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What Now?

An Essay Presented at the Kit Kat Club
February 15, 2011
Columbus, Ohio

[Sean Allen rings a Buddhist prayer bowl.]

Thank you, gentlemen of Kit Kat. Thank you, Mr. President.

I asked Sean Allen to help me open this essay by ringing a Buddhist prayer bowl, specifically classified as a standing bell or singing bowl, a descendent of the bronze bells dating back to the 8th-10th Centuries BCE. Rather than hanging inverted or attached to a handle, singing bowls sit with the bottom surface resting. The sides and rim of singing bowls vibrate to produce sound.

Singing bowls are played by the friction of rubbing a wooden, plastic, or leather wrapped mallet around the rim of the bowl to produce overtones and a continuous 'singing' sound. High quality singing bowls produce a complex chord of harmonic overtones. Singing bowls may also be played by striking with a soft mallet to produce a warm bell tone.

Singing bowls are multiphonic instruments, producing multiple concurrent harmonic overtones. The overtones are a result of using an alloy consisting of multiple metals, each producing its own overtone.

But this is not an essay on bells. It's more an essay on why anyone would have one. These bells are employed worldwide both within and beyond a variety of Eastern spiritual traditions, for meditation, trance-induction, relaxation, healthcare, personal well-being and religious practice. Tibetan Buddhists speak of hearing as the sense that calls us to attention when we pass from one life to another.

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At last month's meeting of Kit Kat, I came to our cocktail hour knowing that I needed to find one of these bells. On an intuitive whim, I asked Sean if he knew where I might find one. "Oh," he said. "I have one of those."

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It is traditional for the essayist to thank the person who nominated him to the membership. Of course, I will always be grateful to Jon York. Thank you, Jon, wherever you are.

But I am also grateful to Sean, the person I nominated. Thank you, Sean, for joining me at these tables, for letting me nominate you to Kit Kat.

The person who nominated us demonstrated an act of admiration. But when we ourselves were nominated, and we chose to accept

an invitation to a lifetime of dinners with that person who nominated us — that was an act of love.

But I'm not here to invade Sean's privacy. I'm here to illuminate ours.

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This is a philosophical essay. That's what Herb Brown called my first essay, *Word of Mouth*.

So many Kit Kat essays deeply research historical events, people and moments. Some look into the future to help us understand what at least the essayist predicts or fears or hopes will be our future. This essay doesn't look back much, or forward much. This essay focuses on the current moment.

And, as a philosophical essay, this essay is based more on contemplated truth than researched fact. Such an essay might disappoint an audience in the outside world, because we live in a peculiar time, during which contemporary society worships facts more than truth. Where the only worthwhile events are those that can be observed by witnesses, substantiated in clinical trials.

But here in Kit Kat, we have a safe space. A laboratory where we have the opportunity to contemplate the meaning of life.

This essay is about what I seek to learn to do in my life: to live in the present — and how Kit Kat contributes to my pursuit of the present moment. I love Kit Kat because it is a monthly visit to the Now. As my essay unfolds, I hope to create several vivid moments during which all of us are mindfully embracing the present moment, so that we might truly appreciate *What Now?*

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This essay is a draft. It is woefully unfinished. It would take me a lifetime to explain my topic.

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Last month, Dick Burnett scared me. His essay on Jacob's Pillow danced closer and closer to my topic. When he asked us to breathe, to engage in the dance with life, the dance of life, I feared he was about to present my essay. I thought I might have to take him out.

But Dick's splendid essay pairs perfectly with my own. I want to advance this pairing, focusing ever more on his concluding admonition: to live in the present. To embrace what is now.

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To explore *What Now?*, we will explore several moments in time.

The first one was just a minute ago: when Sean rang the bell. You remember the harmonic tones. They filled the room. While it might have been weird or, at least, certainly unexpected, it remains memorable. You can still remember the tones.

Why is that? Hearing is a peculiar sense. We can shut out vision by closing our eyes. And taste, smell and feeling seem secondary because even short distances render them ineffective. I think that is why so many religions use an audible call to worship.

