How to Find Peace and Happiness in the Chaos of Everyday Life

ZEN for Everyday Life

BY Matt Valentine
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Preface

Zen for Everyday Life serves as a universal path to transforming your stresses, difficulties, and suffering into peace, joy, and liberation.

I still remember the first time it happened. It was as if a boxer was using my heart as a speed bag. Bada’-bada’-bada’-bada’-bada’. My heart was practically beating out of my chest. My breathing became shallow. I didn’t know it then, but what I had just experienced was the effect of heavy stress and anxiety. Over the next few months I would slowly begin to become aware of what was causing it.

First, there were the fears and worries that constantly ate at me. From my credit card debt, not having enough money to pay my rent, and having a new baby boy to care and provide for, to the fact that I was quickly approaching 30 and yet still hadn’t come close to accomplishing anything of
value in my life. I had more to stress about than ever before.

Then there was the rushing around. An almost staple of modern life, I was further stressing myself out by rushing around in order to try and fix all of those problems which I was stressing about so that I wouldn’t have to be stressed anymore. You can imagine I wasn’t very successful! And when I wasn’t trying to fix one of my problems, I was still rushing around. I was so used to it that I’d stress myself out over nothing.

Next, there was the deepest layer of the “self”, where our demons live. It’s the side of ourselves that most choose to ignore, to the point where many of us forget it even exists, but which has an unmistakably significant impact on our well-being. There was the fact that I was insecure about ever being wrong about anything, the fact that I hated the feeling of putting myself out there and being vulnerable, and the fact that I had never been shown the power or importance of caring for others, so I lived essentially for myself and my own selfish motives.

Later, I’d learn that the continued existence of all of these things, or rather the fact that they bothered me, essentially centered on the fact that I didn’t have a spiritual or daily practice which in a way “maintained” my sense of inner peace. That is,
a practice which deeply nourished my mind and body on a regular basis and worked to unravel this negative self-talk. Sure, I ate well and exercised practically daily, that definitely helped, but I was under a lot of stress, had a lot of adversity, and a number of deep-seated issues that I needed to work out, and there was no amount of exercise that could help me overcome those things. What I really needed was to feed my mind and body, and work on myself, in a deeper way.

Finding a Better Way

My life changed when I discovered a little book by the name of The Beginner’s Guide to Zen Buddhism by Jean Smith.

There wasn’t anything particularly special about it, it was simply that: a beginner’s guide to the practice of Zen Buddhism. It didn’t really get into the meat of anything, it stayed on the surface level of Zen throughout the majority of the book and worked more as a gateway to further exploration (as intended), but, it explained everything assuming the reader knew nothing about Zen.

This was key. For someone who, at the time, had little knowledge of Buddhism, Zen, or any concept of spirituality for that matter, the very
The reason why the book was able to have such an impact on me was that it was in plain English. Amazing concept, I know. So many books out there, not only on Zen or Buddhism but on spirituality in general, either use jargon (words the unintroduced reader won’t understand), make the material too complicated, or speak in some other way that makes applying the material confusing. This can be OK, as some of it’s necessary for higher levels of learning, but not for beginners, and therefore it’s especially not suited for the new age of the internet where huge troves of people are becoming self-taught (or at least starting on their own). There needs to be a clearer path to learning for beginners which is accessible to everyone. A gateway, if you will, that gives people the opportunity to be properly introduced to a universal spiritual practice that nourishes one’s mind and body and helps weed away at the negative self-talk that holds us back from finding peace and happiness.

This would eventually become one of my major reasons for writing Zen for Everyday Life, but it wasn’t my only reason. My complete inspiration behind writing Zen for Everyday Life was to provide a convenient and universal resource to people which took the heart of Zen and presented it in a way that would help a person
develop a daily practice that could bring peace and joy to their life as it is, and I wanted to explain it all in simple, clear, and straightforward language in a way that made the material easy to implement from the time you take your eyes off the book.

By developing a daily practice that can bring peace and joy to your life as it is, I’m referring to finding peace right here in the present moment, without having to make any sort of significant life changes. This is a very important point. You need to understand that you’re complete. You lack nothing. You’re absolutely and completely whole. You’re the Buddha, the very expression of your ultimate potential. You don’t need to become something, gain something, or acquire something in order to find true peace and happiness. You need only to realize your own true nature right here in this moment.

