

"Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda"

By Mary M. Nearpass



"I shouldn't have eaten that candy bar!" " I really should set my alarm early tomorrow to get to work by 7 am." "I should never have gone out with him." Do you ever hear yourself or someone you know saying these things? If so, what do they have in common? Each of these statements has NOTHING to do with the NOW!

We spend so much time in our waking hours (and often in our dreams) worrying about things that happened in the past and/or things that may or may not happen in the future. What is so bad about that? Nothing, if you enjoy wasting your mind and precious time on things for which you have no control. All the energy we spend worrying about potential events that may or may not take place, or loathing over past "mistakes" is wasted. What is done is done. Even though the decisions we have made in the past may sometimes appear to be ghastly, we did the best we could at that time. They need to be put to rest. Instead, we immerse ourselves with guilt over the forbidden fruit of the candy bar, and dwell on our "poor judgment". This often leads to further punishing ourselves by saying, "What the heck, I already ate one cookie, I may as well go for the entire box." Alternatively, we punish ourselves more by working out harder and longer due to our "error in judgment".

The same is true with regard to future choices. Granted, some decisions are much more involved and complex than others, but for the most part, worrying about potential outcome scenarios can only serve to make us more anxious. Often times we become reactionary in the choices we eventually make. Let us say your daughter is getting married this coming June. You made a vow to her and yourself to lose 30 lbs. in order to look "good" for her special day. To date, you have only lost 5 lbs. By dwelling on the 25 still to go instead of on the five you have already accomplished can again set you up for future failure. We often subconsciously recreate our very own self-fulfilling prophecy of "not being good enough".

With our minds constantly fluctuating back and forth like a ping-pong ball between past and future tenses, this keeps us blind to the now. NOW is all any of us are guaranteed. We cannot go backwards and re-write our history, nor can we look

into a crystal ball and predict the best possible future decisions. What we can do, however, is bask in the present moment. Right here. Right now. As you are reading this article, how about being grateful for the eyes that are reading it and a brain that can comprehend the words you are reading! How about sitting down and enjoying the meal that you made for your family instead of placing it in front on your kids, who are in front of the TV, while you proceed to make lunches, fold laundry and talk to your boss on the phone! Although "multi-tasking" is commendable, we often miss the little things that we so often take for granted. Efficiency has its price. Your family may be thrilled if you sat down for a mere 20 minutes and literally broke bread together (that's how long it takes our brains to register that we have indeed ingested calories) and look into their eyes, and really listen to how their day was instead of worrying about getting them ready for the basketball game at 7:30 pm!

I sometimes think we dwell so much in past and future time zones as a subconscious way to avoid looking at ourselves. If we could teach ourselves the beauty and purposefulness of simply "being" verses "doing", we may actually find that we like it. However, we may also find that we do not. Our society has perfected that art of assigning labels to people, places and things. "I was "good" today; I only had a cup of coffee for breakfast, a diet coke and a salad at lunch, so I deserve to have just one, little slice of cake". Do we even hear ourselves? God forbid we indulge in a dessert. These are "bad" foods, so therefore if we eat them, then we are "bad", too. We have conditioned ourselves like a bunch of Pavlov's dogs with our "if", "then" mentality. In essence, we are giving our power away in an inanimate object.

Somewhere along the line we have stopped listening to our bodies natural circadian rhythm of knowing what to eat, how much to eat, and when we need to eat. When we start to get that all food is good in moderation, some healthier choices

than others, we will be far less likely to dwell on our shouldas, couldas, wouldas once we have ingested a morsel of food that is not within our "safe" zone.

The same holds true with our exercise routine. When I talk with people regarding diet and exercise, more often than not, these two topics are approached with a strong negativity. The word "diet", according to Merriam Webster, means "a way of life", often means deprivation, starvation, never eating foods we like ever again. "Exercise", which is essentially movement, has come to mean punishment, boring, sweaty and hard.

We need to take a page out of our children's books. When children have eaten their fill, they say, "I'm done, Mommy!" Even if they did not clean their plates, they listen to their bodies. The next thing you know the kids are saying, "May I please be excused", which is followed by running out the front door to "play". Riding bikes, jumping rope, hula hooping, climbing trees, playing hop scotch, and running races. In essence, the children are exercising. This type of movement comes naturally to them; their bodies crave it, need, and want it. It is as natural to move the body as it is for a bear to hibernate. The difference with children is that exercise is effortless, it is something they enjoy, and it is the camaraderie of playing with others.

Fast forward to adults in today's society. Exercise to many adults is equated with pain and boredom. The words I can't, and I'm too fat in essence mean, "I'm not good enough to exercise."

Lastly, it is about "HOW" we approach exercise. If we believe it hurts, it hurts. If we believe fitness is boring, it is. If we choose an activity we do not like, we will not. We are setting ourselves up for failure.

How we approach each new day determines its outcome. We have all heard the expressions, "Attitude is everything", and "Life is 10% what happens and 90% how we respond." Challenge yourself to live one entire day sampling "being" in the NOW. You can always go back to excessive fear, guilt and worry. They are predictable, reliable, familiar and boringly safe. Besides, we already know how these things are working for us.

You might just find yourself actually enjoying your food, feeling energized by your workout and relishing the sparkle in your son or grandson's eyes. Feel good in your body; appreciate the marvel of what it does instead of what it does not do. Learn to approach self-nurturing for vitality verses vanity. Be grateful for a mind that can think, beam with pride at your daughters' recital, and nurture your spirit in the temple that houses it. What have you got to lose? You might just find that you like the present so much, that you will not want to ever leave. Only the future will tell.

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