When Sean rang the bell, the tones drew you into the present moment, nearly forcing us all into the present, the Now. The tones interrupt our Western focus on the future. Or on the past. And they deliver us to the present moment.

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Before I speak about *how* to live in the present, I feel obliged to speak on *why* to live in the present. We all know why to pay homage to the past. And we know why to plan for the future.

But why should we seek to live in the present?

Strangely, *why* is less accessible, less articulated than *how*. A Google search for "*how* to live in the present" returns 286,000 results. A Google search for "*why* to live in the present" returns only five!

Why is the Internet filled with ways to live in the present, but no explanation of why to live in the present? I put this very question to a teacher of mine, a Buddhist monk named Shih Ying-Fa. The Venerable Ying-Fa is the founder and Abbot of CloudWater Zendo, the Zen Center of Cleveland. (Nothing says "Zen" quite like "Cleveland.")

I must offer a disclaimer. I am not a Buddhist. I am a Jew. (Perhaps you already heard.) It is possible that I am becoming both — a "JewBu." But I am not a Buddhist and I feel very out of my element when discussing Buddhist ideas.

In our correspondence on *why* live in the present, the Venerable Ying-Fa writes:

> From my Buddhist/Zen perspective, when we're laboring under the illusion of separateness, we create much disharmony and suffering....

When he writes of "separateness," he is referring to the Buddhist perspective that we mistakenly think that we are separate from each other, that life is separate from death, that I am here and everything else is "the other."

Ying-Fa continues:

> We always seem to want to end our suffering and replace it with happiness, not the other way around, so it's obvious that happiness is our preferred state. This points to the Buddha's First Noble Truth that says suffering is woven into the fabric of life.
>
> The ancient Indian word for suffering is *dukkha*, which translates as "unsatisfactoriness," but has more of the feeling of "being out of true" like a cart with a bad wheel. This feeling of unsatisfactoriness is like the subtle vibration in a steering wheel when the front end of a car is out of alignment, and can eventually manifest in feelings ranging from mild irritation to agony. This "being out of true" is actually caused by "not living in the present."
>
> What you, Artie, call "living in the present" serves to replace craving, anger and delusion (the Three Poisons in Buddhist teaching) with non-attachment, loving-kindness and wisdom.

Now that I have read only 150 words from a Buddhist teacher, it has happened again: I am confused. When I read such words —

from Shih Ying-Fa or any Zen Buddhist writer, my mind crumbles. "Non-attachment." "Separateness." The words don't mean anything. When I read Buddhist writing, I mistakenly read it as a Western journalist, rather than an Eastern meditator.

It's like I'm suddenly an Ohioan in California.

But Ying-Fa makes a wonderful point. He concludes:

> I think that the lack of an explanation to "why" we should live this way stems from the fact that most of the people talking about "how" take it for granted that we all want to end our suffering. So why live in the present? It sure beats the alternative.

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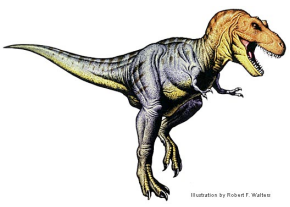
Don't worry. That's enough. I'm not going to read you any more Buddhist texts tonight.

Let's turn to the West.

In his book, *Stumbling On Happiness*, Harvard Professor Daniel Gilbert teaches that much of our happiness is never achieved, because we live with our eyes on the horizon. We invest each moment in a future goal — eating broccoli today, so that we might be healthy later. But enjoyment and happiness, Gilbert argues, live entirely in the present.



The broccoli example doesn't quite work for me. I love broccoli. Its hedonistic to eat a food that looks like trees. I feel like a vegetarian Tyrannosaurus, eating trees. I love broccoli enough to request that Gary Ness

order it for dinner tonight, so this broccolini example of deferred gratification doesn't quite work.

