

Past...Present...Future...

It's Tense!



A Journey from Self Exploration to Self Actualisation

Khayaal

Thoughts from and within

A stack of several old, worn books with various colored covers (brown, blue, green) and pages. The books are piled on top of each other, and a red semi-transparent overlay is placed over the top portion of the stack. The text is written in white on this overlay.

Editorial Notes

Dear Readers,
We are happy to announce that we are reviving our newsletter Khayaal. Khayaal presents a platform to share thoughts. In this volume, we are looking at living in the present. Views of those who practice living in the present are shared here with how positively it impacts their everyday lives.

“Present was a train of freedom. Wisdom, I realized, lies in the present. Not in the past or future. Even as I kept filling my backpack, it still felt light. Being in the here and now changed my perspective so much! Or was it the other way round?”

Editor's Notes

Brooding, Daydreaming and Present – the three trains stood on the first three platforms. I had tickets to all three of them. I wanted to catch the Daydreaming train! It was my favourite train! Here, through one window, I could see lush green expanses, but through the other, I could see only barren land. I could see the sea on one side, while a desert on the other. There were birds and animals on one side, but when I looked out through the other window, there was no life out there. There were pretty colourful flowers and tall trees on one side, while only few cacti on the other. I would often sit on one side, enjoying the magnificence of life, while sometimes, I would go to the other side and sympathize with myself through all the catastrophes. But Daydreaming suddenly left the platform before I could catch it.

So I turned to Brooding. Ah, Brooding! This certainly was the next best train! On Brooding, there was no space to keep my backpack. I'd have to carry it all the time...but I guess I could do that. One side of the train's windows wouldn't ever open. They were always closed and locked. You face that window and you see the shutter...that's all. While on the other side, you could see the ghosts of the past; the zombies and monsters and demons and fiends. I could sit there for hours together and sulk and whine and throw tantrums and crib and badger myself! That sounded like an amazing idea! Plus I had my friends who always visited me on that train! Guilt, sadness, jealousy, fear, possessiveness and anger – they would always come and spend time with me without fail. I could bask in the ecstasy of lament! Oh how addictive this journey was!

As I was about to climb on to Brooding, a whistle sounded from Platform no. 3. It was Present. Both Brooding and Present were about to leave in five minutes. I had five minutes to decide. But I would have to climb the staircase to get to platform no. 3...I'd rather get on to Brooding. But then, Present was a train of freedom. On that train, I had the choice to keep my window open, half-open or closed. There was also enough space to keep my backpack. There were other people on that train. There was tea and coffee, and *garmagaram bhajiyas* as well! There were smiling faces and peaceful landscapes. Guilt, sadness, anger and fear would at times pay me a visit, but they'd leave after a while. Since joy and faith were my constant companions, I could keep the devil at bay.

One and a half minutes to decide. I was still contemplating whether it was worth the trouble of climbing the staircase and running to the other platform with my backpack. Another whistle sounded from platform no. 3, and on impulse, I made a dash for the Present. I caught the train just in the nick of time. With all the huffing and puffing, I realized I was still smiling. The mirror above the window showed a pretty face; after a very long time, I noticed how I looked. I took my seat, as joy and faith flanked me, and checked my backpack. There were several old ideas, beliefs, feelings and packages in there, rusting and rotting in stagnancy. A little cleaning would do well, I thought. Tearing the Daydreaming and Brooding tickets apart, I let go of them. Some sense of freedom and gratitude filled me. The backpack felt light; almost empty. I decided to explore the train, as well as every station it stopped at. But this time, I was careful to not take everything that came my way. Wisdom, I realized, lies in the present. Not in the past or future. Even as I kept filling my backpack, it still felt light. Being in the here and now changed my perspective so much! Or was it the other way round?

I got back to my seat and enjoyed a cup of hot ginger-tea, listening to the pleasant chugging of the train, looking at the beckoning horizons. I looked around and saw life. I looked within and saw life. It was that life within that guided me to the right train. The train sped on; I opened the window and the cool breeze caressed my hair and face, as my backpack lay in the corner.

- Uttara Iyer, Junior Counselor,
Maanas The Inside Story...



From the Director' s Desk

“My past is my reality and it does have its impact on me but I have heard the wisdom of life and only taken from my past what I need for my learning and growth. The rest is all a story. My Story, just like anyone else’s story. For me it is right now that matters. Every moment, how fully and completely I am immersed in it. Experiencing all that my journey has to offer me and sends my way. Being in it to live it, so in case I do survive to see that future, I would have a bag full of lovely memories that I would have created. Memories not full of that past when my journey wasn’t in my hands but memories of a time when I could choose what to live. My choices and my decision to live would define my memories.”

