

## Live Like You Mean It\*

*Woke up, got out of bed,  
Dragged a comb across my head,  
Found my way downstairs and drank a cup,  
And looking up I noticed I was late.  
Found my coat and grabbed my hat,  
Made the bus in seconds flat,  
Found my way upstairs and had a smoke,  
And somebody spoke and I went into a dream.*  
John Lennon and Paul McCartney – A Day in the Life

Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans. John Lennon

It's January. Last year came and went. Maybe you celebrated the coming of the New Year or maybe you didn't. Maybe you made a list of resolutions or maybe you didn't. Maybe you watched the ball drop on Time's Square or maybe you didn't. It doesn't matter. The New Year has begun despite your efforts to embrace or avoid it. This means that last year and all the years that preceded it are over. It's time to let go of yesterday's successes and failures and tune into where you are now. If you live your life numbed out and disconnected like the character in the Beatles' song *A Day in the Life*, or so busy making other plans, you are losing out on the possibility to live, to really experience your life, today.

The tragedy is that even though what most of us want more than anything is the experience of being totally alive, most of us don't have a clue about how to do this. Instead we plod through meaningless or only half lived lives and escape with food, drugs, alcohol, shopping, sex, TV or a thousand other distractions. We are afraid to risk looking at the stories and feelings from the past that keep us stuck. Most of us have gotten so good at avoiding these stories and feelings that we don't even know who we are or what we want.

You can start this process by asking yourself, "Who am I?" Take a moment to breathe into the question and drop down into a place beneath all the superficial details. Don't worry about the answer. It will come when you're ready. The exercise described below will help you scrape away the labels that other people have imposed on you and find who you are at the core of your being. Maybe you were the high school reject or maybe you were part of the popular crowd. Maybe you spent your high school years pleading with God to not make you gay or maybe you dated every guy you could find to prove that you weren't a lesbian. The truth is that unless you are still in high school, this no longer matters. You also have to dig beneath all the roles (e.g. computer programmer, accountant, activist, Mom, son) that you play. You have to accept that your eye sight isn't what it was, that you might be a little more cynical or wary than you used to be, that your body has changed and that your abs and glutes are different.

Second, ask yourself "What do I want?" It's easy to focus on things like a fab new car, six pack abs, a hot sexy honey, great sex, a new job, winning the lottery or a vaca in the Bahamas. If this is what you come up with, I want to challenge you to

go deeper. What would the new car, the six pack abs, or the winning lottery ticket, give you? More importantly, what is your life's dream?

Take these questions seriously. You're worth it. Carve out at least five or ten minutes to sit with these questions every day for two weeks. When you do this practice, find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted. Turn off your cell phone and put it in a different room. It's hard to get present when texts are coming in. Get comfortable and set a timer so that you don't have to worry about the time. And begin by taking a few deep breaths and notice how that feels in your body. Then ask the questions, "Who am I?" "What do I want?" Repeat these questions silently in your head a few times and then let the answers flow as you continue to breathe. Don't worry about writing them down, you can do that later if you'd like. After a couple of minutes, let go of the questions and the answers and bring your awareness to your breath. When you catch yourself hanging on to thoughts, let them go and drift your awareness back to your breath. Continue this process of breathing, drifting away and drifting back until your timer goes off or your ten minutes are up.

In the meantime, outside this practice, let go of the questions entirely. Let your subconscious mind do the work for you and give yourself permission to do those things that bring you happiness. Give yourself time to watch the sunset. Rather than rushing off to work, take a few moments to cuddle with your partner. When you eat a piece of chocolate, savor it. Take time to play with your pets or your kids. When you do the dishes, notice what the warm water feels like as it washes over your hands. Rather than tuning out to yet another episode of *The Golden Girls* or *Burn Notice*, tune into the feelings you would otherwise be avoiding and let yourself feel them. If you need a hug, ask for one. If you're sad, let yourself cry. If you're happy, let the joy bubble up from the depths of your belly. Dance as if no one is watching. Sing to the radio. Let this year be the year that you live like you mean it and experience what it feels like to be truly alive.

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