Or does it? Isn't it a goal to fall in love with the most nutritious foods, the most nutritious experiences, the most nutritious people? For if life presents us with a menu we love and one that is good for us in the future, then have we not killed two birds with one stone?

In any event, to love what we are doing is the very meaning of life. That is the message of another Western academic, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the author of many books on what he calls "flow," the psychology of the optimal experience. He has proven what might seem obvious: that each of us does something that we truly love to do. It might be gardening, it might be cooking, it might be surgery or teaching. Hopefully, it is the stuff of our work.

Whatever our "flow" activity, we return to it. It is familiar and engaging.

I see Kit Kat as a flow experience. And I know that not everyone does. I once brought a friend to Kit Kat. Afterward, I mentioned potential membership and he responded: "Why would I ever want to do that? I'm not a masochist."

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Dr. Csikszentmihalyi says that we repress ourselves. And that "repression is not the way to virtue. When people restrain themselves out of fear," he says. "Their lives are by necessity diminished. Only through freely chosen discipline can life be enjoyed and still kept within the bounds of reason."

At Kit Kat, we celebrate the freely chosen discipline, so that life may be enjoyed and still kept within the bounds of reason. *Celebrate* the freely chosen discipline? We *enforce* it. We are required to freely choose a discipline on which to present an essay. We are forbidden from presenting on the topic of our work, our — by now — less freely chosen discipline.

But, I admit, when I consider the Kit Kat experience, I am less interested in the essays. At a meeting of our executive committee two summers ago, our impending Centennial inspired Allen Proctor — who was already, we are now *glad*, entering his Centennial trance — to ask: "What is the essence of Kit Kat?"

Allen proposed that it was the essay. That is, no doubt, why he has asked Al Kuhn, our unofficial Essayist Laureate, to present an essay called *The Kit Kat Essay* during our Homecoming meeting in April.

But I disagree. I think the essays are delightful, but they are secondary, even incidental to the Kit Kat experience. The essays inspire one man to research and contemplate and share, but they are merely an excuse for us to gather.

When asked, "What is this Kit Kat Club?" by any friend who thinks, because of the "Kit Kat" name, I am ambitious enough to visit a bordello, I always respond with familiar phrases: "monthly meeting of 39 men," "who take turns delivering essays," "each on a topic that is not his profession," "except the clergy and academics who generally think such rules are not for them."

[Perhaps my Buddhism has a bitter streak?]

But this description misses the essence of Kit Kat. The essay is not the essence of Kit Kat. The essays are red herrings. (Or orange roughies.) By presenting different topics, the essays make each meeting different.

But I believe,

The essence of Kit Kat
is
what makes each meeting
the same.

You know what makes the meetings the same. It starts when you put on your tie. You find your club tie and you think of George Meiling because he gave you that tie. (He personally paid for all of them, he once announced, not asking for club reimbursement, because he "could not withstand the audit.") It is the same every month. I smile at George's whimsical generosity at 5:15 p.m. every third Tuesday.

I think of this tie as a time machine. It directly ties us to our club's English roots, to our past. When I knot this tie, I step into the past, an unchanging present.

The constant, unchanging agenda continues: you drive to the club, trying to remember the names of the Kats with whom you are least familiar. Every month!

You arrive at the Columbus Club, negotiate the parking lots, enter the historically restricted doors, and come through the coat room, to turn the corner and see the Early Kats, the ones who come early.

Have they arrived so early because they fear that Frank, our bartender, might otherwise be lonely?

No! They have come for the predictable, the constant. They have come for a return to the nest. Not for the essay. That is incidental, unless you are the essayist.

We have all come to be among the members. And, I hope to express tonight, we have come for a moment, a shared moment of living in the present.

And, then, after a cocktail or two, our gathering is called to dinner by the resonance of yet another bell, the Columbus Club's little gong.

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Let us pause for a moment for another ring of a bell. Not Sean's prayer bowl. This bell, for me, produces one of the most memorable sounds of Kit Kat.

