so many people who possess all or many of them still so unhappy? If I told you that everything you’re looking for, everything you need to live a truly wonderful life filled with peace and joy is something you have access to right now, would you believe me?

It’s true. But to achieve this kind of internal peace requires a few very easy changes. It’s literally all in your mind. Let me explain.

When we’re born, our minds are like a blank slate. Infants make no judgments about anything. They don’t evaluate what’s good or bad, and react only to what they need in the moment, like milk or a clean diaper. By about the age of two and a half, our minds become more aware of our surroundings. We begin to look at things and form

likes and dislikes. We say to ourselves, “I want more of that.” Or, when something is unpleasant, we think of it as bad and attempt to push it away. The term I use for this kind of thought process is the “egoic mind,” which is another way of saying that our thoughts are in control.

It’s egoic thinking that causes us to suffer. I don’t mean the kind of suffering you experience when you burn your hand on a hot stove. What I’m talking about is mental suffering that’s created by internal thoughts. It’s the “if only I could have” kind of thinking that focuses on accumulating external things, like honors and accolades, or material possessions. It can also come from wanting internal things, like obtaining deep wisdom, self-confidence, or for some, reaching enlightenment.

Egoic thinking comes from trying to control or change things that are out of your hands, instead of accepting “what is.” It’s making mental commentaries about things that we think are good or bad. And it’s about finding discontentment in our lives, no matter how well off we really are.

THE CYCLE OF DESIRE

What *is* the Cycle of Desire? Let’s say you’re planning to buy a convertible sports car. You’ve imagined yourself punching the throttle to the floor and whizzing through traffic. You’re sure that when you get your new car, your life will be complete. The day finally arrives when you buy it, and for a while, you’re blissful. That euphoric state of mind fades, however, and you begin to realize that the fancy car hasn’t made you as happy as you thought it would.

External possessions may temporarily satisfy your desire. Note that I used the word “temporarily.” You see, once that sense of satisfaction is gone, you’ll experience more suffering until you find something else to satisfy your next desire. Again and again, you will make purchases, thinking that you’ll eventually find contentment. In the end, you won’t, and your struggle will continue.

For you it might not be about buying something expensive, like a new car or fancy house. Maybe your desire centers on your educational and professional success. Let’s say that you were accepted into the Ivy League college you had always dreamed of, and now that you’ve graduated, you’ve set your sights on earning an MBA or a Ph.D. Once you get your degree, you land that high-paying job; you know, the one with all of the prestige and perks. Still, you feel as if something is missing. Then you realize what would really make you happy is winning the “Employee of the Year” Award that your company gives out once a year. Will you find contentment at last, or will you allow the cycle to continue?

I’ve even known a few people who desperately wanted to become a guru, anticipating that people from all over the world will seek them out for their great wisdom. They believe that if only they were a guru, then all would be well.

Okay, maybe you don’t know anyone who aspires to being a guru, but I’ll bet you’ve had friends who think that if only they could find their soul mate or have a beautiful child, then they would be blissfully happy.

“But, Dr. Puff. What’s wrong with wanting those things?” you ask “Why does having these desires cause suffering?”

Just look around at what’s going on in the world. With so many companies going out of business, job security is low at times, even if you have a higher degree. You may have a great job, but you could lose it. There are no guarantees.

As for that perfect relationship you thought you had with your soul mate, marriages can and do end. Your wonderful children will move away one day or, heaven forbid, one could die. Even gurus are human, and they often get caught up in the Cycle of Desire.

In other words, “Desiring” or “If only I could have” thinking causes a person to have a sense of “I want something right now,” which invariably translates to “I’m not happy with “what is.” Stated simply, it means that you’re not finding peace in the moment. Instead, you’re thinking, “I want something else.”

The second part of the Cycle of Desire is becoming fearful that once you have something, you might lose it. Let’s use the example of that great job you obtained. You’ve put your kids in private schools, bought big new SUV, and have been looking at a 3,000 sq. ft. house. After attending a board meeting, you learn that quarterly sales have tanked and the company stock is shaky. Your desire has become fear; fear that you’ll lose your job, your prestige in the community, and, maybe even that house that cost more than you could really afford.

Another example of this Cycle of Desire can occur in people working towards obtaining a higher education. After earning their Bachelor's Degree, they worry that they should have gone to a better school. They enroll in the Master's program for two years, earn that degree; and then find that they are still unhappy. Some aren't satisfied even after earning their Ph.D. In some instances, many will begin working on another set of degrees in some other field, thus continuing their Cycle of Desire.

Not that everyone who goes onto graduate school falls into this category. But for a number of people, the Cycle of Desire drives them into having a fear of what might happen if they stop increasing their educational level. The contentment and lasting satisfaction that they were looking for is elusive. It's there for a few moments, but then they begin to think about what they want next.

