

Life is full of stressful situations. We as competitive creatures always are under the false belief that we have to take risks, that we need to be successful and productive all the time. If we fail to fulfill this requirement, we are immediately overcome by stress, anxiety, and the fear of failure. Isn't there a way that will provide solutions for the negativity in our lives? A way that helps us keep calm and feel joyful?

You will discover 20 daily Zen Buddhism exercises that will motivate you to lead a happy and exciting life with this summary. Practicing these habits will motivate you to leave the habits and decisions that result in your maelstrom. You will feel a sense of relief and contentment and you will learn what it means to change your outlook on life to lead a better life full of peace.

## Chapter 1 - Maintain good relationships by changing your perception.

People are the most complex beings in the universe. Dealing with rude coworkers or overly judgmental parents exhaust people with their complicated nature. We need to find a way to bring a feeling of calmness to even our most stressful interactions.

How can we accomplish this? Well, the first thing you need to do is change your focus.

Humans tend to focus on others' bad characteristics. But we as a species should try our best to think about the good qualities of the people around us. Act as if you are a Zen gardener when you try to analyze the characteristics of other people. A Zen gardener regards a tree as its own entity when the time comes to plant it in his garden. He evaluates the general features of the tree and contemplates what feelings the tree would evoke in people. He considers the other elements of the garden as well. Eventually, he makes a choice and plants the tree in a place that will be in harmony with others while also showing its unique beauty.

The author is familiar with Zen gardens where all elements should be decorated in a way that will evoke a sense of harmony. The same situation applies to relationships as well: you need to appreciate the unique features of people and find ways to communicate with them accordingly.

We need to spend enough time with people to understand their character completely. And unfortunately, modern settings often pressure people into caring more about our number of friends rather than having a few close friends. We are conditioned to feel proud of how wide our social circle is, instead of focusing on the depth of our relationships.

However, Zen Buddhism provides a more entertaining approach to relationships.

The Zen philosophy focuses on the phrase Ichi-go Ichi-e. The phrase means once in a lifetime, referring to the fact that each interaction we have is unique. You might never see a person you've interacted with again. Thus, it is important to focus on deepening the connection with the people you interact with. After all, you might never see them again.

Still, you will always encounter people you dislike. Even if you were a monk in a Zen temple, you would still have someone you didn't like. Don't dwell on interactions that are fading or interactions that negatively affect you. Think about blossoming trees instead. Birds love to perch on trees that blossom beautifully. As long as you are happy and blossoming, you will attract the right people.

## Chapter 2 - Keep in mind that what you have is precious.

Everywhere we go, we come across shopping malls. We use our convenient credit cards for each purchase. The abundance of shopping malls and credit cards motivate us to spend excessively. Excessive consumption has been celebrated by many for years. However, an alternative way to incessant consumption helps you save money and feel more peaceful.

Buddhism argues that people get addicted to greed. Even if we obtain what we have desired, we won't stay satisfied for long. We are bound to want more than what we have.

If your actions are motivated by feelings of greed, you will always experience stress. Leaving greed behind and opting for a simpler lifestyle will help you feel liberated and content.

Chisoku, meaning "be satisfied", teaches how to cast greed aside from your life. The Buddhist teaching suggests that you should be grateful for what you own after you have enough to fulfill your needs. Tell yourself that "This is enough". Don't let your desires dictate your actions. Chisoku is the antidote when greed is the poison. The practice helps us understand that what we have is enough. Once you accept this discipline, you will feel more peaceful.

Feeling dissatisfied? Think about all your desires and ask this question in front of a mirror: Is what I want an absolute necessity?

Of course, simple living does not equate to living frugally.

Buying cheap objects that you do not actually care about is what frugality is about. In contrast, a simple life means you have what you need and that you are thankful for the things you have in your life. You might have a cup that is solely for coffee. And while it is the only cup you have it could be a really expensive one that cost you a hundred dollars. What matters is that the cup will be needed, used, and you will feel satisfied.

Lastly, a simple life does not equate to going to the mall each time you realize you need something. Rather, a simple life means you are imaginative with what you have and use what you already own for new purposes.