It's when the members — the gentlemen for whom we return each month — are described by the membership chairman. When Denny Griffith speaks of the list of prospective members, he always uses a specific word. Have you noticed?

Denny, would you please rise and say the word?

[Denny stands: "We have some splendid gentlemen who are in line for election to Kit Kat."]

"Splendid." Thank you, Denny. Now that he says it, of course, you remember that "splendid" is Denny's word, his mantra. And splendid is his mission. Splendid is what we hope Kit Kat's membership chairman is seeking.

Let me ask Denny to ring that bell again, so that the sound of his voice, as rich and delightfully complex as a prayer bowl, might focus us on the present, on what is now, on *What Now?*

Denny, please, again?

[Denny says: "Splendid."]

We are here for the splendid members. An unchanging list of members, please God — we pray that the list of members does not change. But the membership list does change. While Denny's committee seeks *splendid*, they must accept *mortal*.

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My decade, 1938 back to 1929, is the first decade in our reverse chronological Centennial journey to be comprised completely of surely what are now dead Kats. The mathematics are morbid: a 30-year-old essayist in 1938 — perhaps George Paulson will tell us in May whether any Kat has ever delivered an essay so young — such an essayist would now be 103. He's dead. They all are.

All my decade's gentlemen are not only dead, they are unknown to me. I don't even recognize their names. But while they lived, they were not fossils. They lived in full color, not in black and white. They probably complained as we do that life passes all too

quickly. So they tried to do what we are doing to stop time and live right now, using Kit Kat as a primary vehicle.

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There are some great essays, to be sure. On February 21, 1933, the attorney Robert E. Pfeiffer presented "Europe From the Air," which told the story of how "at Yale, my classmate, Sinclair Lewis, volunteered to show me how to work my way to Europe on a cattleboat."

But, I am sorry to report, our archives from my decade contain more eulogies than essays. Some years are only obituaries. There is such sorrow, such love in the remembrances. It would appear that the essays didn't matter. If the archives are our only window, the members met as a burial society. At least one of the eulogies is the length of my entire essay.

For example, in 1929, a Mr. Osman C. Hooper, my ancestor as the club's secretary, speaks lovingly of Claude Meeker. I've never heard of either of these men, though a Google search reveals the the Ohio Newspaper Association has a yearly presentation named for Mr. Hooper. I read from this eulogy, not so you might know Mr. Meeker better, but so you might hear in this eulogy an unchanging voice in the way we eulogize each other today.

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"Circulars, letters, price lists and catalogues are often of great service, but sometimes they do more harm than good, especially if postage is short paid, which is usually the case. Great harm is often done by the rather flamboyant language of our advertising literature. We are prone to be too cock sure and to claim too much. Thus in a most excellent, well meaning trade publication in New York, devoted to our foreign commerce I counted the phrase 'the largest in the world' 150 times concerning 150 different American enterprises seeking foreign support. Now the foreigner, be he an Englishman, a German, Frenchman or even a Spaniard, is willing to admit that we are a great country, but he would prefer that we be rather tender with his own feelings and not arrogate to ourselves everything. I once referred a high-sounding appeal for trade to an English merchant, and he replied he really needed something of that kind, but the extreme modesty of 'the claimant' rather frightened him. No matter what we do at home, our literature intended to attract foreign trade should be courteous, dignified, conservative in statement and absolutely true. Adjectives should be expurgated whenever possible.

(From an address delivered by Claude Meeker, ex-Consul to Bradford, England before the Columbus (Ohio) Board of Trade, Sept. 7, 1897.)

In 1929, Mr. Hooper said:

> Claude Meeker was my friend, as he was the friend of all of us. His unexpected death, December 6, 1929, came as a shock to the entire city, for here he had spent the major portion of his years, and here he had risen to a position of universal respect and esteem.

And the eulogy "In Memory of Professor George Wells Knight" by George Washington Rightmire, the sixth president of The Ohio State University, on April 19, 1932, ends with these words:

> Now that he is gone, the total of what he meant to us is assuming clearer and more impressive definition.