The Cycle of Desire is like a ping pong game. Desire, fear; desire, fear. Your mind goes back and forth. What will happen in the future? What if I lose everything? What if the company goes under? What if my stocks tank? What if my spouse leaves me? What if my child gets sick or, worse, dies? What will I do then?

If you're still not convinced by what I'm saying, try to talk to someone who has succeeded in accomplishing greatness. If you were able to get into their souls, you would likely learn that no matter how great their success, they're not satisfied with what they have, and that they are always looking towards their NEXT goal. It's also very common for many of these extremely accomplished men and women to fear that they won't be able to stay on top.

You know, it's really strange that we humans are always...looking up. By that, I mean the apartment renter envies the person who bought a condo; the condo owner who wishes she could buy a small home; the husband and wife with a three-bedroom home who would give anything to own a large tract home; the person with a huge house who desires to live in a mansion at the beach...and so on. This is another aspect of the Cycle of Desire.

Even stability may increase your need for more stability. You may have a million dollars in the bank, but you worry if that will be enough. What if the market crashes? What if I need two million? What if...? It's a need for more and more; to move to a higher and higher level that many people experience, especially here in America. We tend to compare ourselves with people at our level or higher; never with the people beneath us. People who have college degrees don't compare themselves to high school drop outs. They compare themselves to people with higher degrees. We're always just looking up.

We all get caught up in this kind of thinking. Even spiritual gurus and ministers that I've known have desires for those elusive material things that are out of their reach.

Focusing on external things that you don't have includes relationships. For example, let's say you want to find your soul mate. You spend years looking, but no one quite meets your expectations. Many people get stuck here in an endless cycle of dating, breaking up, and continuing a never-ending search.

But let's assume you find that very special person who you believe *is* your soul mate. Now, you have to convince the object of your affection that you are his or her soul mate. What if you're rejected? Will you spend the rest of your life wishing for that person or someone like them?

On the other hand, maybe you both believe you're soul mates, and you get married. All is well for a while, until your mate falls out of love with you and seeks love elsewhere. Or perhaps that doesn't happen, but they get cancer and pass away.

What I'm saying is that, unless you can end the cycle of desire and fear, you will be bouncing back and forth between these two poles for the rest of your life.

It's okay and very normal to want all of these things. But instead of calling them "desires," let's call them "preferences." Getting back to the example of buying a new car, you can have a preference for a particular model, style and color. That's fine. But the purchase should be made with full awareness of what you can afford, and, when you can and should buy it. You need to remove thoughts about acquiring things to please your egoic self or to impress others, as this will almost surely result in more suffering in the long run.

Rather than relying on external things to bring you pleasure, you must understand that the only true happiness comes from inside of you. Be content with what you have when you have it by living in the now.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

Through the years, I've been privileged to know many incredible people who have had a profound effect on me. They are wonderful examples of living in the moment; of how practicing this philosophy can change not only the individual who lives in the now, but how much they can affect those around them. I'd like to share a couple of their stories with you.

When I was working on a doctorate degree, I had the good fortune of meeting Verna, a wonderful woman who lived in a local nursing home. Verna was basically alone in the world. Her husband and son had both died. Her only grandson was a drug addict, and she hadn't heard from him in years. On top of everything else, she was plagued by multiple health problems. And yet, Verna was one of the happiest people I have ever met. Instead of moping around thinking about all of the things that had gone wrong in her life, she spent her days trying to make everyone in the nursing home feel better. She chose to be happy, in spite of her life's circumstances. "God has kept me here for a reason," she said cheerfully. That reason was to reach out to other people and fill their days with as much joy as Verna could provide for them. By refusing to succumb to negative thoughts in spite of her surroundings, and by accepting "what is," Verna found peace and contentment.

I was drawn to Verna because of her positive attitude, and I rarely missed our weekly breakfast together. Though she has passed away, I've never forgotten her.

Another good friend is Betty, an inspiring woman whom I met in a meditation group. When Betty was in her thirties, she began having severe medical problems. She talks about the fact that she actually died during surgery and the near death experience

that she had when her heart stopped. Betty describes it as a blissful, intense and mystical feeling. She was “at one with the Universe and enjoyed the ultimate sense of peace.”

She was revived, but never fully recovered. The result has been years of poor health and living in intermittent episodes of pain. Her life looked very bleak, and she had pretty much given up on everything.

While undergoing physical therapy, Betty met a little girl who was also having treatments. The child had such a positive outlook on life, she inspired Betty to accept her own situation, to love life, and to live in the moment. That was 35 years ago. Today, Betty uses a walker, wears braces on her legs, and lives alone. Still, she is one of the most peaceful, loving people I have ever met. She is totally comfortable with her physical problems, and has learned to love life. While meditating, Betty often has mystical experiences, harkening back to her near death experience.