The Buddhist path is, at its essence, simply about how to live life to the fullest. Those things which all of us are most concerned with: peace, happiness, and meaning. It’s called Buddhism to notate those followers that live by the teachings of the original Buddha, it’s not about worshipping the Buddha (who was a normal human being just like you and I), it’s simply about living deeply in your everyday life in order to discover your true nature, and through that finding peace. Zen is the very
expression of the Buddhist path fully realized in our everyday life. It’s an experience, rather than a teaching. It’s not a facial, a back massage, or a serene feeling of calm. True Zen can’t be put into words, only experienced in your everyday life. It’s for this reason that you could say *Zen for Everyday Life* isn’t Zen at all. It’s about the *universal* principles which point to Zen and allow you to cultivate true peace and happiness in your everyday life. Let *Zen for Everyday Life* serve as a gateway to a deeper, more peaceful, and more meaningful existence. You can call it Zen, or you can call it not Zen. Whatever you decide to call it, it doesn’t matter. What matters is that you realize the importance of developing a daily practice which nourishes your mind and body, and put that practice into action. And *Zen for Everyday Life* will show you how to do that.

A practice such as this is universal and transcends all labels and categorizations, and is where true Zen exists. It doesn’t matter what religious affiliation you are, whether you consider yourself Christian, atheist, agnostic, simply spiritual, or something else altogether. It doesn’t matter where you were born, or what race, age, or sex you are. *Zen for Everyday Life* serves as a universal path to transforming your stresses, difficulties, and suffering into peace, joy, and
liberation. And the application of these principles is through practical techniques which you can easily and immediately begin to apply after reading.

The human race might seem very different from one another at times, but if you take a moment to look around you’ll realize that we all have a lot in common. The greatest of which is our desire to relieve our pain and suffering and find peace and happiness, whether that’s the desire for our own peace and happiness or the peace and happiness of others. This applies to the business owner who has hopes of making millions of dollars so that he can control his destiny, the man or woman searching for “the one” to complete themselves and start a family, the mother and father fighting to give their son or daughter a better life, the terrorist committing acts of violence on those he thinks are his enemies so that he can be rewarded in the afterlife with abundance, and the monk or nun sitting quietly in meditation. Take a moment to look around sometime, you might be surprised with what you find.
You can call it Zen, or you can call it not Zen. Whatever you call it, it doesn’t matter. What matters is that you realize the importance of developing a daily practice which nourishes your mind and body, and put that practice into action. And Zen for Everyday Life will show you how to do that.
“Want to draw with me, daddy?” My oldest son, who was two and a half at the time, said to me. “I’d love to draw with you baby, what do you want to draw with?” I said. He thought for a moment and then said, “mmm...crayons”. So we took out a tin box of Crayola crayons and dumped them out on the floor.

We were sharing a large piece of paper some thirty inches wide by twenty inches tall. Despite all that white space, he generally liked to draw right on top of whatever I was drawing. If I went left, he followed, if I drew a circle, he’d draw over it. The best I could do was just continue to finish what I was drawing, because if I moved he’d just move with me. Naturally, I didn’t mind, after all I was just drawing a random picture with some crayons. What was important was that I was spending time with my son, and it didn’t matter how we did it. I
just made the best of it and simply enjoyed the experience of drawing with my son.

I can’t recall how many times we’ve sat down to draw together, sometimes even using my Japanese style calligraphy set (I have to make sure he’s pretty calm first, otherwise I’ll end up with a room covered in black ink...), but this time something hit me. Call it a moment of insight if you will, whatever it was I realized something that day. I realized that life is a lot like drawing with my son.