The gentlemen of my decade knew the founders of Kit Kat. They knew them well. Osman Hooper was the founding president of Kit Kat. Claude Meeker was the tenth president. George Knight, the 15th.

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Where are you, H.E. Cherrington? You were the arts critic at the *Columbus Dispatch.*

I have your essay here. You spoke so eloquently on March 22, 1936. You presented your own message from the grave, an ethical will entitled, "If this were my last message to my survivors." But that essay is a mere fossil. A relic. A bone. A sign that you were here, but it does not describe the delight and joy of your Kit Kat experience. Your essay? It was just a shadow on the wall in Plato's cave.

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Reading these old essays and eulogies is like watching the death scene at the opera. The soprano just won't drop. She sings on, ringing like a bell, like we all do, trying to stay alive and, if possible, to stay in the moment.

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There is one day each year that I find it very easy to live in the present. It is a surprisingly nourishing experience, surprising because it is *Yom Kippur*, the Jewish day of atonement, well known as a fast day. There is no eating, no drinking, no bathing. (Why is another essay.) Whatever the reasons, Yom Kippur is the very opposite of Kit Kat's banquetry, yet they share a powerful similarity.

Rabbi Michael Paley, for many years the chaplain at Columbia University, teaches that *Yom Kippur* is different from all holidays in that it is the same day each year. Not that it falls on the same day of each year, as Thanksgiving falls on the fourth Thursday of November. No. Rabbi Paley teaches that *Yom Kippur* is the *same* day, the very same day, recurring each year. Each year is a circle, with one day in common, with us returning to the same moment and we relive the day.

It is like Bill Murray's spiritually renown movie, the 1993 classic, *Groundhog Day*, where Murray, playing Phil Connors, an egocentric TV weatherman, wakes up day after day to relive the same day. Angela Zito, a co-director of the Center for Religion and

Media at New York University, screens the film for students in her Buddhism class. She says that *Groundhog Day* perfectly illustrates the Buddhist notion of *samsara*, the continuing cycle of rebirth that Buddhists regard as suffering that humans must try to escape.

Yom Kippur is a Jewish version of *Groundhog Day*. There really is little to distinguish one *Yom Kippur* from another. The menu is the same. The liturgy is the same. We are hungry and thirsty. We have headaches from hunger and dehydration. We have foul breath. We are grumpy. But we have returned. In fact, the central theme for the day is *teshuva*, *return.* We seek to to return to who we are, our authentic selves. There can be great meaning.

But the day is just like last year. And the year before that.

The entire day is like that.

Change is often — just as we see today in Egypt — resisted until inevitable. On Yom Kippur, people complain about changes. Everyone wants to hear the tunes they remember from their childhood.

Kit Kat is that way. The small things change: who speaks, about what, what food is served. But think for a moment: what are the biggest changes, the biggest innovations you can recall at Kit Kat?

[long pause.]

None come to mind.

Our website? It is just a new version of our old Membership Binder.

Emailed meeting notices? That is nothing. It is nothing. And, believe you me, it gets pushback and complaints. *Oy*, how you Kats *kvetch*.

But the website and meeting notices are not Kit Kat. They are the shadows in Plato's cave, mere reminders of the real thing that is Kit Kat.

So Kit Kat is more than any one essay. It is more than any one person.

Is it the food?

No, the menu is always changing. And, I believe, what we love about Kit Kat is not what changes, but what stays the same.

So what is predictable in the food?

Of course, it is the *presentation of the menu*. When Gary Ness rises as Christopher Katt, you smile. "Here he comes again," you think, "just as he always does, just as surely someone as Christopher Katt has done for the past 100 years." Like Sean ringing a prayer bowl, like Denny saying "splendid," Gary rises and presents delicious words — in an unchanging way — that are always reduced to a mouth-watering, culinary promise.

Gary?

[Gary stands: "I think you will find this delightful." — or whatever he chooses to say. — P.S. (written after the essay) Gary delivered a

beautiful mini-essay recommending that *bon appetit* be a post-meal blessing.]