Heaven is Here... ...In Every Single Moment

Two creatures were sitting side by side at heaven's gate. One looking healthy, happy, chirpy, fresh. The other looking dull, sick, tired and listless. Both sitting there, waiting for the gates to open. They had both been given a particular time of arrival and they waited in

anticipation of what lay in store for them. The security had told them that someone from inside will be coming shortly to receive them. Slowly as time kept passing, a realisation crept in that punctuality isn't necessarily something that one can anticipate in heaven too! As people do when often having to wait, they read something, looked around, got up, took a stroll and checked their cell phones. Finally, as the urge to converse took over, they looked at each other and smiled. One said to the other, "Hello. I am Ms. Life." The other looking a little startled replied, "Hello! I am Ms. Life too." Now it was the first one's chance to feel surprised and she said, "Okay, but what is your full name? Because mine is Ms. Sad Life." The other one replied, "Well, I am Ms. Happy Life." Sad life said, "If we both belong to the same family tree, how come we never knew each other on earth?" Happy Life said, "Maybe because sadness and happiness don't get along too well..." Sad Life said, "Ya, as it is who would even want to know me?" Happy Life asked, "Why would people not want to know you?" Sad Life said, "The way I appear, did you feel like knowing me or making friends with me?" Happy Life said, "Honestly, not at the first look. You look so tired and sick, I felt something was really wrong and that I should just let you rest." Sad Life said, "Yes I am so damn tired and you know the irony is that while the body in which I inhabited kept saying she is sick and tired of Life, I got tired of her. And do you know Happy Life, you and I started the same, pure bundles of energy but I should congratulate you. You sure are lucky to have inhabited a wise person!!!" Happy Life said, "So true, the person I inhabited really knew how to live me!"

With that the discussion turned towards their journey and bodily experiences. Sad Life shared how the person or body she inhabited was always either lost in memories of the past, sad memories, bitter memories, scary memories. Most of her waking time would go in thinking of the past and that would generate a lot of disturbing emotions and make her angry or fearful or sad. Anyone in her life, even remotely resembling someone from her childhood, she would start projecting things on to them and then recreate those entire set of disturbing emotions for herself. People would try to come close to her and love her but through her fears and fights, she would push everyone away. Even when she thought of the future, she would anticipate negative and catastrophic events. "Years went by and every time someone would try and tell her to come out of her vicious cycle of bitterness, she would say, 'But I am unable to'. Even I would tell her from within, 'See that flower blooming in your garden, see the sun looks so warm and pretty today, see that workshop or experience seems happiness giving, see that person makes a lot of sense'. But all my attempts and my voices from within she would snub. Every single attempt would be reprimanded. Not just that, in her anger, she would actually use a hammer and squash me. If for too long, she didn't get anyone to throw her bitterness and anger on, she would hurt her body, damage it or hurt me and my voice. Gradually, she restricted my circulation to all parts of her. I couldn't reach her brain to rejuvenate any new thoughts. I couldn't reach her heart as it froze more and more. I couldn't reach her skin as it dried up and became listless. I couldn't reach her face and eyes as they became non-radiant and joyless. I kept telling her not to do this, not to restrict me as she was inviting trouble. But she didn't listen and as predicted, in all those places that I couldn't reach, death started taking over. Bit by bit, area by area, death claimed her and ate into her body. You know Happy Life, sitting helplessly inside her, I had only one wish. If and only if she would have decided to choose me. Even if she would have chosen to live one moment of her life fully and completely, I could have made her realise how beautiful life can be. But she never, simply never ever gave me a chance. That is the cause of my sadness today. I spent an entire tenure on earth, without getting even a single chance to express or experience myself fully inside her or through her. What a waste and I couldn't even explain to her what she was losing out on as she kept telling me she wants *Mukti* or salvation from me..."

