



A Simple Thing

Hearts and Minds Newsletter
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Each month, this educational newsletter highlights a simple practice that you can use in your daily life. Simple things, which are often easier to understand than they are to do, hold great potential for changing our experiences, relationships, and lives.



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At *Hearts and Minds*, we teach adults and children how to cultivate their innate capacities for awareness, acceptance, and kindness. Visit www.withheartsandminds.com to sign up for a course or contact us about bringing an educational event to your school, workplace, or other organization.

Have one exquisite moment each day.

Before you stop reading because you think exquisite moments sound like too much effort, consider this. We already have exquisite moments. In fact, our days are filled with them. We're usually just too busy to notice them.

Don't think this applies to you? Ask yourself how many times in this past week you've noted that half the day (or the whole day) has gone by and you don't know where it went, what you did, or why you were doing it. If the answer is several, you're in good company. Many of us go through days (weeks, months, years) doing *instrumental* work, the things that need to get done, because, well, they need to get done. But anything we do over and over becomes rote by definition because we've done it yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that.

Another way to categorize this kind of rote activity or automatic pilot is *mindlessness* or literally "without awareness." We think we're aware all day long because our minds are always busy but mental activity is not the same as awareness. That's how we find ourselves at the end of the day unaware of how it got by us.

A life lived on autopilot is not only a life unexamined but also one that's largely under-enjoyed (no one sits up on their death bed to announce that they wish they'd spent more time working, doing dishes, or folding laundry). To really *have* at least one of the exquisite moments that are available to us every day, we need to slow down enough to notice it. We need to learn to savor it.

Why?

I think the question here is really “Why not?” *Why not* savor the exquisite moments whenever we can? There’s no down side as far as I can tell and the upside is pretty amazing.

When we savor something, we are undeniably *in* it. There’s nothing automatic about it. Instead, we’re living in a present moment experience that we’re enjoying. And we’re relishing it, which is a good thing. Research suggests that prolonging a positive experience (and the positive emotions that go along with it) is more closely associated with happiness than the intensity of the experience.

Savoring or relishing our experience is a kind of mindful awareness that amplifies our pleasure and improves our well-being. It helps us cope better under stress, strengthens our immune system, and is believed to alter the way our brains respond to emotion (reducing activity in the parts that register negative emotions and increasing activity in the parts that register positive ones). Wow.

Here’s another reason. Savoring is not hard to do. You could savor just about any experience that you enjoy. A baseball game, a live concert, a glass of wine, a nice hot bath or shower, a swim, some yoga, quiet meditation, alone time, a good book, favorite music, an incredible meal, play time you’re your children, nap time with your children, and so on.

I think it feels natural to savor things you already enjoy, to notice the exquisite moments that are already there. But ordinary moments can become exquisite because of the attention and presence we bring to the experience. So even if there is nothing you can think of that you’re enjoying on this day, just start savoring the next plain old moment by giving it all of your attention and see what happens.

How do I practice?

Here are a few suggestions on how to notice exquisite moments and start savoring:

1. Engage all of your senses at your next meal: eyes, ears, taste, touch, smell. Don’t rush! Let yourself have this time to see what it’s like when you are fully present.
2. Celebrate a recent accomplishment of someone in your family – even your own! Relive and relish the experience together.
3. Imagine that whatever you’re doing is the last time you’ll ever have this experience.
4. Develop an attitude of gratitude, which keeps us from taking our days for granted. Write down or talk about three things that you are thankful for every day. Enlist a partner, friend, or family in this exercise! Spread it around.
5. Do one thing at a time. When we multi-task, we literally split our attention, which significantly derails our chance of really noticing, let alone savoring, anything.
6. Share your exquisite moment(s) with others. Tell someone about your experience of savoring something and include how you felt during that experience (there’s a strong association between expressing positive feelings and enjoyment of positive events).

Other Resources

Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life by Thich Nhat Hanh and Dr. Lillian Cheung

Positivity by Barbara Frederickson, Ph.D.

What's New?

On Jul 18, 2010, I participated in a live weekly Boston radio program *Kids' Health Reservoir*, hosted by Maria Broderick, Ed.D. of *Reservoir Family Wellness* in Acton, MA. To hear the broadcast, visit <http://www.energytalkradio.com/programsshows.html&show=78&recording=774>

- Coming soon! A new blog on *relational mindfulness*, which is about bringing mindful awareness practices to all of your relationships. Updates will be posted in the next issue of "A Simple Thing" and on www.withheartsandminds.com
- *Happy Minds, Wise Hearts: A Mindfulness Retreat for Moms* will be offered this fall at Serenity Yoga and Wellness Center in Bedford, MA (description below).

As busy moms, we know that our families depend on us for many things. Because we tend to focus more on others than we do on ourselves, we're less likely to know that our happiness also depends on us. It's true. We grow our own happiness through our daily actions: the things we say and do, the choices we make, the people we spend time with, and the ways in which we take care of ourselves and others. As simple as this sounds, it's not easy. But it is something we can learn.

Curious? Consider participating in *Happy Minds, Wise Hearts*, a new mindfulness retreat designed specifically for moms coming soon to the Lexington, MA area (email maryann@withheartsandminds.com to enroll in the first section or for more information). This educational program will be offered in a relaxed setting where you can connect with other moms and learn about relational well being to the benefit of yourselves, your children, and others. Together, we'll explore three dimensions that help us cultivate happiness and influence our well being: mindfulness (a quality of attention), heartfulness (lovingkindness practices), and skillfulness (relational practices toward self, children, and others). Through gentle instruction and guided meditation, we'll practice deepening our capacity to balance what goes on within us with what goes on around us.

If you enjoyed this month's issue, consider sharing it with a friend or family member. New readers can subscribe at www.withheartsandminds.com



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