If you need to make use of everything you have, think about Kyoto's Zen gardens. Famous for their dry scenery, it is impossible to see any water element in the Zen gardens. Still, each element is decorated in an immaculate way where the arrangement helps visitors imagine the sound of a water stream. The existence of such creative gardens proves that we can achieve many things just by being liberated and using our imagination. We don't need credit cards to achieve what we desire.

## Chapter 3 - Alterations in your diet will help you become more energized.

Do you ever wish that you were more energetic? Exhausting work hours, housework that needs to be done, and our hectic family lives may tire us immensely. How can we overcome the exhaustion from these commitments? You might not be lucky enough to reduce your workload or go on a two-month vacation. Still, there are simple methods to feel more energetic towards life.

A method to feel more energetic is to go barefoot. Take off shoes and socks. It may sound weird at first but imitating the way of monks will help you get over your exhaustion immensely. With time, walking barefoot will show its benefits by strengthening the body. Monks are known to be resilient to colds.

Of course, walking barefoot outside of your home might not be convenient for most of us, but you can still wear a pair of thong sandals when you need to leave your house.

Thong sandals have many health benefits. Between the big toe and the second toe is a sensitive skin that also works as a pressure point for our internal organs. Going outside with the sandals helps the body by massaging the point.

Another way to gain your energy back is by reducing your meat intake.

Altering your diet to include more vegetables and throwing away meat and dairy products will help your mind feel soberer. Since the body and the mind share a strong connection, your skin will benefit from this as well. Eating too much meat, on the other hand, has negative effects on your mind. People who eat too much meat tend to be easily frustrated and more troubled. It is usually hard to cut down on your meat intake, but you can start by dedicating one day of the week to vegetable-based meals. Then, you can increase the number with time.

Do you still feel as if you lack energy? Then start exercising more. You may think that resting helps you store energy, but not being active enough can make you feel exhausted.

Think about the cup of coffee you drink every morning. If you're at home, then you use a coffee maker. When you're commuting to your workplace, you visit a café and order a cup of coffee. But what would happen if you had to work for your coffee? Let's say you need to visit the woods at dawn and gathered wood for the fire. You need to create the fire by yourself to boil the water. Imagine that you ground the coffee beans while the morning sun lights up your surroundings? Then the cup of coffee you drink would make you feel more refreshed. Why? Because you worked for each step until it was done. Living a vital life is similar, it demands you dedicate time and effort.

## Chapter 4 - Little alterations to your morning routine will help to become relaxed and concentrated.

Whenever someone wants to know how we are doing, we tend to emphasize how busy we are. Can we ever get out of this constant state of being busy? The answer is: Yes, we can. The first step for that is adjusting your alarm clock.

You might think that you don't have enough time to do all the things in your schedule. And that is why you are busy. But the reality is a little bit different. Let's think about the interesting story behind the Japanese character for busy: the radicals used mean loss and heart. Thus, when you feel that your schedule is too busy for something, it means you don't have any more room in your heart.

Fortunately, a small alteration can help you become more relaxed and freer. Changing your body clock to start a little bit earlier each morning will help you feel less busy.

Wake up fifteen minutes earlier each day to have a nice cup of tea or coffee. If possible, enjoy your coffee next to a window. Hearing the chirping birds in the morning will help you start the day happily. Within just fifteen minutes, you will feel liberated from your hectic life.

Another way to help you feel freer is by cleaning your room. That way your mind won't be too foggy.

Think about the Buddhist monks that live in Zen temples. They clean their living place completely every morning. The temple is never dirty, to begin with, but that is not the point. Monks use the cleaning ritual to clear their minds. Indeed, the Japanese character for enlightenment is made up of radicals that mean a clean mind. Each time the monk cleans the room with a broom, he also cleans his foggy mind. Buffing the floors helps their inner selves to be polished as well.

While you clean your space, pay extra attention to your shoe collection.

In Zen Buddhism, recognizing our footsteps is an important practice. If we don't acknowledge our footsteps, we wouldn't be able to see what direction we are heading towards in life. Line up your shoes to make sure your next step in life will be well-ordered.

## Chapter 5 - An easy but powerful method to enrich your life is being involved in art and calligraphy.

The wondrous world of art can be quite terrifying with its art galleries and extravagant price tags. However, Zen Buddhism doesn't advocate being an art connoisseur to integrate art into your life. You can use your imagination to become your own artist.

Look at the acclaimed Zen artist to learn about how happy we can become simply by picking up a pen.

