

Introduction

Imagine a man meditating on a secluded mountaintop. Imagine another man with jiggling manboobs dancing at a rock concert. Now imagine something in between, and you have me and my approach to life. I tell you this not because I want you to envision me chesty and hairy while showing up to meet you for lunch. Rather, I want you to think about fun and faith in the same sentence. Because there is a place where the party and the prayer can coexist peacefully. There is a place where the chocolate tastes sweeter, the music sounds better, the inspiration feels richer, and the visions look clearer. That place is The Moment.

This book is an inspirational manual, a funny, irreverent guide that encourages you to protect those sacred moments when life happens and memories are formed. When we pollute the moment with excessive distraction and stimulation, it affects our ability to slow time, to record memories, and to truly appreciate life. Whether it's the chaos of the cell phone interrupting the perfection of a great sunset or the stress of work

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clouding precious time with loved ones, so many of us are missing the important moments in our lives—not because we don't care, but because we're so busy.

I believe there's an urgent need to reclaim The Moment.

The following story inspired my fascination with the impact one moment can have on a lifetime. When I was fifteen years old, I went with my dad to Game 1 of the 1988 World Series at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles. With my hometown Dodgers batting, the heavily favored Oakland A's were ahead 4–3 with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning. Things were looking bleak for the Dodgers. Their MVP Kirk Gibson was worn down from the long season and sitting out the game to rest his injured body. But in a last gasp of hope, and a man on second base, Gibson was summoned to bat.

Facing the A's dominating relief pitcher Dennis Eckersley, Gibson was so badly injured that were he to get a hit, he could barely run to first base let alone to second. He dug into the batter's box but struggled to get his bat on the ball as he fouled off pitch after pitch. The fans awaited what would surely be the overmatched Gibson's inevitable strikeout. And then the amazing happened. Gibson got a hold of a pitch and drove a high fly ball deep into the October sky and over the right-field bleachers for a home run! The Dodgers dramatically won the game and went on to win the World Series. It is still widely considered one of the greatest moments in the history of American sports.

You want to know where I was sitting when he hit that home run? In the back seat of my dad's car driving down the 405 freeway. That's right . . . we missed a moment for the ages so we could beat twenty minutes of traffic in the parking lot.

It happens to everyone. We leave early from an event because we're trying to beat the traffic or we forget to enjoy a meal because we're watching the news while eating or we fail to notice

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a full moon because who has time for a full moon when a hundred e-mails await your reply? As the great yogi Iyengar said, “We throw ourselves from one endeavor to another, believing that speed and movement is all there is in life.” And in this mission for speed and movement, we miss so much of the life experience.

For this reason, there’s an increasing need for a personal ritual or practice that enables—and delivers—sanity and clarity amid the chaos. Yoga became my way of carving out more moments. But I didn’t discover this without striking out a few times.

Right out of college, I went to work for a sports talent agent, doing PR for NBA legend Shaquille O’Neal. Shaq enjoyed calling me Slowmanelli on account of my less-than-speedy gait around the office. You could say I was oh-so-slowly finding my way.

After that job, I pursued a few other careers, but nothing really resonated until my buddy Ian Lopatin invited me to a yoga class. The energy in the room was intoxicating. I felt muscles release, tightness melt, and a clarity I didn’t know was possible. After that first class, I was hooked! Yoga got me to that same place that I’d experienced watching the Dodgers, going to Grateful Dead concerts, and pining for my latest love. Yoga was a fusion of everything—physical, mental, and emotional.

So along with some similarly inspired friends, I promptly quit my job, and headed for Arizona. We like to say we dropped a yoga bomb on Phoenix. In quick order, we opened yoga studios that are now considered pioneering in the international yoga community. The studios offer a modern presentation of the ancient practice, fusing everything you know and love about Western culture (fashion, music, technology) with everything you know and love about ancient Eastern culture (Feng Shui, sacred geometry, soothing chants). Our mission was to make yoga more accessible to the

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masses by busting through yoga's stereotype of being an overly serious, pseudo-hippie, woo-woo experience.

A few months after we opened the first studio, I started teaching yoga. I added mainstream music to my classes—from Willie Nelson to Frank Sinatra, Erykah Badu to Phish, the Gypsy Kings to George Strait—to make the ancient practice a little more familiar. I called my style Yeah Dave Yoga because in college I had a tendency to ask “profound” questions my friends didn't know how to answer so they'd simply reply, “Yeah Dave.”

To each of my yoga classes, I add a message using fun themes, quotes, and a touch of humor. My students have proven a captive audience for my questions and ideas. And more important, the questioning ensures that my students never get bored. God knows there's nothing worse than being bored. I've been known to eat at a restaurant and order the check with the meal, such is my dislike for sitting and waiting with even the slightest chance of being bored.

So, despite my life as a yoga teacher, I am hardly preaching on a pulpit of patience. For though I love yoga and travel the globe teaching it, sometimes it asks too much of a person to remain on a three-by-six yoga mat for sixty to ninety minutes. Clearly, yoga is not for everyone. But there is one benefit from yoga that is absolutely and totally relevant to everyone: an enhanced ability to live in the moment. While so many would want this ability, they might not want to do yoga to get it.

And such is my motivation for writing this book. I seek to show you there are no prerequisites to living in the moment.

While this book is influenced by yoga principles, yoga gurus (Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois), and yoga-inspired philosophers (from Wayne Dyer to Caroline Myss), you will soon realize this is not a yoga book. Living in the moment doesn't involve any crazy stretches, far-fetched formulas, or life-changing diets. It doesn't re-

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quire you to give away your possessions, commit to wearing loin-cloths, or memorize sacred texts. In fact, I will show you that living in the moment can be learned so quickly that it merits abbreviation. So I've removed the word *in*. Why? Because you need *not* fit "in" to any custom, clique, or tradition. "Livin' the Moment" simply suggests redefining the things you love most (e.g., a taste of chocolate, a sip of wine, a great tune) as gateways to the power and beauty of being present.

