

## Awareness + Intent = Action! Living Life, Facing Feelings, Staying in the Moment

Someone I know refers to herself as a ‘woman of action’ and I admire her for using this phrase. Just hearing her say it out loud inspires me. It’s a simple phrase, and eloquent too. It sums up the way someone makes the choice to live a life with intent, staying in the moment, feeling the feelings, and focusing on the needs of self in order to have more to give to others. It’s the concept of balance in a nutshell. In a life lived with this approach, time is no longer an enemy, but rather a gift. Each day above ground is another day to appreciate the moments one at a time, living each one with intent.

As you’re reading this, think of everything you have done so far today. How many of those things you did were with intent? Two? Ten? None? Not surprising if you said none, because it’s easy to live our lives on automatic pilot, isn’t it? And when we do this, we lose the opportunity to really experience our lives at their fullest, because we are so busy getting on with the next thing on the endless list. That’s when life becomes stressful and boring at the same time, because instead of taking that nanosecond to breathe more deeply, we believe there is never enough time to ‘get it all done.’ And it’s boring at the same time because we aren’t really tasting, feeling , sensing, seeing, smelling anything. It’s all colorless, odorless, sometimes even joyless.

There is something different about living a life with intent. First off, it is a place where every action, no matter how small or routine, is an action of purpose. Each action has an importance - there is a value to the action not because it gets us to the next thing, but rather it is where we need to be right then. Each moment brings an opportunity to be aware of everything around us as we go through the day, the week, the month, the year, the lifetime. But the flip side of living a life with intent might strike panic in many hearts. If we slow down long enough to have intent, then we have that extra moment or two to feel feelings as we live our lives. There’s the cause of panic for many people, who choose to keep themselves moving too quickly in too many directions, the purpose of which is to avoid feelings. This is a root cause of addictive behaviors, which serve as distraction from feelings. That’s what people delude themselves into believing anyway, until they (hopefully) wake up from their denial and realize now they have two problems. The first is what set the addictive behaviors in motion in the first place, and now they have the consequences of the addictive behaviors themselves to deal with as well. All because people are intent on avoiding feelings, which ultimately none of us can escape.

And what are the feelings people try through addiction, compulsion and obsession to avoid at any cost? Angry, sad, lonely, scared. That simple. Strip away all of the other language, because those are the basic four that come through for any one of us at any given time. A life lived with intent puts us in closer constant touch with any or all of those feelings. At the same time, along with the other four feelings, an intently lived life also gives us opportunities for the feeling of happy - content, satisfaction, elation, joy - whatever words you want to use to describe that feeling. Well worth it, in my opinion.

Why is a life lived with intent better than one without? If we live with intent, then we feel the

feelings. We use the feelings to focus on ourselves. When we focus on ourselves, we are not wasting time blaming others for our feelings and our life decisions. After all, unless someone is holding a gun to our heads, nobody else is responsible for the decisions we make but us. A life lived with intent reminds us that we, and only we, can propel our lives forward through action. And we can use our feelings to fuel that forward motion.

Let's start with anger. So much is written about anger and how dangerous it is. Often people are referred to me for 'anger management' issues. Why are people so afraid of owning, facing, dealing with anger? Because it's a volatile feeling, isn't it? We have all seen where anger can take us, and we all know how we might act out with behavior if and when we are angry. Here's the thing - there is not a person alive who is able to avoid anger 100% of the time. Impossible. And there is no point in trying to suppress this feeling completely, because it will only show up somewhere else, and most likely in a less than positive way. Now try putting intent and awareness into play. Here's an example. Did you ever find yourself in a situation where something was said or done to you that caused you anger? And, when you felt the anger, did it help you move to action, in that feeling the anger created the energy you needed to take a next step forward? That's choosing to take the feeling, own it, and then use intent to move into action.

Take another feeling - fear. How many times have you felt afraid of something and chose not to go forward with action due to fear? That backing off from things about which we feel afraid is a place where many people choose to stay 'stuck' throughout their lives. Why are we so afraid of so many things when it comes to this emotion? One reason is because we fear rejection if we say how we feel. Around this issue, sometimes anger and fear go together. For example, we might be angry at someone, but then comes the fear that if we tell the person our angry feelings, the person will reject us and we will lose that relationship. We also know that in certain relationships we can express our feelings, and while the person might apologize, he/she might also continue to repeat the same behaviors. It's a vicious cycle with certain people. Let's take a look at a couple of scenarios where we use intent with feeling to create action. You know you have the angry feeling toward someone. You know you want to say what you are feeling to the person. You know that if you do say what you feel, there is the possibility that the person will choose to reject you from their lives. Now, think about how it feels if you continue to feel angry and don't share your feelings with the person who caused the anger. Okay, now it's up to you to decide which makes more sense. Do you take the risk of saying what you feel, knowing the outcome could lead to disconnection from the person? Or do you hold onto your feelings and allow them to take up space in your head and your heart, knowing that the emotional damage they cause is therefore being done to you and you only? Of course in this one it depends on the situation and on the relationship with the person. But if we are living with intent, taking our feelings and owning them in the moment, then the risk is worth taking because regardless of the outcome with the other person, we have released ourselves from the chains of fear and lightened our emotional load going forward.

Lonely and sad are next. They are feelings too and deserve acknowledgment. They go along with grieving and loss, and abandonment is there too. Lonely and sad aren't always about being by ourselves, incidentally. Lonely and sad and abandonment and grief and loss can all happen in the middle of a crowded party, or on a date in a restaurant, or at a family event. What's

happening in any of those moments or situations is we perceive we are not heard, valued, accepted, validated, understood. I can remember times when I was in situations where those feelings came over me. In the past, at times when I was not living with intent, I ‘shook it off’ and tried to ‘put a smile on the moment’ like an emotional band-aid. But it was not a solution to dealing with the feelings. And it doesn’t work well for me in the long run to keep putting emotional band-aids over wounds that require much deeper healing. At some point the real feelings come to me, usually after the fact, and then I’m left with an emotional ‘hangover’ - feeling as if I’ve been run over by a steamroller. Staying with the feelings and living with intent means I choose today to be true to my feelings and to make sure I have the emotional support I require in my life to help me process those feelings.

Today, I choose to take ownership of lonely and sad and so forth. There is always more than one option available to me in owning my feelings with intent and moving into action. For example, if I know there is a given situation at which I might need to make an appearance, I can give myself the permission of time. I choose when I will arrive. I give myself a time window, in that I will do an emotional self-check after an hour. If I am still feeling connected to me, and am feeling comfortable and real within myself, then I can choose to stay another hour and do another time check then. That’s living with intent, staying in the moment, and choosing action to work with the feeling. Another option is an obvious one - if there is proven history that the given situation has been toxic in the past, then I can remember the definition for insanity (doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result). Living with intent and choosing action means I have the option not to repeat insanity, but rather can choose not to put myself into the toxic situation at all.

In the rooms of 12 step recovery programs, one of my favorite cliches is “Stay in today.” It’s not about looking down the road, but more about living in the moment, being in the here and now. Staying in today, or staying in the moment, means we take life in digestible portions, little bites that are more easily managed. We don’t get overwhelmed by that never-ending list of ‘things to do.’ Instead, we take the moments one at a time. We look at each thing we do and focus on its meaning. We own our feelings when they happen, and we process them as they occur, rather than suppress them or internalize them or ignore them or use addictive distractions to push them away. Living in the moment with awareness and intent leads to the action of making choices from a place of strength. Just for today, one day at a time, it’s about maintaining a life in balance.