

Zen Mind

in the Middle of Chaos and Stress

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What do you do when your job or your personal life is a constant source of busy-ness, rushing, nose-to-the-grindstone work and stress?

Or what do you do if your life is simple and relatively stress-free - but something occurs and suddenly you are in the middle of chaos and high stress?

This is when we could use a dose of Zen Mind or the **Art of Letting Go**.

What is Zen Mind? To be honest, I am still learning what it is, but what I have been practicing is a constant letting go. Here is an example:

I have a major deadline approaching. I am totally stressed! But what is the source of the stress? It is not the work, which is just a series of actions. It is not the deadline, which is just a time constraint. It is my reaction to those external events — my fear that I am not going to make it, that I will mess up, that I will look stupid or incompetent. The fear that is causing my stress reaction is rooted in my wanting things to happen a certain way -- wanting to meet the deadline, getting things perfect, and looking good.

What if I could let go of wanting things to be perfect? This is a fantasy, an ideal, that I am holding onto. It might turn out that way, sure, but it could turn out a dozen other ways. The truth is I do not have complete control over how it will evolve. All I can do is - do the work - but the fantasy, the fear and the stress are getting in the way. If I can let go of this ideal, this fantasy, I can let go of the fear and the stress.

This is the Zen Mind about which I am learning. It is simply letting go, and in doing so, you attain a peace of mind no matter what chaos and seemingly stressful events are going on around you. Although I am still in the process of learning this, I will share what I know.

The Art of Letting Go

So these are the steps to letting go:

1. **Notice why you are stressed.** What external event is stressing you? Why is it stressing you? What fear do you have?
2. **Notice what you are holding onto.** If your response is fear, it is because you are holding onto something. It is probably a fantasy/ideal, wanting to control something, wanting something to happen a certain way, or wishing things would meet the expectations you have. If you are saying, "*He should do this*" or "*It should be like this*" then you are holding onto an ideal/expectation/outcome.
3. **Realize that it is not real.** This fantasy, this expectation, this wishing you could control things - is just in your mind. To be fair, we all do it. But it is not a real thing — and it can be let go.
4. **See that it is hurting you.** This thing you have created is causing you stress - which is shortening your life and making your life less enjoyable. Be aware of the pain it is causing in your life.
5. **Let go.** If something you have created in your mind is causing pain, why hold onto it? It is not worth it. By letting go you release the pain and are left with you and the work you need to do.

Zen Mind in the Middle of Chaos

So you work long hours and are stressed to the max. It is work you love, perhaps, but still hard work, and still lots of stressors. Maybe you get to take some good breaks during the day - maybe you take weekends off - maybe you get some great vacations.



Zen Mind in the Middle of Chaos and Stress

But the fact remains - no matter what kind of breaks and vacations you take, much of your life is spent doing the hard work - leaving you feeling stressed. You need to be able to simultaneously work and be on vacation. This is the practice of Zen Mind about which we are talking — letting go and being able to breathe and smile in the middle of a stressful workday.

It is only stressful, of course, because of the ideas we create in our heads. Therefore, if we can create a constant practice of awareness and letting go, we are empowered to let go of the stress.

Your boss dumps a new project on you with a close deadline. Yikes! You are instantly feeling stressed. Notice - and let go. Breathe. Feel the stress floating away as you let go of an ideal and an expectation. You are now free and can do the first task — after all, that is all you can ever do.

Your co-worker or client may be angry and yell at you. This is highly stressful - until you realize that they are probably yelling for some problem that is not really about you. They are stressed - they are having a bad day - and/or they have problems dealing with stress. You are holding onto the expectation that everyone around you should behave perfectly, which is an absurd fantasy. Let go of that and reach out your heart to this fellow human being who is not happy. How can you make things better for this person? With an open heart - sending them unconditional love.

Your son is stressing you because he is not doing what he should be doing. You are angry! Why can't he just do what you ask? Of course, this is a fantasy. Your kids (or friends or spouse) are not going to live up to the expectations you have of how they should behave. These expectations are not anything real - just fantasies. You cannot control their behavior — wanting to do so stresses you. So let go of that expectation and the desire to control and the stress goes away. Instead, open your heart and be open to who they are.

That is all easier said than done. In the real world, it takes a lot of practice. We often forget about this process when things get chaotic and that is okay. Life is a constant practice. Keep practicing and let go of wanting to be perfect. Just in the attempt - you are already perfect. €