

YOUR BRAIN HAS NEVER BEEN TO THE PRESENT MOMENT

Walk Your Talk | Unity on Maui | Sunday, May 3, 2026

"The present moment is the only place God lives — and your brain keeps moving the furniture."

THE NEUROSCIENCE

The Brain as Prediction Machine

For most of human history, we assumed the brain worked like a camera — light comes in, the brain takes a picture of reality. Neuroscience has overturned that entirely. The brain is not a perception machine. It is a prediction machine.

Neuroscientists Karl Friston and Andy Clark developed Predictive Processing — the discovery that your brain constantly generates a model of what it expects reality to look like, running slightly ahead of actual experience, using incoming data merely to correct its forecasts.

You are not perceiving the world. You are perceiving your brain's forecast of the world. In measurable terms, your nervous system is running approximately 500 milliseconds ahead of actual reality.

The Default Mode Network

When you are not focused on a task, your brain does not rest — it wanders. The Default Mode Network activates and immediately begins rehearsing conversations, revisiting regrets, simulating futures, planning, and worrying backward. Studies consistently show the human mind wanders away from what is actually happening for between 47 and 80 percent of waking hours. Research is equally clear: when the mind wanders, people report lower levels of happiness — not because of where it goes, but simply because it has left now.

Your brain has a physiological bias away from the present moment. This is not a character flaw. This is a factory setting — and factory settings can be changed.

Eckhart Tolle

"Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now. Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now." The mind travels. Life never leaves here.

FOUR PATHS. ONE INSTRUCTION.

Every major contemplative tradition — centuries before neuroscience — diagnosed the same problem and offered the same prescription.

- ▶ **Zen Buddhism:** The concept of Shoshin — beginner's mind — is the doorway to now. Open, uncluttered, not already knowing what comes next. The Zen koan is a circuit breaker for the prediction machine. The instruction across centuries: Before thinking.

In one sentence: Your mind is the problem and your mind is the solution — you just have to train it.

- ▶ **Advaita Vedanta:** Behind all the noise of thought and memory, there is a quiet, steady awareness — the sakshi, the witness. It has never been damaged and is never absent. You do not need to find it. You need to stop mistaking the noise for yourself.

In one sentence: You are not broken and God is not far away — you just have a very noisy mind.

- ▶ **Christian Mysticism:** Brother Lawrence worked in a monastery kitchen and discovered God was just as present at the sink as in the chapel. The practice of the presence of God means turning attention, again and again, to the divine reality that is already here.

In one sentence: God is not far away and prayer is not a long-distance call — it is turning your attention to what is already in the room.

- ▶ **Sufism:** At the center of Sufi practice is waqt — the sacred now. God exists only in the present moment, not in the past or future. The Sufis spent their entire lives learning to actually show up to now so that an encounter with the divine becomes possible.

In one sentence: God lives in this moment — and the Sufis spent their entire lives learning to actually be in this moment.

Four traditions. Four continents. Two thousand years. One shared conclusion: the wandering mind is the primary obstacle to spiritual awakening. The practice of returning to now is the central work of the spiritual life. They knew — long before we had the instruments to measure it.

THREE PORTALS BACK TO NOW

1 THE BODY

Sensation is always present tense. Your body cannot be in the past or future. One conscious breath — just feeling the air moving — drops you out of the narrative and into now. Every tradition understood this. The body is the anchor.

2 SOUND

Listening without labeling interrupts the Default Mode Network immediately. Sounds in this room have already been categorized by your brain. What if you simply heard them — without naming, without deciding what they mean? Raw, unlabeled sound is a direct doorway to now.

3 PRESENCE

Real eye contact — actually seeing someone rather than waiting for your turn to talk — quiets the wandering mind more powerfully than almost anything else. Presence with another person is not a thought. It is contact. And contact only happens now.

THE UNITY LENS Charles Fillmore co-founded Unity on the conviction that the Christ is not the historical Jesus — it is a universal, indwelling divine presence in every human being. The name of God in Exodus 3 is **I AM THAT I AM** — not a noun but a present-tense verb. Unlimited. Eternal. Always and only now. Every time you say **I AM**, you are invoking the divine name. The Christ presence is not a visitor. It is an indwelling — available not in peak moments alone, but in every conscious breath of every ordinary day.

GOING DEEPER

1. Rev. Blaine confessed he spent the week thinking about Sunday rather than living the week. Can you identify a recent time when you were physically present but mentally elsewhere? What were you actually missing in that moment?

2. The research shows the mind wanders 47–80% of waking hours. When you sit with that number honestly, what does it bring up? What might your life look and feel like if that percentage shifted — even a little?

3. Which of the Four Paths — Buddhism, Vedanta, Christian Mysticism, or Sufism — resonates most with your own spiritual experience of the present moment? What is it about that tradition that feels familiar?

4. Charles Fillmore taught that the I AM is always present tense. Where in your life are you following I AM with a limitation — I am afraid, I am stuck, I am not enough? What truth would you choose to follow it with instead?

5. Rev. Blaine said: every moment you notice you have wandered is the awakening itself — not a failure, but a return. How does reframing the noticing as the practice change your relationship to your own distractedness?

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

Choose Your Portal into the Present Moment

Commit to one portal each day this week. You do not need to do all three. You need to do one — consistently, repeatedly, faithfully.

- ▶ **The Body:** Before getting out of bed each morning, take one fully conscious breath. Not a deep yoga breath — just one breath you actually feel. Notice the air moving. That is now.
- ▶ **Sound:** Once each day, stop whatever you are doing for 60 seconds and listen. Do not name the sounds. Do not decide what they mean. Just hear. That is now.
- ▶ **Presence:** Choose one conversation today and give it your complete, unhurried attention. Do not compose your response while the other person is speaking. Just be with them. That is now.

Which portal will you choose this week?

THE NOTICE & RETURN JOURNAL

Each evening this week, take two minutes to write one moment when you caught your mind wandering — and came back. Do not judge it. Do not analyze it. Simply name it.

Day 1 — I noticed:

Day 2 — I noticed:

Day 3 — I noticed:

THE KEY REFRAME

Every moment you notice you have wandered is **not a failure**. It is the awakening itself. The noticing **is** the practice. You cannot notice you have left without already having returned. The brain will wander again in about thirty seconds. That is fine. Notice. Come back. That is the whole practice.

AFFIRMATION

"I am here. Fully here. And here is holy."

Say it slowly. Mean it.

BLESSING

May you meet your wandering mind with compassion, not criticism. May you find — again and again — the quiet place within you that does not rush, does not rehearse, and does not live in yesterday or tomorrow. May you return to: the breath, the body, this unrepeatabe moment. Not perfectly. Not once and for all. But gently, faithfully — again and again.