Thank you, Gary.

The essence of Kit Kat? It isn't the food — though we love it. It isn't any one essay. It isn't any one member. It is the constancy of the experience. We return for what is the same.

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This is the central point of this essay: that Kit Kat addresses a basic human desire to stop time, to understand *What Now?*

At Kit Kat, we are trying to return to a familiar moment. In a world and life that might pass by in a ceaseless blur, we seek the predictable texture of something we know. That we might, for a moment each month, live in the present. Right now.

Our occupations are left at the door. We are simply human beings. And, at Kit Kat, we practice the art of being human.

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I would like to conclude — which does not mean that this essay is near the end, but rather entering its last, potentially dreadfully long segment — with a list of four methods I employ in my pursuit of living in the present. Honestly, I fail at all of these every day. I have not developed in myself an ability to live in the present. That is the goal of my next ten years.

I'm good at living in the present. I'm witty, I fire off emails and social networking messages fast — rather poetically: digital haiku. But I can easily find myself drowning in this back-and-forth, living in the now but being nothing more than a reflection of the conversations I am in.

So how now? How do I create a sense of now that is not lost in the hunt for — and reaction to — the next text message and the next response?

Here is what I long to do:

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1. Seek silence.

I already don't watch television. And I drive in silence, without radio, more and more. I don't want others to tell me what to think. (I get enough news from my daily newspapers.)

I want to return to meditation.

I first heard about Transcendental Meditation ("TM") when I was 14 years old. (My son Duncan — here with us tonight as my guest — is 14 years old, so I learned how to meditate one generation ago.) My sister Dory had moved away to college and reported that she had learned TM, so I asked my parents for permission to learn.

Years earlier, The Beatles had gone to live with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the great popularizer of TM, but to me, The Beatles were a source of music, not spirituality.

At 14, I was unable to drive to the short series of TM lessons: an introductory group meeting, another group meeting to discuss the mind-body connection, a private meeting with the teacher to receive my *mantra* — a sound that is, for me, much like the ringing of a prayer bell — and to meditate with the teacher, more group meetings with meditation and sharing of experiences, and occasional "checkings," where I would meditate beside the teacher, in private, and briefly acknowledge the experience.

At the end of any meditation session with the teacher, he would ask a single question. "Was it good?" He was very specific with this basic question. He explained one day that we were not to ask ourselves, "How well did we do?" but rather, "Was it good?"

That's much like the answer I give Alisa when she asks, "How was Kit Kat?" I give her some details, but the answer always starts like the measure of meditation. I smile, recalling the experience and say, simply, "It was good."

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2. Pause to draw.

Since my last essay, I have twice walked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. (Both times with Duncan, far ahead of me.)

The first time, I was so preoccupied with survival, with making it back up to the Rim the next day, that I never experienced a moment of Now. The second time, last November, I took a sketch pad and drawing pencil. They would prompt me to focus on the reality of the moment. (As it turned out, it was November and too cold to draw. But I sat for hours in different places, aware of the

sketch pad in my pack, staring at the natural glory as if I were drawing it. Next time — in a couple years, I hope — I will go during warmer weather and draw.)

For now, I seek to draw every day.

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3. Stop. Breathe.

Thich Nhat Hahn, the Buddhist monk, teaches this poem. Here it is. (It doesn't rhyme. It's not that kind of poem.) Four short lines:

> *Breathing in, I relax my body.*
> *Breathing out, I smile.*
> *Dwelling in the present moment,*
> *This is a wonderful moment.*

Like much poetry, it is deceptively simple. Let's break it down.

> *Breathing in, I relax my body.*

That's easy enough. Let's do it together.

> *Breathing in, I relax my body.*
> *Breathing out, I smile.*

It's not one of those broad smiles. It's a subtle smile like Mona Lisa's. An understated smile like the Buddha's. A smile that is enough to make your body think you are happy about something.

Let's try. Smile.