What I mean by that is, there will always be something. Something will always be there, ready to cause you pain, suffering, or simply stress of some kind and ultimately get in the way of your peace and happiness. You’re trying to get the kids ready for school, work on a project at work, cook dinner, or simply enjoy your off time, and something always wants to get in the way. Something is always trying to distract you from the present moment. When you’re cooking dinner, that bill that’s due next week is really where your mind is at. When you’re supposed to be taking time off for yourself your mind is back at the office working on that project you have to finish. We live in an almost perpetual state of distraction and worry. Most of us don’t notice it, but this has a profound effect on our overall well-being.
If you’re waiting for the right climate to be happy, or think that if you take care of this one thing or get to this one point then you’ll finally find peace, it will never happen. If you move out of your current house to a newer, bigger, and overall nicer home, you might think that you’ll finally be happy. But after some time, the same issues, or different issues, will arise. Something always gets in the way. There’s no running from it, and there’s no hiding from it. But there is a solution.

Remember the realization I had when drawing with my son? All you have to do is...keep drawing. Don’t go to another section of the page, don’t go to another page, don’t stop drawing, don’t be distracted by the other crayons drawing around you, and most importantly don’t try to push the other crayon away. Draw with your whole being. Be fully present for the drawing experience. Enjoy the moment for what it is, find the beauty in this moment instead of constantly looking elsewhere.

I hate to break it to you, but you won’t find the peace you’re searching for on a vacation in the Bahamas. That’s only a shallow and temporary relief. You’ll find peace in your own mind, in the heart of the chaos of your everyday life, and Zen for Everyday Life is about showing you how to do that. It’s about showing you how you can find peace and happiness right now in this very
moment. While walking to work, picking up the kids from basketball practice, cooking dinner, and amid all of your other regular everyday activities.

Living Zen

*Zen for Everyday Life isn’t about adding new things onto your life, it’s about transforming your very life as it is into something altogether beautiful and joy-filled.*

The word Zen translates directly as “meditation” in Japanese. When you look at the idea of meditation closely, what is it really? Especially in the Zen sense, it’s simply doing an act with all of your being. When it comes right down to it, that’s what Zen is- it’s living your entire life with every ounce of your being and in every moment. By doing so fully you live expressing your own true nature without your critical or “little” mind getting in the way.

In Japan, particularly in the Soto school of Zen, this has primarily taken the form of zazen, which means literally “sitting/seated meditation” in Japanese. But Zen wasn’t meant to be only about sitting in meditation, although this is considered the foundational practice. In the words of Alan
Watts, “there should also be a walking Zen, lying (down) Zen…” and so on. Therefore *Zen for Everyday Life* is about making your *entire* life into a meditation. But that doesn’t just mean living with a gentle but complete awareness of the present reality (mindfulness), it’s also about learning how to live your entire life deeply, so as to see into the true nature of your life as a whole, discovering your true self and a great reverence for life that makes each moment fresh and beautiful.

Meditation isn’t just sitting cross-legged on the floor with your eyes closed. You can practice meditation in so many different ways. *Zen for Everyday Life* will show you how you can use various forms of meditation and contemplation to transform the stresses, pains, and suffering of everyday life into inner peace, fortitude, and a great joy that pervades every moment of your life. I’ll also cover a whole treasure trove of tips, tricks, and strategies which you can implement that will help enhance and support your practice.

Also, *Zen for Everyday Life* isn’t just about throwing a bunch of things at you and letting you figure things out, or sort things out, for yourself. Look at it as the starter’s guide to creating a daily practice of peace, or living Zen, where I’ll guide you step-by-step through how to bring peace, joy, and
overall *new life* to each of the most common (and otherwise mundane) activities in your daily life.

This is an important point that I’d like to touch on. Part of the reason why *Zen for Everyday Life* can help you find peace and happiness within your everyday life is because it literally transforms the very mundane everyday activities which you do each and every day (and largely take for granted) into opportunities for nourishing peace, healing, and joy. Therefore *Zen for Everyday Life* isn’t about adding new things onto your life, it’s about transforming your very life *as it is* into something altogether beautiful and joy-filled. It’s literally *living Zen*.

And by a “daily practice of peace”, I’m referring to learning how to deeply connect with yourself. That is, your *true* nature, not the guy or girl running around with 1,000 thoughts a minute, being controlled by impulses and desires (hint: that’s not you). By daily practice, I’m referring to a set of daily activities and behaviors which encompass the act of touching your own true nature deeply, so as to discover and then maintain peace of mind, peace with those around you, and ultimately finding harmony with all living and nonliving beings. But as I mentioned, for the most part, these aren’t exercises or techniques which are added onto your daily activities, more than that
these are different ways of doing and perceiving the things that you already do repeatedly every single day.