Through the years, I’ve known children in hospital oncology wards. Many of these kids were in pain; some were dying. You’d think that they would be extremely unhappy and depressed. But these kids are absolutely amazing. They are typically upbeat and positive, in spite of their suffering. These beautiful children have barely lived their lives; and yet, they’re not afraid of dying. Many who are terminally ill continue to hang onto life, even though they are in pain. Why? Because they’re worried about the anguish their family will experience when they die.

Most of these children are peaceful because they are accepting what's happening in the moment. I highly recommend that each of you visits an oncology ward to meet some of these remarkable kids. They are truly an inspiration.

So, how can you, too, live a peaceful life, no matter what's going on around you?

The answer to this question is the main focus of this Podcast. I will share ways for each of you to live a peaceful life, no matter where you live, no matter what your surroundings look like, and no matter how much you're suffering.

LEARNING TO GO WITH THE FLOW

Like you, I've had unexpected things happen that have required letting go of desires or changing plans. Accepting a situation at face value is a constant struggle for all of us. We all need to remind ourselves to redirect our thoughts, to what is and go with the flow.

One of those unforeseen events occurred when my wife and I took our children on vacation. After staying in some pretty rustic cabins in several national parks in Utah, we decided to splurge on a hotel room in Las Vegas on our way back to California. We found a very nice hotel, where there were a lot of things for the kids to do, including an extra special swimming pool. It was going to be the perfect way to end our trip.

After breakfast on the first day, we changed into our swimming suits and headed to the pool, excited about all of the fun we were going to have. Instead, my two-year-old daughter banged her chin on the cement and was left with a gash that we knew would

require stitches. Of course, my first thought was about making sure my daughter was all right. Then I silently thought, “Oh no. After spending so much money for our room and really looking forward to having a great day in Las Vegas, now we’re going to have to spend the day in an emergency room. There go all of our plans.” Practicing my belief that we have to let go of these kinds of destructive thoughts, I stayed present with what was happening in that moment.

Believe me. Most of the day was shot. We had to go to more than one emergency room to find someone who would do stitches on a toddler. We had to take taxis across town and sit in waiting rooms for countless hours. In spite of the situation, we found ways to make it a special day. For instance, we visited the gift shops in the emergency hospitals and let the kids pick out a few toys. We made a big deal out of riding in the taxis, since it was a new experience for our children. We ate at a fun pizza restaurant after our daughter had been taken care of by a doctor. The end result was positive. The kids talked for months about all of the fun stuff they did on what could have been a nightmarish day.

Another day that could have gone terribly wrong was when my wife, children, and I were flying home from a two-week trip in Texas. We had to catch an early flight in the morning, so I set the alarm clock and we retired around 9 o’clock. We were asleep when the power went out around 1:00 a.m. I’m grateful that I woke up and realized that all of the lights, including the face of the clock, had gone out. So I went to the front desk and asked for a flashlight. There had been a power outage throughout the hotel, and since there wasn’t an alarm clock and the phones were dead, I stayed up, but let my family

sleep. At 4:00 a.m., I woke them up, and we all got dressed and packed our suitcases with only the illumination of the flashlight. We could have fretted and been upset; instead, we made it into a great adventure, one the kids still remember.

Our adventure continued when we got to the airport. It was the day when one of the major airlines had shut down, canceling most of its flights. The result was utter chaos at the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport, which was one of their main hubs.

Thank goodness that we weren't flying on that airline. Most amazing was that our flight was on time, in spite of all of the flight delays. But I just knew that people were going to be really upset, whether or not the situation affected them directly or not. Sure enough, as my wife was going through the security line, I overheard a woman telling her that it was going to be a terrible day. My wife turned to her and asked, "Were you booked on the airline that got cancelled?"

The woman responded, "No."

"Oh. Then is your flight late?" my wife inquired.

"No, it's right on time."

This woman was in the exact same situation as we were; in fact, she was probably better off, since hadn't been in an area that lost power in the middle of the night and likely had more sleep than we did. And yet, she had already made up her mind that it

was going to be an awful day. That's the way it worked out for her, since she was obviously stressed and unhappy.

As for us, we caught our plane without any problem and arrived home tired, but without all of the upset that the woman in the airport had experienced. It's not that we were immune to problems; but it was the way we accept what is and roll with the punches.

Accepting "what is" is like performing martial arts. A key part of practicing this discipline is learning to relax your muscles. If you're very tight and someone hits you, you will get hurt. But if you relax and flow with a blow, it doesn't hurt as much. It's like that with life. When you relax and flow wherever life propels you, things go much better. If you fight life, things are tougher.