The last two lines are more conceptual:

> *Dwelling in the present moment,*
> *This is a wonderful moment.*

This just states that life is lived in the present. And this moment is a wonderful moment.

Any moment, even washing dishes, can be a wonderful moment if you will it so.

And, if you recite this poem as you drive your car, you will be a better driver.

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Amid this list of methods for keeping me focused on the present, I will mention that there are many popular methods I avoid: abuse of alcohol and drugs, extramarital affairs and the like. These are attempts for mortals to grasp at the present, to live in the now. I avoid them because they make life more complex and I seek simplicity.

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Here is the final method I mention tonight that I use to keep myself focused on the present:

4. Celebrate small victories.

This comes from a speech given by General Electric's former CEO, Jack Welch, who was born in 1935, during my decade of Centennial essays. That is coincidentally the same year of birth as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso. As the head of state and the spiritual leader of Tibet, living in exile, The Dalia Lama is the complete opposite of Jack Welch.

Jack Welch infamously won the nickname "Neutron Jack," by firing more people than anyone else ever — like a neutron bomb, he eliminated employees, but left the buildings intact. He once gave a speech to a worldwide gathering of the Young Entrepreneurs Organization. He asked the assembly of entrepreneurs, hard charging, successful entrepreneurs, "Who here, by a show of hands, who here has celebrated — truly celebrated — a victory during the past month?" No hands were raised.

"Come on now," Mr. Welch continued, "I'm not talking about a grand party. Who has at least celebrated a victory by stopping on the way home for a nice bottle of wine to share with your spouse?" Still only a few hands were raised.

Mr. Welch was disgusted. Here he faced some of the most successful, luckiest people in the history of the world. And they did not, would not, perhaps could not pause to smell the roses — to raise a glass to their own happiness.

In that, Jack Welch, the opposite of the Dalai Lama was calling for a return to the present. Both teachers — Welch and the Dalai Lama

— know that the best trophy is a moment's satisfaction, a moment fully engaged in the present.

Welch watches the future and strives for a better tomorrow and so does the Dalia Lama. And both know that it is undignified to ignore that we are living the best lives in the history of humanity. Especially with the vast number of our fellow humans who have no clean water, no sanitary conditions, we need to appreciate our good fortune (and not just in our 401Ks). Our good fortune is in the now, right now. With all our wealth, Now is all we have.

My wife, Alisa, puts it simply: "At the end of life, all we have is our relationships." And, I might add, our relationships live in the Now.

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Another ringing of bells, please. I understand that this essay might be less memorable for its words than for the series of sounds produced by others.

For this ringing, I need all of you. It is traditional, we all know, to tap one's glass with a spoon in order to introduce a speaker.

I ask that each of you pick up a spoon and tap — as quietly as possible — on your glass. And as we do it, listen deeply to the sound and let it bring you further into the present moment.

[The members tap their glasses.]

What now?

I leave you with this thought: I am not motivated by our archives. Our archives at the Ohio Historical Society have as much to do with the Kit Kat experience as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame has to do with attending a Pink Floyd concert. They are shadows in Plato's cave.

What we have here is the real thing. I want the real thing and I want to help us focus on that real thing. My essay is for you tonight, now, not for the archaeologists who won't be impressed with my essay anyway.

I am motivated to explore *What Now?* because living in the present is not an extravagance. It's an obligation, because it's the only way we can figure out who we are, so we might become our most authentic selves. And we must become our most authentic selves to maximize our power, so that we might be most helpful to the world.

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A blessing: May neither food nor essays get in the way of what is familiar about Kit Kat, of what returns us to a celebration of life, of love, and of *What Now?*

I long to hear your questions and comments — possibly the richest, most valuable, monthly expression of *What Now?* — but with one difference. I ask that, at the end of the meeting, we not leap up and strike out for the door.

I ask for 15 seconds more at the very end of our meeting.

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[Questions and comments.]

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[After the questions and after the President's comments, Sean Allen rings the Buddhist prayer bowl.]

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Bibliography