"Stomach stress gurgles are no match for this spinning Rolodex of chill pills."

—Neil Pasricha, #1bestselling author of
The Book of Awesome and The Happiness Equation

**NINA PUREWAL** and KATE PETRIW

FIND PEACE OF MIND AND HAPPINESS IN YOUR EVERYDAY

# IET THAT SH\*T

Find Peace of Mind and Happiness in Your Everyday

Nina Purewal and Kate Petriw



# **Collins**

# **Dedication**

To the loves of my life, Mike and Bianca Purewal; and to my greatest teacher, my mom, Rita Nayar.

—Nina

To my dad, thanks for all that you do.

—Kate

To our readers: Here's to finding peace in the everyday and letting go of the bullshit. We love you.

And to the universe: thank you.

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#### Introduction

LIFE ISN'T ALWAYS EASY. You're trying to check off everything that's on your to-do list, but you hit the sack feeling like you haven't made much of dent. It's one thing after another that can send you into stress mode at the drop of a hat. Whether it's the challenging circumstances around you or it's your own mind that sets you spinning, there are moments when you feel like you're running on a hamster wheel and can't get off, physically or mentally.

We know what that feels like. We, too, have faced a few life challenges and found ourselves spinning out of control, feeling as if we could barely catch our breaths. We wanted nothing more than to find a little peace and tranquility. So, we decided to take our stress pretty seriously and spent time researching, studying, and introspecting. Thankfully, we came to realize that there *is* a way out, a way to hop off that hamster wheel now and again. And we want to share what we learned with the beautiful you.

In this book you'll find more than a hundred tips to get you to a peaceful, happy place—and you'll get there without having to sit oceanfront listening to the waves, beer in one hand and book in the other. The great thing is, sometimes you don't need to drastically change your routine to find the calm. You don't need to switch jobs, or stop going to that class, or live in the mountains for years. You can find the calm by doing the things you do but just doing them a little differently—whether it's cultivating some deep breaths throughout your day or being aware of the "negative autopilot" that takes over from time to time. Finding peace doesn't have to be a huge project. As it turns out, you can actually find peace in the everyday.

You're probably used to hearing that you should make your diet a priority, hit the gym a few times a week, and shower daily, all to take care of that precious body of yours. But how often do you prioritize your mind? Too often we're stuck in our own heads and too busy to step back and take

inventory of what's swirling around in there. Being unaware of thought patterns that might be adding an additional layer of stress to our lives can put us at risk of blowing a fuse over the co-worker who chews too loudly, the partner who's lost the remote control, or the friend who doesn't text us back.

But when you do take some time to make your mind a priority, giving it a good cleanse once in a while can have a positive effect on the rest of your life. Being conscious of your thoughts can help to make you less reactive to the daily bullshit that pops up. You are better able to tackle it or to accept it and let it go.

So how do you reap the benefits that come from making your mind a priority? In this book we've outlined the steps that helped us do just that. Consider this book a toolkit that will give you what you need to cultivate calm and address any obstacles that might be in your way. Our book talks about letting go of negative self-perceptions, regrets from the past, and anxieties over the future. It will show you how to reframe the thoughts that leave you feeling stressed out and overwhelmed. It will help you to stop looking at life through a narrow lens and doing stuff that's not always true to who you are.

This isn't a book that will make you feel like you need to add another "to-do" to your list. It's simply a way to reframe your perception in your daily life. Each chapter begins with an overview of a topic, to help you get into the groove. Then we'll take you through a bunch of practical tips, concepts, and examples of how to implement some peace in your daily life.

We hope that by the time you get to the end of the book, you'll be walking away with an extra skip in your step, a calm smile on your face, and a badass approach to a good life as you work to let that shit go.

## Chapter 1

#### **Awareness**

## Goodbye Past and Future Worries

IT STARTS BEFORE you even get out of bed.

Your alarm goes off. Here we go. You check your phone, to find fourteen new emails that swooped in after you fell asleep. Shit, I'm behind already. You have a few seconds to scroll through Instagram, check the weather, brush your teeth, shower, throw on some clothes, successfully find matching socks, grab a slice of toast, and get on your way.