Happy Life felt saddened by this and while she empathised with Sad Life, her narration also took Happy Life back to her journey on earth. She reflected on what she had been able to experience in the human body or person she had resided in. A smile came on Happy Life's face as she recollected how the person she was in, just knew what living was about. Brought up in difficult circumstances, the person she resided in was never bitter. In fact, it was the other way round. Having gone through the childhood experiences that she had with her biological family dying before she was 10 and many other emotional support systems abandoning her by 15, she had made it a principle of her life – We don't know what is in store tomorrow. What we have is today. With that sowed deeply within her, she lived each moment, each experience, each relationship and each circumstance with fullness. She would always radiate with joy and energy, giving others things and love both. Merrily gardening and cooking and going for her work and taking care of her adopted kids. Whenever people would ask her, "Don't you have any issues, you always look so cheerful", she would say, "Yes indeed but I also always have Life with me and within me." When they would ask her, "Don't you feel sad about your past?" she would say, "My past is my reality and it does have its impact on me but I have heard the wisdom of life and only taken from my past what I need for my learning and growth. The rest is all a story. *My Story*, just like anyone else's story." When others asked, "Don't you worry about the future?" she would say, "So many have died around me in an untimely manner, I don't know when it will be my time; today, tomorrow or 10 years from now. So I don't really know what future means. For me it is right now that matters. Every moment, how fully and completely I am immersed in it. Experiencing all that my journey has to offer me and sends my way. Being in it to live it, so in case I do survive to see that future, I would have a bag full of lovely memories that I would have created. Memories not full of that past when my journey wasn't in my hands but memories of a time when I could choose what to live. My choices and my decision to live would define my memories."

These thoughts made Happy Life, very glad and content about the person she had been given. As the smile on her kept growing, Sad Life also started smiling. Happy Life realised she had been narrating everything aloud. Sad Life said, "Do you know what I think of Heaven? I think it is a place where lives get to choose the body they will go into." By the time she completed the statement, the doors of heaven open and some entity with no form really came forward and called out Sad Life's name. The entity said Sad Life could enter and will be reassigned the next body for another set of experiences. Sad Life asked, "But what about Happy Life, isn't she supposed to enter?" The entity said, "No. Happy Life could just go anywhere, she was free." Happy Life confused, said, "Free? Don't Happy Lives get an entry to heaven?"

The entity said, "Well this is not heaven. This is just a processing centre, to recirculate lives, till the person they inhabit understands what is heaven. You my dear were already in heaven. Past the first 15 years of the journey, all the time that you spent in that body was heaven. People on earth very often think that heaven is something they reach in the future. But that is not true. Every single moment that they decide to live joyfully, completely, immersed and experiencing everything that the journey has to offer, learning from what the journey sends their way, grateful for every breath that comes and goes, experiencing the energy called life within them, and all the possibilities that lie in each moment. All the different futures they can direct their lives towards and the abundance that life has to offer them and that they can create for themselves and others. All this is possible because in every moment, they are still breathing in and out and till that cycle doesn't stop, they are alive. The ones who find their life, don't wait for heaven any more. They found heaven and what it means. They know the wisdom of life – a wisdom through which they know that Heaven is not somewhere in the future, not with any person, after a particular success, post an achievement, after a particular life stage, post a particular responsibility. Heaven is here, within them. It is in Every Single Moment they decide to live fully..."

- Meenakshi Kirtane, Director, Psychotherapist and Counselor, Maanas The Inside Story...



From the Expert's Viewpoint

“If I live in the present, it doesn’t mean I don’t think about my yesterdays and tomorrows. I take a few moments at the end of the day to think about what happened this day or whatever comes to mind from the past or worry about the future. I make it a point to recall and apply learning from my past mistakes and try to chalk out my future plans accordingly. All of this either as a mental note or a diary entry and I’m done. For the next day, I don’t think or brood over the past or future. I just register the now. So when the day begins, I’m experiencing the day as is, where is, using all my senses to the fullest.”

Living in the Present – A Conversation with The Old Me

Hi! What's new?

Me: The usual... You seem a little pensive today.. anything the matter?

I: I was just thinking about a phrase that I came across today and I found it intriguing- Living in the present and it set me thinking ..Do we live in the present?

Me: What? What does that mean? Don't we all live in the present?

I: Yes, technically, or I guess physically, we all do. But are we completely present in thoughts and feelings in today?

Me: You know I never thought about it before. I guess most of our thoughts are more about the past or future and that seems more real than today!!

I: So, if the thoughts are of yesterday or tomorrow, then it follows that our feelings would also be about yesterday and tomorrow!

Me: Oh right! So are you saying that we are physically present and mentally absent?

I: Seems like it...

Me: This is terrible! Then what are we supposed to do about the present?! When do we think about today?

I: Well, if we go by the usual way we do things, then you would have already thought about today sometime in the past or will think about it tomorrow or day after...