Here's how it works.

Every day, if you can enjoy one delicious moment, one beautiful moment, and one funny moment, you will soon recognize a meaningful life is no further away than a box of chocolates on your desk, the street musician on your walk to work, and a little heartwarming (if not sidesplitting) laughter.

How do you find a delicious moment? Allow the ecstasy of a great bite of food to deliver you to an altered state. In Italy, savoring pastries, sauces, and pastas is a means of celebrating life and carving out islands of sensory pleasure. To take a cue from Italians, surround yourself with exotic foods in your office, in your home, everywhere. Special cheeses, wonderful wines, and unique chocolates have the ability to overwhelm your senses with mouthwatering delight that demands your undivided attention.

I've spent the last five years co-creating and presenting the "Yoga + Chocolate" experience, which teaches that when you are really relaxed on your yoga mat, one bite of amazing chocolate becomes a symphony of flavor in your mouth. By taking the time to truly enjoy something delicious, you find a deep state of joy that is not far removed from the greatest feeling of all . . . love. As a wise one said, "Forget love, I'd rather fall in chocolate."

By urging you to seek a beautiful moment, I mean take the

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time to stop and enjoy a lovely landscape, view, or object. Easy enough, right? Place yourself in the following scenario to determine your ability to appreciate beauty. The *Washington Post* conducted an experiment whereby world famous violinist Joshua Bell, with his \$3.5 million antique Stradivari violin, was positioned in a Washington, DC, subway stop during rush hour. If you had seen him, he'd have looked like a street performer. But if you had truly listened, he would have sounded like one of the world's great musicians. Over the course of the forty-three minutes that Bell performed, 1,097 people hurried past, few even turning to look. Only seven people stopped, if just for a few seconds.

Would you be ready to pause and listen if you stumbled upon something like the Joshua Bell experiment? I'll be honest with you. I'm not sure I would have. It sounds simple, but truthfully, it's not easy to build the capacity, patience, and wherewithal to stop and smell the roses. Improving your ability to enjoy beauty not only helps you find substance in the crazy blur of time, it also builds character; the character to appreciate life when life is worth appreciating. As Thoreau said, "Perception of beauty is a moral test."

Last but not least, try to find a funny moment in your day. The shifting and shaking of a good laugh feels similar to the shifting and shaking felt when riding along a bumpy, obstacle-laden road. When I moved back to L.A. from Arizona in 2005, I encountered plenty such obstacles. I got a job teaching yoga at one of the more traditional studios where teachers generally don't play mainstream music. In the first class I taught in L.A., a woman showed up in a one-piece leotard (is that called a unitard?). Oh Lord, I remember thinking. Class began as did my music . . . some Bob Marley. The woman was very confused.

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She jumped out of her pose and up to her feet where she turned to me with her upraised hands as if to say, “What are you doing? Music? I don’t understand?!”

She wasn’t rude, just surprised. It was a clash of cultures and generations. I briefly explained, “This class is a Music Flow Yoga class.” She got back to doing her yoga. But I could tell she was disturbed.

The next song on my playlist was by Lauryn Hill. Once again, as if we rewound the previous scene, the Unitard Yogini jumped out of her pose and back to her feet. She gave me the same expression with her upraised hands as if to say, “What are you doing? Music? I don’t understand?!”

This time I explained in more detail that I was teaching a little different kind of class and suggested that she give the music a chance. So once again, she got back into her yoga.

The next song started playing . . . some Jack Johnson. As if we were struggling through a scratched DVD, the woman jumped out of her pose again. Part of me was mad, part of me was sympathetic, and part of me couldn’t help mentally scrolling back to when I was a kid and used to cut up tube socks trying to make baseball stirrups similar to the ones on this lady’s unitard.

This time she’d had enough, rolled up her mat, and left.

When this happened, I was already feeling sort of vulnerable, worrying that my style of music-inspired yoga might not resonate at this traditional yoga studio. I could have easily had a mental freak-out. But instead, I managed to laugh off the situation, thinking how much yoga must have changed in the Unitard Yogini’s lifetime. (I will greatly elaborate on laughter in chapter 2.) What could have been extremely stressful became a funny moment that perfectly captured my humbling first day as

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a yoga teacher in L.A. As much as it's usually a reaction, laughter can also be a choice to treat rocky moments with joy the way you'd treat bland food with salt.

Beyond the humor, there was something very meaningful about this situation. While my form of yoga was different from the Unitard Yogini's preferred style, we sought the same result: a deeply present moment. And whether you get there through laughter or food or music or yoga, it's *that* you get there, not *how* you get there, that matters most.

My hope is that while reading this book, you will be encouraged to chart your own, very personal path to the moment. Along this path, you will discover so many odd perspectives, hidden meanings, and powerful transformations. The following chapters share snapshots and stories from my path to the moment. I've learned how appreciating a glass of wine is appreciating a vibrant spirit; how savoring the scent of Drakkar Noir cologne is savoring those awkward memories of youth; how embracing the pain of a broken heart is embracing the capacity necessary to sustain love.

As you have so often heard, it is not the destination but the journey that matters most. What's so fun about this journey is that its path can be paved by yellow bricks, dusty trails, flowing chocolate, or mind-bending guitar jams. And best of all, there's no need to pack your bags. I'm about to show you how to pack your moments. They are all you need to discover untold flavors, power, and passion. As author Robin Sharma said, "Life is just a series of moments. If you miss the moments, you miss your life."