You get into your car with just enough time to get to work. *Phew.* As you start driving, a parade of thoughts comes marching in: *Ahh! I forgot to do the inventory report for Jamal. Wait, is my cousin's birthday on the twenty-second or twenty-third? Shouldn't have had that ice cream sandwich last night, feeling kinda sluggish. How many days do I have left for vacation? I really need to plan something soon. Ugh, I gotta file my taxes...* 

It rambles on until—boom!—you're at the office. Do you even remember getting there? Where did all of that time go, from the minute your alarm went off to the moment you sat down in your chair?

Surprise, you missed it.

From the second you woke up you've been on the go. And you even managed to layer all kinds of worries on top of the basic busyness that is your life. You, my friend, might be stressed AF.

WE'VE ALL HAD MOMENTS like this—autopiloting our way from A to B while letting our mind wander in its own little world. Being on the go physically is one thing (rushing to get your kid to soccer practice, madly trying to avoid being late for lunch with a friend), but having a busy mind on top of that is another. In fact, sometimes your mind runs a hundred times faster than your body. You might not think much of it, but weighing down your already busy life with negative and unnecessary thoughts can increase your

stress level. Except, it doesn't have to be this way. Just imagine if, instead of allowing your stress to build to the point of your nearly having a meltdown, you could find a way to calm your mind.

Think about that drive to work, the one in which the thought parade came marching through your mind. Those thoughts may be loud (so, so loud), but they're kind of useless. Or at least they're useless *in that moment*. From the minute you put your key in your car's ignition and fire up the engine, you can't physically do anything but drive. You can't be on your laptop pulling up a report. You can't open your calendar to confirm the date of your cousin's birthday. And you can't research a vacation or finish your taxes. All you can actually *do* in that moment is drive. So why worry about the other stuff?

When you're annoyed about something that happened in the past or worrying about the future (which of course you have the right to do and be), you're not experiencing your life as it happens. You're missing the here and now, the tiny little moments your life is made up of—driving your car, grocery shopping, enjoying a night out. Think of it this way: if you're always there, you're missing out on what's here.

So how do you stop your mind from racing? How do you actually stay *here*?

You start by shifting your focus. Instead of thinking through ten different things on your commute, why not try to observe the trees along the way or simply be grateful that you're heading to a place that pays you for what you do? You could notice the sweet smell of your shampoo and how it reminds you of a scent you used to wear in high school. Sure, thoughts and worries might creep in between all of that, but they will come and go—they won't take over and potentially stress you out. Each time you shift your focus to the world around you or things you're grateful for, you move away from thoughts that might make you worried or anxious. You refuse to let them take over.

When you consciously swap the challenging thoughts for more positive ones, even neutral ones, you'll notice a change. Your heart rate might drop. Your shoulders will relax away from your ears, your eyebrows will unscrunch, and your body will feel calmer. *This* is where you can find moments of calm in the everyday.

Want to know the best part about this approach to grabbing a bit of peace? It doesn't require any drastic changes to how you live your life.

Keep your routine. Hang on to your social life. Go to those gym classes. Excel at work. We're not suggesting you should stop any of that. Mostly, it's tough to be calm because of the million things going on *in your head*, not just because of how busy your life has become.

When you actively become aware of the constant swirling of your mind, you can start to do something about it. And when you learn how to calm your mind, it won't matter what you are doing physically; moments of peace can be yours.

#### The Pursuit of Happiness

Why is it so important to calm your mind? Simple. Because calming your mind is one of the first steps toward achieving what we're all searching for: *happiness*.

And how do you calm the mind? By living in the moment. *That's* where you can find pure happiness. The thing is, you won't find it externally, but —wait for the cheesy line—you will find it by looking within. Only you can control your thoughts and how you react to what's around you. And when you're able to move to a more self-loving, accepting, less reactive mind, you'll find you're a naturally happier human.

Think about this logically for a second. If happiness existed in objects or experiences, then the same objects and experiences would make everyone equally happy. Take coffee, for example. Our friend Tony is obsessed with the stuff. He knows exactly how he wants his beans ground, and the temperature and aroma have to be just right. His morning cup makes him feel happy, complete, and energized; he would give up beer before he gave up coffee. Nina, on the other hand, is neutral toward it. Sure, she'll grab the odd latte when she's out at a coffee shop, but that's as far as it goes. And then there's our buddy Luke. He despises coffee so much that he can't even stand to be in the room where it's being brewed. So, does happiness really reside in that cup of coffee? Clearly, the answer is no. If it did, coffee would bring the same happiness to everyone that it does to Tony, but it doesn't. You can apply this same "happiness test" to any passion: music, books, sports, a particular food. You get the gist. Ask yourself this question: Is happiness in that thing or in the act of experiencing it?