It's easier to go with the flow if you keep your expectations appropriate to what is. Just be, and learn to love what is. Here's an example of something that happened to me. Because of poor decisions made by a lending institution, I unexpectedly had a major financial line of credit closed. It's easy to go into panic mode when a crisis like this hits, especially when it comes to monetary issues. Although I felt the disturbing event and acknowledged my initial egoic fears, I set about doing what needed to be done to remedy the situation.

First I called the financial institution and tried to fix things there, but to no avail. So I simply opened up an account at a more stable institution, and a month later everything was back to normal. I spent less than six hours fixing the situation over a

several-week period. Of course, I could have easily spent countless hours worrying and fretting about it. But I chose not to; to accept what is; and to move on.

I realize that these kinds of situations can be difficult. But just ask yourself how much time you lose missing out on what is happening now by worrying what might happen tomorrow.

I'd like to share one of my favorite quotes: The Serenity Prayer. It says: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Basically, it advises us to change what we can, and accept what we cannot. In other words, go with the flow. Make a copy of the Serenity Prayer and read it as often as possible.

THY WILL BE DONE

Those of you who follow one of the world's major religions share in the belief that God is the ultimate source of power. Therefore, God, or as some people prefer, the Universe, is in control of everything. When it comes down to it, these same believers don't live that way. Christians believe in the biblical directive, "Thy will be done." Most other religions have similar tenets that they follow. And yet, followers of these religions often fill their prayers with requests for this or that to happen. Then when their requests aren't fulfilled, they get upset. Apparently, they really don't understand the meaning of "Thy will be done."

At its core, “Thy will be done” means that what is happening right now is exactly what is supposed to be happening. It is God’s...or the Universe’s will. Isn’t that the same thing as living in the now and accepting what is?

Here’s one of my favorite stories that illustrates this point:

Rick was constantly complaining to God and making requests. One night when he was praying, a voice came out of nowhere, and he realized it was God’s voice. God said, “For years, you have been asking me for all these different things. Well, I’m going to make a deal with you. I’m going to give you one request. You have exactly six months to decide what you wish for. Make it a good one, because it’s the only request you get for the rest of your life.”

Rick was nervous, but excited. He began asking his friends, what he should ask for? He asked one person, “Should I ask for money?” The friend responded, “Money doesn’t buy happiness and it comes with a lot of headaches. Plus, if you have a lot of money, everyone will come begging for some of it. So that won’t work.”

Then Rick asked another friend if he should ask to live a really long time. His friend had a really good point. “What if all of your friends die before you?” he said. “You would be all alone.”

Six months went by, and Rick couldn’t think of what he wanted. With his time to decide at an end, he heard an inner voice saying, “Okay, Rick. What’s your last request?”

“Before I answer, can I ask you one question?”

God agreed.

“Can you tell me what I should wish for?”

“Very well, Rick. I advise you to ask me for this: Whatever happens, whatever life gives you, you will be content with it.”

And the moral of the story? If you truly want peace and happiness, accept that what is happening right now is God’s will. Work towards your goals, alleviate pain and suffering in the world in as many ways as you can. But once you have done your part, leave the results to God -- or the Universe, or whatever you call the divine intelligence. All is well when you flow with what is. Of course, do your best at everything you do. Improve and grow, but according to all the great religious texts of the world, the final results are in God’s hands.

This message is evident in both the Christian Bible and the Bhagavad-Gita, the sacred writings of the Hindu philosophy. Essentially, the ancient texts tell the faithful to find the healthiest seed, plant it in the richest soil, and water it with the most mineral-based water, and with the perfect amount of sunshine and shade. But if it is to grow, that’s God’s job. In simpler terms, God’s will is being done, and all is well.

We human beings have limited minds and don’t always see how the Universe or God is working out his or her plan out. Try to imagine that you’re a little screw on the Saturn 5 Rocket on its way to the moon. All that you’re able to perceive is from a screw’s perspective. Everything seems to be going fine. Then suddenly, the rocket begins to shake violently.

Let's extrapolate. The violent shaking of the rocket is like losing your job, home, or marriage. Perhaps it's a death in the family. In other words, something really huge has upset your life and has thrown you into a tail spin. But the belief would be that there is a plan (i.e. making a trip to the moon), and you may not know the end results. Some ultimate meaning and purpose is there, but because of your limited perspective, the small screw cannot understand why the violence occurring right now.

