

Do Nothing for a Moment

**WE SPEND FAR TOO MUCH TIME AUTOMATICALLY SWITCHING
GEARS INTO 'DOING' MODE, AND IT'S DIFFICULT TO
SOMETIMES SIMPLY BE. JOCELYN DE KWANT LOOKS INTO
'DOING' THINGS DIFFERENTLY.**

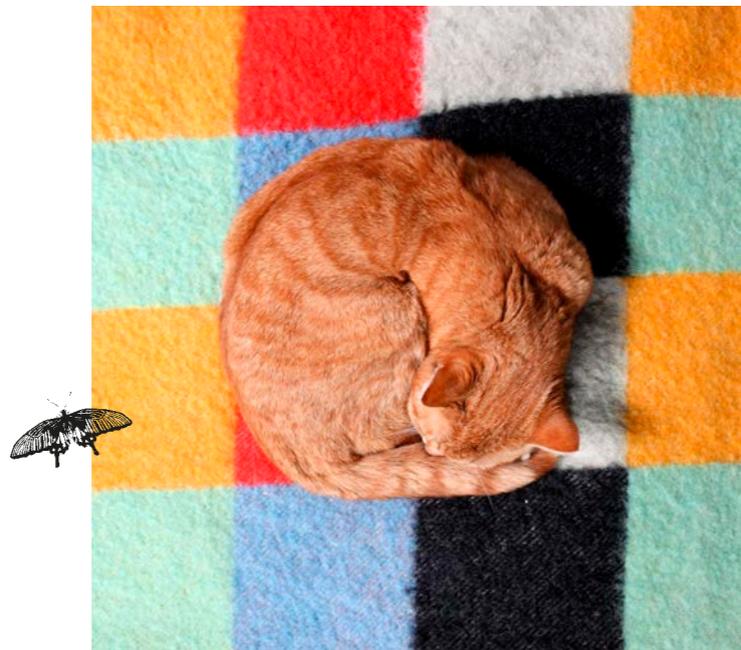
It was one of those videos that makes its way around online, shared by Facebook friends. A couple of sweet old ladies are talking about things they regret now, as they are nearing the end of their lives. The core message came at the end of the clip. And it wasn't seize the day, or follow your heart, but much simpler: "If I could do it all over again," one of them says with a regretful smile, "I would try to spend more time just being, instead of doing." In the rush to get from one place to another, life had passed them by. By always being busy, they had spent too little time in the moment. Maybe it was the simplicity of the message that spoke to me so powerfully. In 40 years' time, it'll be me sitting there with my friends, I realized, and I will have the same regret. Because I spend all day doing things, too. Even when I'm reading a book or playing a

game with my kids, I feel like I should be doing something else. There is always one more thing to do or to work on, always some message to answer on my phone. And before I know it, I've watched another dozen of these video clips on Facebook and signed three petitions for very important causes as if, otherwise, the world would stop turning.

GETTING THINGS DONE

Somehow, in our busy society, simply 'being' has become something that is frowned upon. This is what mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn said during a speech for Google employees, who are pretty much at the pinnacle of the 'doing' culture. He talks about how Western society is addicted to 'getting things done' and crossing things off our to-do list. But that one thing that never

>



“WAITING, BEING QUIET, DOING ONE THING AT A TIME, LOAFING ABOUT. THESE ARE THINGS WE HAVE LOST THE ABILITY TO DO OVER THE YEARS AND NOW FIND DIFFICULT”

isn't that complicated at all," Van Eelen says. "Imagine looking back on your life and thinking of all the good moments. They weren't the moments when you thundered through life without thought. They were the moments in which you were completely present."

'seize the moment'?" He nods and she thinks about it some more, before adding, "I don't know, I'm kinda thinking it's the other way around. You know, like the moment seizes us." To which Mason is silent at first and then says, "Yeah, I know. It's constant—the moment. It's just... It's like it's always right now." ●

TWELVE YEARS LATER

The movie *Boyhood* nicely illustrates how life flies by when you aren't paying attention. Director Richard Linklater filmed the main characters—a broken family with two children—for a few days every year for twelve years in a row. At the beginning of the movie, six-year-old Mason is lying on his back philosophizing about where wasps come from. At the end of the movie, everyone is twelve years older and you can sense—especially in the mother, played by Patricia Arquette—a slight panic at how fast everything has gone. Milestones have slipped by almost unnoticed, and suddenly her children are all grown up. In the last scene, an eighteen-year-old Mason is sitting next to his new fellow student, a pretty girl, in the evening sun. They are about to begin their studies and are looking at their new roommates who are having fun (of the space-cake variety, incidentally) a short distance away. The girl asks Mason, "You know how everyone's always saying

TIPS ON HOW TO STOP 'DOING' AND START 'BEING':

- * You are so much more than just your thoughts. Try to consciously use all your senses. What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel on your skin?
- * Everything is changing all the time, but the image you hold of things in your mind sometimes remains static. A few times a day, try to notice five new things about a situation or about people you are talking to.
- * Keep track of your breathing; it always brings you back into the moment.
- * Focus on your feet and how they are planted on the ground. This takes you out of your head for a moment.
- * A lot of unrest comes from wanting to change the situation. If you switch to 'doing' mode in a quiet moment, ask yourself, "What am I saying to myself? Where does it come from? What happens if I accept the situation as it is now?"

"This little voice is there to tell us if the environment is safe or not, it is our survival instinct," Van Eelen says. "But it is not everything that we are. We are powerfully conditioned by our upbringing and surroundings and especially focused on what is wrong. When we exist on autopilot, we are acting on old opinions and insights about ourselves and our environment." Which means that it may no longer be relevant to us at that moment in time. "When you look into what this voice is telling you about what should and shouldn't be done, you can also consider what would happen if you ignore all that. Stop and ask yourself once in a while: Is this the life I think I deserve?"

LOAF ABOUT

Waiting, being quiet, doing one thing at a time, loafing about. These are things we have lost the ability to do over the years and now find difficult. But these are precisely the skills needed to bring us back to being, back to now. As far as loafing about and being in the now is concerned,

we can learn a lot from children. Toddlers who are engrossed by their own shadow, or a dog in a window. Or teenagers who stay in bed for hours on end, without a trace of guilt. I remember the walks to the supermarket with my (then) two-year-old daughter. She would stare in literally every window, checking out its contents. And stop at every single door's mailbox, opening and closing the flap. I must have been looking vaguely annoyed one time, because an older man said to me, "Just you wait and see, one day you'll look back on these days as the best time in your life." I smiled politely but thought he was a nosey man who had no idea how often I had to walk like this with her. And now, five years later, I see he was right. Because it was really only a very short period of time that she did that. Perhaps I should have taken the time to amble along with her, sharing her discoveries without any hurry, more often. "When you regularly have these brief moments during which you experience things consciously, then 'not-doing' suddenly

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives"

Annie Dillard, American author

TEXT JOCELYN DE KWANT PHOTOGRAPHY ©MARCEL/STOCKSY UNITED

"Oh no! I overslept! I'm late! For my nap!" -Garfield, the lovable orange cat who became famous in the comic strip in which he perfects the art of doing nothing