Here's another tricky thing about happiness. You can easily fall into the habit of thinking that it exists in the future. *Once I land my dream job, I'll be happy*, you might think. Or *Once I buy a condo, things will brighten up*.

But have you ever followed up on those thoughts? Chances are that once you got or achieved the thing you were chasing, it wasn't long before you went back to feeling unsettled, maybe even *un*happy. The pursuit of this kind of happiness can set you off on a never-ending chase—because this type of happiness is fleeting, and it won't be long before you're thinking about the next milestone. Now that you have your dream job and a new condo, you find yourself wanting a promotion and a new couch. And once you get the couch, it's only natural to want the matching chairs. And now that your living room is all done, you're thinking the kitchen needs to be spruced up. It doesn't end. And you'll never be satisfied because there are always more things to buy or experiences that give you a high.

And we don't just look for happiness in stuff; we look for it in people, too. To some degree that's okay: the people in our lives can absolutely be a source of happiness. But they can also evoke a wide range of other emotions. One minute you love your parents and the next you find them incredibly frustrating. You're obsessed with a friend, but then they say something that pisses you off. You love your partner to bits, and then they go and do something to make your blood boil.

So, what's the deal? If happiness can't be found in things, in the future, or in people, where is it hiding? Here's the truth:

Regardless of what is happening around you, the only person who has the capacity to bring you endless happiness is you.

Even the stuff that you think makes you happy is fleeting. Most external stuff comes with a built-in "peak" of enjoyment. Ever heard someone talk about the "law of diminishing returns"? It's actually an economic term, used to explain production efficiencies and such. But if you opted out of Economics 101, that's totally fine. For our purposes we'll go with the non-economic use of the phrase, which refers to how something that starts out seemingly awesome can pretty quickly fizzle out.

Take french fries, for example. Think about the last time you ordered them. The moment they arrived they were piping hot and tasted amazing. They were delicate and crispy on the outside and filled with soft, potato-y goodness on the inside. Those first few bites were bliss. You were seriously loving those fries. By the time you got to the eighth or ninth fry, though, it wasn't the same. They were still delicious, but not *as* delicious as fries one

and two. Suddenly, you passed the point of maximum enjoyment. Maybe you didn't reach that point until the tenth fry or the twentieth, but somewhere along the line it happened. Even though you still had fries left, you didn't feel like eating them anymore. What's going on here? The twentieth fry has the same form (crispy outside, gooey inside) as the first. It might be a little colder, but for the most part it's the same basic fry that was making you so happy three minutes earlier. It's not the fries that have changed—it's you. Your enjoyment of them has declined.

We know what you're thinking: Hold on a second. All those things—fries, friends, family, coffee, the promotion, the condo—do bring me happiness. That's true . . . kind of. Those things might bring you happiness in the moment, but you cannot depend on them for permanent happiness.

You don't have to feel weird or bad for finding happiness in your new house, or your morning cup of coffee, or some fries, or a new phone. Experiencing happiness from all these things is incredible. You just need to know that they're a source of *temporary* happiness. Permanent happiness comes from within you and can be fostered through calming the mind.

#### It's Who You Are at the Core

And here's the bit that's really going to blow your mind: true happiness doesn't just exist somewhere within you—it is you. Happiness is who you are at your very core. That's why you feel so good when you're happy: because it is your true nature. This yearning to find happiness and peace is not about searching for it somewhere "out there"—it's about unravelling who you really are and realizing that happiness is right there, within you.

So, you might be asking yourself a few questions right now. One of them is potentially: Where did these girls come up with this shit? Fair enough. The truth is, we didn't "come up" with any of it; it's been around for centuries, and we'll tell you more about that as we go along, so stay tuned.