This is a faith issue. Perhaps there is an ultimate purpose (i.e., getting a better job). By holding onto this belief, you may find that life is much easier when you don't have to know the reason for everything that is happening in your life right now. Just know that there is some reason. Relax and flow with life.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

So how can you turn off your mind and learn to live in the now, in that desired state of accepting "what is?" It's really a simple three-prong process that doesn't require anything but practice. Thoughts arise naturally; it's a conditioned response based upon what you've been exposed to and what you've experienced throughout your life. It's how you handle your thoughts that makes the difference.

1. You can file those unwanted thoughts in your mind and start thinking about them. These are often thoughts about things like your finances: You might think "I'm really worried about what's going to happen next year." The worrying process has begun. That's the thought that arose, and you continue thinking about it. You may stick with it for 5 minutes, an hour, 5 hours, or for decades.
2. Another thing some of us do when a unwanted thought arises is try to suppress it. You might say to yourself, "Why am I thinking about this? I'm not supposed to

think about this. What's wrong with me? I should be flowing with life." This kind of suppression doesn't work either, because whenever you try to block out something, it actually gives it power.

3. The way to handle unwanted thoughts is to witness or acknowledge those thoughts. Then go back to being in the moment and accepting what is.

So again, the stages of it are really important. Thoughts arise spontaneously in your brain. This is a conditioned, subconscious response thought process that's very natural and can't be completely shut off. So when you see someone or something that looks a certain way, and you comment on it in your mind, go ahead and acknowledge these thoughts. But don't continue to think about it. Don't judge or comment on it as good or bad. Simply stop thinking about it and get back to what is happening in the moment.

In my practice, I teach my clients that having a peaceful life means that you need to live relatively thought-free. That's because it's our thoughts that evaluate our existence. We constantly rethink events from the past and worry about the future. Our minds conjure up all sorts of fears, desires, and dislikes. So, by observing these thoughts without criticism for having them, but then immediately getting back to what is happening now, we're better able to live in the moment. The more frequently we do this, the quieter the mind becomes, and a peaceful life emerges like the lotus flower emerging from the dark waters below.

To truly understand the kind of peace you'll derive from living in the now is something you must experience for yourself. You can't merely read about it or conceptualize the feeling. Can you truly know what chocolate tastes like if you've never

taken a bite? Until you've experienced this total sense of well being, you can't understand what I'm talking about. It's always there inside of each of us, just waiting to be realized.

I encourage each of you to try to still your mind and see how it feels. And if you make this the focus of your life, you'll become more and more peaceful. Invest time in it, and you'll reap the rewards. You will live a much more peaceful life. Work at it. It is work, but the returns on your investment are well worth the effort.

Move towards having "no judgment" kind of life. For instance, you may be served a meal that's not your favorite dish, but that really doesn't matter much. Instead of fretting or complaining, appreciate what you have and move on. Finding true peace means being in total harmony with what is. The what is at that particular moment in your life may not be your first preference. It may not be the thing that would have brought you most happiness. Don't forget that happiness is a transient state of being. Like everything else, your current situation will pass and then there will be another state of being, and another. Let go of the outcome of those situations. Have an openness to life and all that is. Just be still and observe.

I'm not talking about meditation, though I'm a great believer in it. Actually, I've been practicing meditation in some form for decades. I advise my clients to meditate as a way to quiet their minds. That's when we discover that our minds are constantly making commentary.

I'll discuss the practice of meditation in more detail in a future Podcast and article. For now, let me say that meditation good for is quieting the mind. Our minds are very, very busy. If you don't realize how cluttered your mind is, just try to meditate. Most people's thoughts bounce around like a ping pong ball. Frequently referred to as the "monkey mind" for obvious reasons, we make mental lists of groceries to pick up at the store, or think about a phone call we need to make later, or the cleaning we forgot to pick up yesterday.

Although it takes a little practice, you'll find that meditation keeps your mind quiet and that you'll feel relaxed and calm. But how can you keep that peaceful, meditative feeling the rest of the time? Applying the simple rule of living in the now through accepting what is can bring you this same sense of a quiet mind. The ultimate goal is to remain in a state of meditation; that state which is quiet and just observes both what is happening inside and outside of oneself...without commentary, all of the time. Work towards having a meditative life.

BEING AWARE

I've talked about trying to live a thought-free life. That doesn't mean that you should live a life without awareness. Try this: Pay attention to your thoughts. If you're like most people, you'll realize that you're judging all day. You'll think, "This is good. That's bad. Good, bad. Good, bad." These thoughts pop into your mind and then spill into your mental commentary, causing you suffering.

Is thinking those thoughts going to change anything? Tell yourself, “Unless I can do something about this, I will let these thoughts go.” Make a conscious effort to do this. Eventually, you’ll discover that your mind will get quieter and quieter until you finally experience the peace that comes with accepting “what is.”