**Zen for Everyday Life, a Step-by Step System**

You’ll notice that each chapter in the book is either titled or starts with a verb. There’s two reasons for this. First, I wanted to emphasize how important it is that you take action, so I made it as easy as possible to know exactly what typical everyday action you’ll be working on for a particular chapter. From sitting, walking, creating, growing, and developing, to prioritizing, kindling, and planning, you’ll know exactly what you’ll be working on in each chapter. And second, because the book is about living Zen, each chapter is about capturing the Zen of each action, so the Walking chapter attempts to show you how to make your everyday walking into “walking Zen”, and so on, transforming your life one common everyday action at a time.

Part I, *Finding Peace*, will introduce you to the most common misconceptions we develop about peace, happiness, and fulfillment in life as well as introduce you to the true path to peace and
happiness through the two major tools of *Zen for Everyday Life*: meditation, the act of living grounded in the present moment with a clear and open awareness, and contemplation, the act of living and looking deeply at your life so as to see into the true nature of things, including yourself.

In Part II, *Being Peace*, and Part III, *Making Peace*, we’ll cover over two dozen exercises using both mindfulness and contemplation, as well as other techniques, to form a daily practice which brings peace and happiness to your daily life. And all of the practices we’ll cover are about taking those things which you do on a daily basis and making them into meditations, not about going on some meditation retreat, or taking a trip to India to see the Bodhi tree (the tree Siddhārtha Gautama sat under before he attained enlightenment and became the Buddha).

Sure, those things can be valuable, and I’m not saying I don’t look forward to taking a trip to India someday to see the original Bodhi tree of legend, but what’s important is that you don’t convince yourself that you need to make some sort of physical change or do something extraordinary for you to transform your life and find peace and happiness. Falling for this is falling for one of the major misconceptions I’ll talk about in the next chapter (#6). If you can do that, then go and do
that meditation retreat, it will be valuable and outside activities like that do help. But don’t forget when you get back home that the change that needs to happen is within, not outside yourself, and you can do that no matter where you are. That’s your focus, anything else is just there to enhance what you’re already doing.

For those that want to take their practice further, support it, and help it grow Part IV, Nurturing Peace, will do just that. Part IV is about developing a stable support system for your practice, and it covers six powerful strategies for nurturing and supporting your practice of peace and happiness. This is where your practice really begins to “expand”, so to speak. Imagine this section as the building of a set of armor, each new chapter a new piece of armor. Each chapter in this section is meant to further enhance and support your overall practice and in many ways simply allow for many more opportunities to cultivate peace and gratitude in your everyday life.

Lastly, Part V rounds out Zen for Everyday Life by covering various important strategies and qualities for growing and maintaining your practice. There’s more to a daily spiritual practice than the activity itself (after all, it doesn’t just magically happen!)- there’s establishing the activities as daily habits, developing the skills to
support your practice, and, to some degree, finding better ways to manage your time if you lead even a marginally busy lifestyle, and Part V will cover all of that and more.

Remember that *Zen for Everyday Life* is about taking your life as it is right now and finding peace and happiness. You don’t need to restructure your life in order to find peace, joy, or meaning in your life. But, keep in mind that some things might have to change to take full advantage of your practice.

For instance, I’d suggest not running around like a crazy person half the day and actually convincing yourself that you’re getting more done by rushing around so much (like I did). For the most part though, this will change naturally by adopting a practice that nourishes your mind and body as the one described in the following chapters. Also keep in mind, you might *want* to change some things. This is OK too, and can be highly beneficial. Just don’t forget that if it’s a changing of your physical surroundings, lifestyle, or anything such as that, it very well may contribute to or support your practice, but it’s not the practice itself.

*One last note:* within these chapters are just examples of ways you can use these various practices. Look at each section as an important
area to work on, and preferably get the hang of what’s mentioned here before venturing out, but remember that once you do get the hang of things you can get creative in your own life and think of your own individual practices for, say, *Nurturing Peace (Part IV)*. Remember what’s most important: to live mindfully and deeply aware of your interbeing and the precious nature of life in every moment. As long as your practice does that, you’ll find peace.