Me: But that's of no use to me today! Why would I do this?! Makes no sense at all!

I: We still do it...

Me: Yes, I get that. But what will we do about today? When do I live it, experience it, feel it? If I don't, then what's the point? It's just 'existing' isn't it, not living. But if we stop thinking about the yesterdays and tomorrows, how will we learn from the past or plan our future? Wait...If I do that, I'm not living in the present... This is so confusing! I don't know what to do anymore! Help!

I: Whoa whoa; hold on! Looks like you're getting really worked up...

Me: Yes, and you started this. So you better fix this!

I: Alright, listen... If I live in the present, it doesn't mean I don't think about my yesterdays and tomorrows. I do, but not always. I take a few moments at the end of the day to think about what happened this day or whatever comes to mind from the past or worry about the future. I do all of that to my heart's content. I make it a point to recall and apply learning from my past mistakes and try to chalk out my future plans accordingly. All of this either as a mental note or a diary entry and I'm done. For the next day, I don't think or brood over the past or future. I just register the now. So when the day begins, I'm experiencing the day as is, where is, using all my senses to the fullest. When I open my eyes, I look at the world around me, I'm aware of the air that I breathe, the sounds I hear, the food I taste. I'm aware of my thoughts and actions, and they're all about here and now. I live today in my today, not postponing it to tomorrow, as that will become my past.

Me: It sounds doable I guess, but don't you have trouble with your thoughts running away from you?

I: Oh yes, in fact when my thoughts ran, I ran behind them and we would have had a merry trip around the world for hours before I would realize that the day was over and I was standing exactly where I had started from..

Me: It sounds like a dog chasing it's own tail...

I: That's it in a nut shell... Then I would be angry and frustrated but none the wiser.. there were too many things that I wanted to do and not enough time to do them so why was I wasting so much of something so less? Time is after all precious and finite.. I decided to use it as it is meant to be..live it

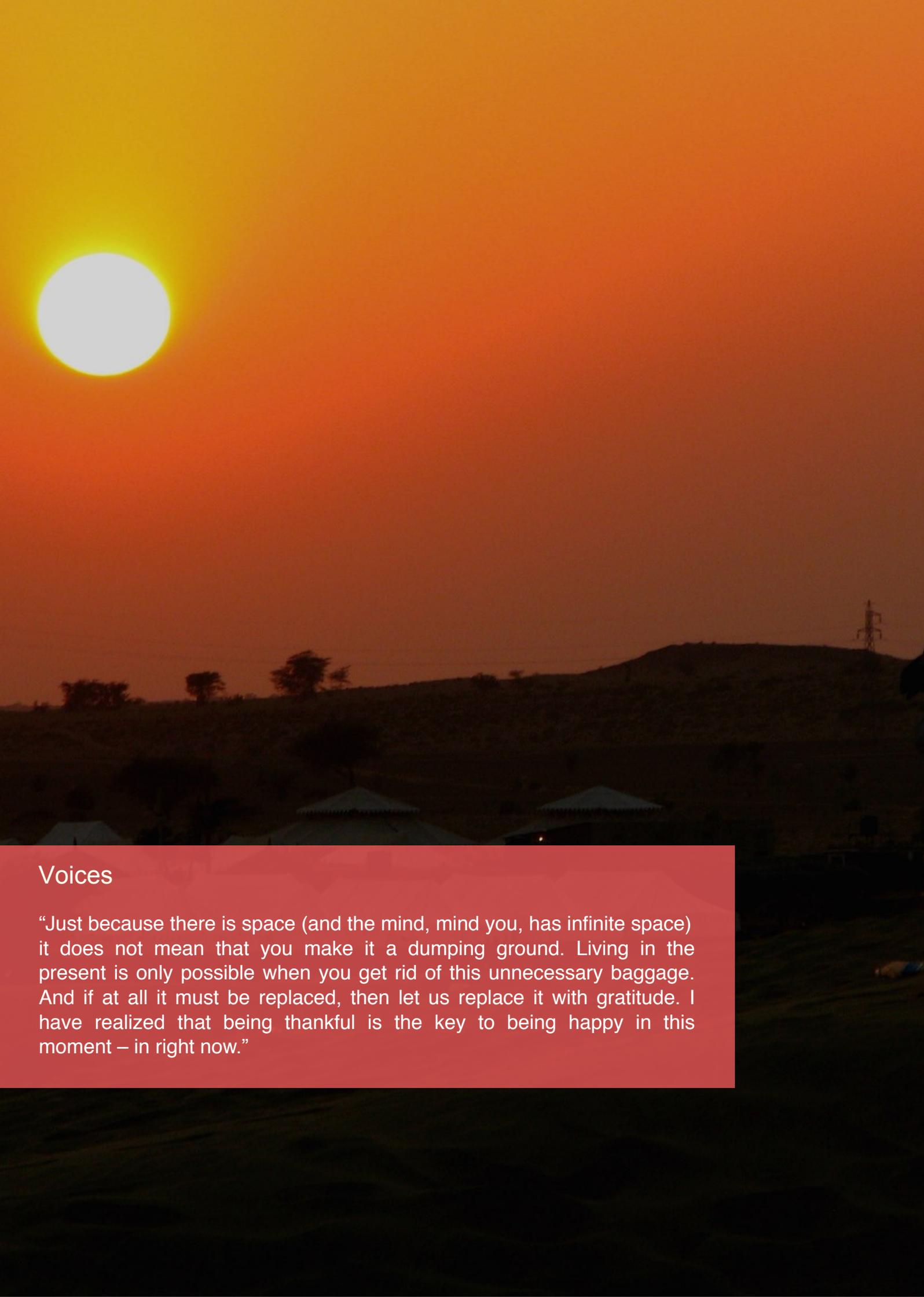
Me: What do you do then?