One of my favorite visualizations, and one I often share with my clients, is to think of yourself as the sky: endless and magnificent. Inevitably, dark clouds will come – they are like the egoic thoughts that say, “I want this. I don’t want that.” We often jump into that cloud and become that cloud, silently thinking, “This is bad” or “I don’t like that.” We stew on something that we can’t do anything about.

Be aware that this is happening and clear the mind of these thoughts. Instead of thinking those dark, egoic thoughts, remember that you are the big, vast sky. Go ahead and witness those clouds. After you observe them, immediately get back to being the sky. If you don’t engage the clouds, they will ultimately move on and go away.

Here’s another one of my favorite analogies. Imagine that you are a beautiful pond. When the water is murky or the surface is rippled, like the thoughts that clutter your mind, you can’t see the bottom. But if you, the pond, is completely and utterly still, the water clears and allows you to see even the smallest detail on the bottom. It’s through this stillness, this quietness of mind that you will experience the depths of your soul.

This is the core of peaceful living. We humans tend to let our minds run away with thoughts and worry. It’s often these thoughts that get in the way of our natural state of joy and happiness. Whether or not we’re aware of it, our heads are spinning with

random images and bits of information – about 4,000 at any given time – that can potentially keep us stressed and in a constant state of angst. Only sleep and a thoughtless, just-being state can give you rest.

What I'm talking about is just being, without the mental commentary. It's those thoughts about something that's out of your control, cogitating on the same event over and over – things you can't change or do anything about – that cause you disharmony. What good can come out of rehashing the same thoughts? If you just witness those thoughts through your ongoing internal awareness, then you can get back to just living, and just being totally alive and free.

For the past 18 years, I've taken the same mile-long walk on my lunch break. Because I have practiced living in the now for nearly two decades, I've never become bored with taking the same walk along the same streets day after day. I stay aware of my surroundings without judgment about what I see. There's always a new discovery: a flower blossoming, someone in their yard who says 'hello,' a butterfly fluttering by. It goes back to being aware and quieting your mind. Try it! Take a walk and observe what's happening in the now. What do you see, feel, and smell? If you have children, take them with you. Point out these things to them. See the moment through their eyes, wide with wonder at your surroundings. You'll return from your walk feeling a sense of great peace.

Does living a thought-free life mean that you stop thinking altogether? Not at all. Okay, then when is it okay to think? Of course, you can't go through life without ever thinking about anything. We engage what is called the "Learning, Natural Mind" when

we learn something new, like a language, driving a car, or a new job. Certain professions, like that of a surgeon, may also require deep concentration.

The Learning, Natural Mind is a very useful “tool.” Yet, we must remember that we are not the Learning, Natural Mind’s servant, and that it’s a tool for us to utilize. When we use this part of our mind, there is natural flow, like dancing freely. Of course, you first have to learn the dance steps. However, once this skill is accomplished, you can just flow with it, trusting that the Learning, Natural Mind will effortlessly and, hopefully, gracefully carry you through the dance.

Unfortunately, what most people do in “the life dance” is to analyze their every step. Am I good enough? Does the other person like the way I dance? What if I forget something? What if I mess up? And so on....

But if you flow with life and trust that you are totally present in the moment, you will make the right choices; choices that will allow your life to flow like a beautiful dance.

LIVING IN THE ZONE

How many times have you driven to work, only to realize upon reaching your destination that you barely remember the trip? As a matter of fact, things that we do over and over again become almost automatic. It’s called “living in the zone,” a term often associated with world-class athletes. I find it interesting that the most powerful branch of today’s sports psychology teaches athletes to execute their sport with total disregard for winning or losing; to focus on single-mindedly performing their sport; and to simply,

completely be one with their sport. In other words, the Learning, Natural Mind has taken over. They pay a lot of money to get that winning edge, and the results have been amazingly effective.

The same “living in the zone” mind set can help people in the business world. For example, I’ve worked with large corporations, counseling members of the sales team. In many cases, the individual sales people are good at what they do, but by learning to get into the zone, they can go to the next level with their job performance. How? By educating them on how to keep their egoic mind from interfering with their success. As we discussed earlier in this Podcast, the egoic mind thinks things like, “What if I’m not making enough money. What if I don’t reach my goals. What if I fail?” It’s that constant negative commentary that gets in the way of breaking through to the next level of achieving their goals.

When I’m hired to work with a company, I work with the employees – from the executives to the sales force to the office staff – to get rid of the negative mental commentary. My objective is not only for these individuals to make more income, it’s to help them to do even better in their jobs.

This method has been quite successful. I’ve been told by former clients that sales persons who have undergone my training have been able to get into the zone when contacting or visiting potential clients. They perform smoothly in the flow and, therefore, increase their sales.