Another one of your questions might go something like *Is this for real?* It sounds too good to be true. Just learn how to calm your mind and live in the now and you'll be happy? Sure. We hear you. We were skeptical, too. Both of us come from a business background, where the proof is in the numbers. We wanted to see concrete, scientific evidence that this approach works. So, we looked at some of the many studies on the benefits of putting this wisdom into action. And we found our proof; in fact, it's endless. One

of the most fascinating things our research uncovered is that living in the now can physically alter the composition of your brain. Neuroplasticity research supports what the ancients knew: with a little bit of training, your mind can be changed, and calming the mind can help you better manage emotions. We tested this theory by using some of the calming tips and ideas presented in this book. We did this while living our lives: working stressful corporate jobs, facing serious life challenges, dealing with the usual amount of daily BS. And guess what? We saw for ourselves just how true it is.

You might be wondering, If happiness is a part of our nature, then why don't we experience it all the time? That's a good one, but it actually has a pretty simple answer, and if you've been catching what we've been throwing down, you already know what it is: we don't experience happiness all the time because there's too much shit in the way. Analogy time. Think about the sun on a rainy day. When you look up at the sky, it's dull, dark, and gloomy. On your walk to work there are puddles everywhere, the air is cool, and it's even a bit windy. You have zero access to the sun's rays. That sucks if you like the sun, but it doesn't mean the sun isn't there. It still exists, doesn't it? It's just that the clouds are preventing you from experiencing its warmth. In that same way, great peace and happiness lie within you, but when there are all kinds of stressors in the way (a.k.a. the clouds), it's hard to remember that peace and happiness are right there in front of you.

One quick note here: it's okay to have negative thoughts or those that make you sad. You're human, after all. But just remember that those negative thoughts are not who you are *at the core*. They are only a small part of you, and they will pass, just like clouds on a stormy day. In the meantime, you can work on accessing that sunshine within—regardless of the weather. You can do that by being actively present. The more present you are, the better you'll be at ditching all the crap swirling around in and outside of you, and the more you will experience the calm and happiness within.

It's time to let that shit go.

## Get Off Autopilot

TAKE A WILD GUESS at what ranks as the biggest obstacle to being present. Go ahead. We'll wait . . . Okay, fine. We'll tell you. It's your mind. Your very own mind is preventing you from being able to experience life in the moment.

Do you control your mind or does it control you? If you're like most of us, it may be the latter. The truth is, you probably have very little control over your mind. So little, in fact, that you likely don't even know the next thought you're going to think. It could be:

- Crap, I really should pee before I start this next section of the book.
- I can't believe Duane got that promotion last week.
- I'm excited about dinner tomorrow. Mmm, food.
- I drank way too much coffee today.
- *That workout was a-mazing.*
- I'm a terrible friend. Let me text him back right now.

An article we came across stated that the average person thinks between fifty thousand and seventy thousand thoughts a day, which breaks down to between thirty-five and forty-two thoughts a minute. WTF? Forty-two? That's almost one thought every second. No wonder you hit the sack each night feeling as if you haven't had a slice of peace all day. Your mind is reeling with nonstop thoughts. And if you're not doing anything to rein them in, they can run the place. Your thoughts are on autopilot all day, errr' day. Instead of being in the moment, present in whatever you are doing, your mind is running twenty steps ahead, constantly going on about the past, the future, or maybe your epic, ongoing to-do list: *Gotta pack lunches tonight, make sure everyone has a bath, get online to check bank statements and buy a new blender, double check to see if those flights to California are still on sale, send a few quick emails, message the group chat back about getting together next week.* Blah fucking blah.

Your overactive, wandering, autopilot mind is like a monkey swinging through the trees from branch to branch to branch. In fact, this type of scattered thinking is often referred to as the "monkey mind." When you're stressed and your head is overflowing with thoughts, your monkey mind heedlessly moves from one thought to the other. And the craziest thing is that you might not even realize it, as it's all happening on a subconscious level.

If our minds had a habit of racing through happy thoughts all day every day, a restless mind might not be such a problem. But the trouble is that they tend to focus on the negative. And when we are feeling particularly overwhelmed, our thoughts are more likely to become toxic. What ifs and coulda, shoulda, wouldas creep in, and before we know it, we're beating ourselves up or worrying about things beyond our control. So not only do our minds wander aimlessly, but they also put us on edge throughout the day—and it's exhausting.