I: I think – but use it to make sense and to find meaning – and I do - to live that meaning ; in short my being and doing are in the here and now...

And that is what I call living in the present...

Me : So I guess the now begins now...

- Shilpa Khokle, Psychotherapist, Maanas The Inside Story



Voices

“Just because there is space (and the mind, mind you, has infinite space) it does not mean that you make it a dumping ground. Living in the present is only possible when you get rid of this unnecessary baggage. And if at all it must be replaced, then let us replace it with gratitude. I have realized that being thankful is the key to being happy in this moment – in right now.”

This New Year, Gift Yourself THE Present!

My father is the No-Baggage Man (like Superman, Batman...you know?) – be it while travelling or his emotional frame of mind. He carries the minimal. His mailbox, SMS folder etc are always empty; unless it's an important message/contact/photograph. I often wonder why he takes the pain of deleting everything when there is so much space available, that too for free!

And that answers my own question. Just because there is space (and the mind, mind you, has infinite space) it does not mean that you make it a dumping ground. And this is especially difficult for people like me. I consider myself a memory hoarder. For instance, I can't delete old pictures easily, even if I have backup on my computer. I cling onto moments for long, long after they are gone. But sometimes, that can be very unhealthy for one's peace of mind.

Yes, we all know that living in the present is only possible when you get rid of this unnecessary baggage. And if at all it must be replaced, then let us replace it with gratitude. I have realised that being thankful is the key to being happy in this moment – in right now.

So let us consciously try to make some changes in the way we think. Let us be thankful for what we are blessed with, with what we have. If we don't have something but are able to achieve it, let us be thankful for the strength and perseverance. Let us be thankful for the hardships because these add up to make us the people we are – ever evolving, always learning.

Just imagine, if a single moment in your life was to be any different, the sum total of YOU would be different. And really, would you want that?

The best way to bring your mind back from the past/future is to keep yourself busy. And this does not only mean your job/household chores/studies. Develop a hobby that has always fascinated you - enroll in that dance or singing class that you always wanted to, make DIY items, try a recipe, watch an old film or read a classic! There is an endless list of things for which we think 24 hours are not enough. So start on one of those. This will not only bring you back to the present but also help you find joy in the tiniest things.

Happy 2016

- Arpita Vadgama, Correspondent, Journalist

Tips to Start Living in the Present

- Remove unnecessary possessions
- Smile and laugh more often
- Notice the world around you
- Keep altering and adding variety to monotonous routines
- Practice gratitude
- Soak in as much of today as possible
- Forgive past hurts
- Love your job
- Single-task more than multitasking

"If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace, you are living in the present."

- Lao Tzu

About Us

Maanas is a Counseling and Psychotherapy Centre that provides services to various sectors and strata of the society. We are an organisation that has a strong remedial as well as preventive focus. We are a group of experienced psychotherapists who believe that each one of us is here to live, experience and express our unique journey called life, and that everyone has the seeds in them to self-actualize their potentials. The entire Maanas team has extensive teaching, training and counselling experience. Please find more details on our website: www.maanas.org.in