You, too, can learn to control your thought process. What I am talking about is not being a great athlete or top executive, but being a great human being. The highest level of human ability is when we flow with life and live in the present moment without mental commentary. Try living in the zone for just five minutes by applying the simple skills that I am teaching. The peace and freedom you'll feel will inspire you to seek more. You can truly live this way! It just takes great earnestness. The more you work towards Living in the Zone, the more natural and easy it will become. You will have to change your conditioning, but that is possible. Believe.

There will be times to use Anger Work techniques or sadness healing, as I've thoroughly discussed in my book, *Anger Work: How To Express Your Anger and Still Be Kind*. Make sure that you do this whenever you feel the need. However, my many years of experience as a psychologist have taught me that people are usually only able to perform their Anger Work a small part of the day, even in severe cases. Unless you need to engage the Learning Natural Mind because you are learning to do something new, try to Live in the Zone the rest of the time.

Living can be broken into three parts: (1) Learning; (2) Healing; and (3) Being. That's it.

GOAL SETTING

Volumes have been written about the importance of setting goals. People have daily goals; monthly goals; yearly goals. Some even have five- or ten-year plans. Is it possible to have goals and still live a relatively thought-free and peaceful life?

Goal setting is fine. The problem is that too many people dwell on their goals, constantly imagining what their lives will be like when they marry their soul mate, land that great new job, earn their college degree, buy their dream home, and so forth. Instead of experiencing the delight of living in the moment, they live focus on trying to make their goals happen and become upset and stressed if they don't achieve them.

Let's say that you have set a goal to find the perfect mate. One night, you're at dinner with your friends at a nice restaurant. Your gaze wanders to a nearby table where a couple is having a romantic evening out. All you can do is think about your goal to find your soul mate, rather than accepting what is and taking pleasure in the moment – good company, good food, and having a great time with your friends. Instead of worrying about what you don't have, which in this case is a spouse, let go of that thought and immerse yourself in what you have at that moment.

Go ahead and set goals. But be careful they don't consume your thoughts. The trick is to write them down and then let them go.

The same goes for planning things. Maybe one of your goals is taking a vacation to Italy, for example. You've saved the money, and you're ready to book the trip. Do the research, make the reservations, and then slip the information into a folder and set it aside. You would be amazed by how many people dwell on things, like worrying that they might have found cheaper airfare, or a better hotel, or...well, you get the idea. Once you've taken care of everything, step back and don't continue to think about your trip until it's necessary. Of course, you can read guidebooks, look at maps, and whatever else

you want to do, but fretting over what's already done won't do anything but cause you to lose sleep.

BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO EVERYONE

I'll bet that about now you're thinking, "But Dr. Puff. What about the bad things that are going on in the world? You're telling me to live a thought-free life. Am I supposed to tune out everything that's upsetting or unpleasant? How can I just ignore suffering, hunger and disease?"

Living in a world filled with tragedies can be difficult. If you see or read about something that makes you feel sad or upset, I'm not telling you to close your eyes and ignore it. Ask yourself if you want to take any kind of action. Is there something you can do to change the situation? If you want to help and have the means to do so, then take the initiative and do it. Write a check or volunteer to help, for instance.

Here's what I recommend. Once you have written that check or done your volunteer work, close the door in your mind and keep it closed until you've quieted your thoughts. Worrying about it constantly won't help anything and can only bring you stress and suffering. And that doesn't help anyone.

People who frequently face upsetting, tragic situations, like doctors, nurses, and firefighters, will be the first to tell you that if you don't close that mental door, your thoughts will soon burn you out. It's okay to feel sadness, but you can't keep thinking and rethinking about what has upset you. You need to get those emotions up and out, like mental vomiting!

PHYSICAL SUFFERING

Many years ago, my father-in-law, Bill, was diagnosed with cancer. After numerous surgeries and countless painful treatments, he died four years later. And yet, if he were here, Bill would tell you that those were the best years of his life. How is that possible? Because he had a positive attitude and loved his time left on earth. He spent as much time as he could with his family, and especially, his grandchildren. Even though he suffered physically, he spent his mental energy living in the moment.

Here's the deal. You can continue to suffer, or you can accept "what is." That's not to say you shouldn't do everything in your power to get well. But once you've done all of the things your doctor has told you to do, like medical procedures, drugs, or whatever else is necessary, then it's time to let go of your constant worry about the future. By living in the now, you'll find that your focus shifts, and with it, you'll think less and less about the physical pain. You make the choice. In my experience, when you're suffering with physical pain, accepting what is can eventually help the pain go away.