**Making the Most of *Zen for Everyday Life***

Before we get started, I’d like to lay some ground work. This book holds within it the keys to developing a daily practice which can help you transform your pain, suffering, and stresses into inner peace, true happiness, and total liberation. But this book in and of itself is just a collection of ideas, made into words, and placed onto a page. It can’t think or act for you. So before continuing, I’d like us to make a deal.

First, you agree to take action on what I talk about in *Zen for Everyday Life*. That is, don’t just read this book, say “Oh cool! That sounds great!”, and then throw the book onto your shelf never to
be seen again. Let’s be honest with one another, you’ve probably done that before, maybe multiple times with other books. If you really want to change your life though, you need to take action, and there’s no better time than now. Deal? Great. As my part of the deal I agree to make this book as simple, straightforward, and useful as possible. I also agree to make the meditations and exercises easy to apply in your own life from the moment you put the book down. So here it is again in detail, our deal together:

**Your Commitment:**

1. **I will take action on the information within this book.** This book ultimately doesn’t have the ability to make you happy, bring you peace, or reduce your stress level. Only you can do that. Like the classic example of a finger pointing the way to the moon, this book isn’t the moon, it can merely point the way. You can read this entire book tonight, turn around, throw it in your bookshelf, and never look at it again. It’s just that easy. In order to create real change in your life you need to prioritize what it is that you want and take steps to achieve it. It won’t happen unless you take action. Don’t just read this book and move on. Zen
for Everyday Life provides the steps, you just need to follow them and do the exercises.

In the proceeding chapters, I’ll show you that peace and happiness are available to you in this very moment. Not in 10 years, or after that next promotion. Not after changing this or that, but in your everyday life as it is right now. But as I said, the pages of this book can't think, sit, walk, talk, or act for you. You need to be willing to take action and willing to make the commitment to find peace within. Both for yourself and for your family.

My Commitment:

1. I will make everything as simple, straightforward, and useful as possible. I promise not to throw a bunch of confusing information at you. Most importantly, there will be no use of jargon. If I use a word not commonly familiar to most people, I’ll only do so when it improves the quality and usefulness of the text, and I promise to give a clear and thorough explanation of the word so that it doesn’t affect your ability to absorb the content as a whole. My primary goal is to communicate the material of this book in a way that everyone
can understand and apply. So I promise to keep things simple.

2. I will keep everything in universal terms. *Zen for Everyday Life* is for all people, not just those interested in Zen or Buddhism, and I promise to stick to that point throughout the book. This is a book meant simply to help you find peace and joy in your life as it is. It’s a book about living each and every moment of your life to the fullest, and doing so in a way that allows you to establish a foundation of peace and happiness for the rest of your life.

3. I agree to give you everything I’ve got. I agree to make this book as insanely useful as possible. This book covers literally dozens of useful techniques, tips, tricks, and strategies all of which I’ve used in my own life to go from stressed, anxious, and generally unsatisfied to a life filled with peace, joy, and freedom.
You’ll find peace and happiness within your own mind, in the heart of the chaos of your everyday life, and Zen for Everyday Life is about showing you how to do that.
Zen for Everyday Life

This was just a preview of what Zen for Everyday Life has to offer. *Zen for Everyday Life: How to Find Peace and Happiness in the Chaos of Everyday Life* is my complete guide to living moment to moment with mindfulness. In *Zen for Everyday Life*, you’ll learn how to mindfully:

- Sit
- Walk
- Stop
- Eat
- Drive
- Arrive
- Rest
- Love
- Heal
- Communicate
- ...and much more.

*Zen for Everyday Life* will also give you the
tools you need to make mindfulness a way of life as well as the tools you need to continue to maintain and nurture your daily mindfulness practice moving forward, guide you through the various myths and misconceptions that keep us from happiness, and show you step-by-step how to truly deepen your moment-to-moment experience of daily life.

You can learn more about *Zen for Everyday Life* by clicking the link below:

[Click Here to Learn More About Zen for Everyday Life](#)