The first step in the process of letting shit go is not to make the thoughts stop but to be *aware* that they are happening in the first place. Once you do that, you can start to change your negative thought patterns and find calmness of mind. What you need to do is rein in that monkey and catch it before it swings to the next branch.

Over the next few days, stop now and again to pay attention to how often your mind drifts off. The moment you *notice* it drifting is the moment you begin to observe your thoughts.

#### Become an Observer

So your MIND is a complicated thing with two distinct parts: the *observing mind* and the *chatty mind*. The chatty mind is the part that you know all too well; it's the monkey mind, the one that keeps going and going and never stops. Just sit for a minute and observe it. No, seriously. Put the book down for sixty seconds and see where your mind goes.

Done? What did you observe? How many thoughts went through your head? Did you wonder, *How do I actually do this?* Or think, *I don't have time for this*. Maybe, toward the end of the minute, you even started to think about what to make for dinner. Regardless, what you did do is watch your thoughts. Doing this is how you tap into your observing mind and use it to *look* at what your chatty mind is doing, and this is the first step toward letting go of your thoughts.

Let's consider how this might help in real life.

Imagine you're stuck in a rut at work, and these anxious thoughts are ricocheting around your mind: I have to get this presentation done by end of week, but I also need to prep for tomorrow's one-on-one with the VP. There are about three hundred emails in my inbox that I should have answered yesterday. This contract isn't going to edit itself—but I'm not a freakin' lawyer, so I don't even know where to begin. And Lisa is constantly on my ass about hitting targets. Can't she see that I'm basically buried here!

When you find yourself having a moment like this, see if you can shift your mind into observation mode.

Calm tone this time: There you go freaking out about work again. That presentation, emails, Lisa . . .

In taking a moment to *observe* your thoughts, you may find that you experience a wave of calm. Switching over to your observing mind pulls you out of the panic you're experiencing and allows you to look at your swirling thoughts from a distance. Your observing mind does not do emotions. It is fact based, rational, and practical. It doesn't try to resolve your thoughts, it doesn't judge situations, and it doesn't judge you. When

you switch from chatty mode to observation mode, you leave behind all the negative emotions attached to your thoughts. Using your observing mind will not totally dissolve your stress, but if you can flip over into observation mode during a really intense moment, you will find some breathing space. And in that space, you can start to let go of your panic—at least a little bit.

As a first step, let's play out some "chatty mind versus observing mind" dialogue in a few everyday scenarios. When your chatty mind starts running, here are some ways your observing mind can catch it and rein it in:

**The thought:** *I need to go grocery shopping.* 

Chatty mind: OMG, I have no idea when I'm going to grocery shop this week. I was thinking Sunday morning, but I don't know. Should I go on Saturday, instead? No, that's not going to work. Maybe Wednesday night before dinner. Nope, I have a late meeting. How about Friday? Nah, not Friday night. Okay, I guess I'll go on Sunday morning. (Note that it's fine to devise a plan and think through it once, but thinking about it over and over is exhausting.)

**Observing mind:** There you go again stressing about when to go grocery shopping. You decided on Sunday morning, so there's no need to go over this again.

**The thought:** *Duane got a promotion.* 

Chatty mind: I can't fucking believe Duane got promoted again. He so didn't deserve that. Everyone knows he doesn't actually do anything but talk a big game in meetings. What am I doing wrong? I can't believe they didn't give the promotion to me. I'm going to quit. They don't do much to motivate me, anyway.

**Observing mind:** There you go again getting all worked up about Duane. You like your job, and just because Duane got promoted doesn't mean that you won't soon.

**The thought:** *I should eat healthy.* 

**Chatty mind:** I can't believe I couldn't go three days without eating chocolate. What is wrong with me? No wonder I can't lose those last fifteen pounds. I'm disgusting.

**Observing mind:** There you go again beating yourself up about what you ate. You made the decision to eat the chocolate, and you enjoyed it. Let that shit go.

We know what you're thinking: *Easier said than done*. Right? And it's true that you might find it challenging to switch modes at first, but training your observing mind is like training a muscle. The more you work it, the stronger it will become—and the easier it will be for you to use it.

So, the next time you're having a stressful moment, take a step back, pause, and use your observing mind. At first you might only remember to do it once a week. Then once every few days. But if you keep doing it, you'll be a rock-star chatty-mind observer before you know it.