The mind is a powerful thing. Of course, there's physical pain. But in reality, much of our suffering comes as a result of *thinking* about suffering, about dreading it so much that we're guaranteed that the pain is going to be every bit as bad as we thought. It boils down to this: You get what you focus on. If you are thinking about all the terrible things that are happening, or more likely, all the terrible things that might happen, you will suffer more. Instead, be present in the moment, even if that moment is painful, as there's nothing that we can't handle one moment at a time. Then look around and see

if there isn't something beautiful to be with. You may find that there is always something to love.

FOCUS ON THE GOOD

My father-in-law and others with serious illnesses whom I've counseled have learned to focus on the positive things going on around them, like a bird singing, the smile of a nurse, the beauty of the sunset outside their window.

We can all learn this valuable lesson and apply it to all aspects of our lives. There is always something good going on, even in the midst of a natural catastrophe or a war. Choose to focus on something good that's going on around you, and don't let your mind constantly focus on suffering.

I love the story of a Tibetan monk who was put in a prison by the Chinese. After 10 years of being confined to a cold, damp cell, the monk was finally released. When he saw his fellow monks, he told them he finally got it. "I finally understand how beautiful cockroaches are," he said. There's always something beautiful everywhere, if we're open to it. Beauty is everywhere. Why not focus on it all of the time?

LIVING IN THE NOW

I have a client who went to Maui for a vacation. The weather was perfect, the hotel was great, and he got a good deal on his airfare. Yet, he didn't have a good time, and he wasn't rested or relaxed when he returned home. Why not? Because he said he spent a lot of time wishing he could stay longer. He would sit on the beach thinking

about having to leave Maui and go back to work the following week. He fanaticized about moving to Maui permanently. As the days passed, he became increasingly depressed about leaving. Before he knew it, his vacation was over, and it actually time to go home. Instead of living in the now and enjoying his time in Hawaii, he made himself miserable.

Like too many people, he didn't experience the "what is." If he had, each moment of the trip, including the long flights and packing, would have had a quality of peace that truly surpasses all understanding. Whether he was sitting, in presence, on the beach at Maui, or in his car in morning work traffic, that thoughtless, peaceful state is always available, always loving, and inviting us to just be. You don't have to wait to have a good life. Have it now by simply being.

EXTERNAL RESULTS

The internal results of living in the now are obvious: peace and happiness. But what about your external world? How does your inner peace affect people around you? Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? In a nutshell, it means that when even the smallest thing changes, it changes all around you. That's certainly the case here. It's all about cause and effect. Many of my clients have discovered that spouses, children, bosses and other people who used to make them miserable have changed for the better. Or so it seems. The truth is that if you change yourself, people around you will likely react to the new, more peaceful you, and they'll change, too.

So let's review.

- The ability to find peace and happiness in our chaotic world is within each of us.
- We can all learn to love what is if we strive to have a life that is lived in the now, instead of in the past or the future.
- We all spend a lot of time and energy trying to control things that are almost always out of our control. If you can change it, do. If not, let it go and accept “what is.”
- Too often, we try to hang on to material things. We need to realize there’s no such thing as permanence. Things change. Situations change. Houses will come and go. So will cars and other possessions. Even people come and go in our lives. Don’t get too attached to anything or you will suffer.
- Be present without thought, and see how peaceful you are. This isn’t necessarily about always being happy. This is about being at peace with “what is.” You may be depressed about something – think of it as a dark cloud that passes by. It may last for a few days. Stay with the awareness that this is not permanent.
- The key to life is silently watching and just being still. It’s a sense of going through life, knowing what’s going on around you, and accepting “what is.”
- The only thing that’s permanent in life is your awareness of what is. If you reside in that awareness without thoughts, you’ll find the peace you’re looking for. Everyone can have it. You just have to stop wanting things to be different.
- When you’re faced with an upsetting situation, relax and let go of the outcome. Things will get better. Decide that you will go through life without mentally commenting and wishing things were different. Do what you can to affect change, and then stop thinking about it.

In simpler terms, live completely in the now. Be aware of your surroundings, but practice clearing your mind of the self-talk that clutters your thoughts. Relax and find delight in each and every thing around you, from the tiniest insect, to the song on your car radio, to a colorful painting in your doctor's office. Simply surround yourself in the wonders of "what is," and let go of every other thought. As you learn to just be in the now, the eventual change in you will not only be an acceptance of "what is," but a loving of "what is."

For more than two decades, I have counseled my clients in these life-altering practices. In the past, however, the number of individuals I could help was limited to those living in Southern California. Through the use of the Internet and Podcasts, as well as the distribution of my book on *Anger Work*, I have been able to reach countless people. My ultimate goal, and the reason I decided to record this Podcast, is to reach out to as many of you as possible, so that you can find the inner peace that we all deserve.