The Zen monks Ikkyu and Sesshu, who lived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century are still acknowledged today for being extraordinary calligraphy and for their elegant art. Their artworks are quite expensive nowadays, but they were not created to be acclaimed by other people. The reason these monks painted these masterpieces was to connect with their inner selves. Indeed, the reason why Zen art is important lies in the fact that they help artists to express the depths of their inner worlds.

You can start your self-discovery adventure by starting calligraphy or painting. Assure yourself that nobody will see what you are going to paint. Then, take a deep breath, concentrate, and let your pen or brush guide you. You will discover a lot about yourself while painting or doing calligraphy.

Being a Zen artist doesn't require many tools, either.

Artists in the West may use the color spectrum in its entirety. In contrast, you only need a pot of ink for Zen art. Even the ocean or the sky can be indicated with black ink in Zen art. Using only one color does not mean the art is one-dimensional. The viewer is left to imagine all the colors in the painting. And imagination is the most colorful thing in the universe.

Still, integrating art into your life does not always mean painting by yourself. Simply looking at art is also enough.

The Japanese houses of the past used to have tokonoma. The tokonoma was a small room where a Zen calligraphy art was hung on the wall. People living in those houses would practice going to the tokonoma to contemplate the calligraphy on the wall. You can imitate this practice by choosing a place to put a Zen art of calligraphy you like and reflect on it daily. You will benefit from the strong impact of Zen art in your life.

## Chapter 6 - Nature will bring joy into your daily life.

Do you remember the last time you walked aimlessly in a forest or smelled a flower? Chances are you haven't been to a forest for a long time. You're not alone, though. Still, you might benefit from changing your daily routine a little bit to spare some time for nature. Zen Buddhism teaches us that people shouldn't lose their connection with the natural world.

We may feel displeased with how monotone our lives are because of our office jobs. Every day is basically the same: the same route, the same office, and usually, the same work. But if you spare some time for walking each morning, you can realize that each day is refreshingly different than the one before, even if you stick to the same path for your daily walking session.

The author chooses temple gardens for his daily walks. He experiences that in these gardens, nature is constantly fluctuating. The leaves of a tree change each week, one day is full of rain while the other is quite sunny. Everything changes—nature is never monotone.

The ever-changing cycles of nature teach us a lot about how to live our lives.

Humans tend to think too much about the past. It is as if we are living in the past, rather than the present. We constantly think about how hurt we were in the past or what mistakes we did in the past. But nature is there to encourage us not to dwell on the past. Why? Because each day brings its own unique things. And we refresh ourselves with time, just like nature itself. We should try to imitate nature and stop dwelling on the past.

There are also ways to embrace nature on smaller scales.

The author, also a well-known garden designer, teaches young children how to make their own miniature gardens in small spaces such as shoeboxes. He motivates children to imagine being with nature. Then, he requests them to recreate the scene they imagined by arranging soil, twigs, and water. And the resulting product is a great representation of the children: serene, tiny gardens of peace.

You can produce your own miniature garden as well. A balcony provides more space than necessary for a miniature garden. Even the window ledges will be enough. You can imagine the scenery of spectacular mountains and flooding rivers to get inspired. And before you realize it, you will have changed a part of your home into the reproduction of the landscape that you imagined.

## Chapter 7 - Use your opportunities and your time to their fullest, for they are limited.

Ask yourself this question: When the opportunity comes to you, will you act on it?

A Zen parable teaches about the story of two plum trees. The flower of these trees needed hot summer wind to bloom. One of these trees grew its flower throughout the winter. And when the summer wind blew, the tree blossomed. However, the other tree waited until the arrival of the summer breeze to grow its flowers. And when the flowers were ready, the breeze was long gone.

Similarly, we usually delay our personal growth. It's a bad tendency of ours to assume that we will have time in the future for our self-improvement. However, Zen Buddhists are aware that life is not an infinite resource.

Shoji is the word that explains the Buddhist concept of death and rebirth. Shoji teaches people to regard life and death together, like the two sides of a coin. When you contemplate life, you should also contemplate death.

The idea of thinking about your death might appear depressing but knowing that life is a limited resource motivates us to be our better selves. Suppose you learn that you only have six months to live. Would you spend that time as an unproductive person, staying as a couch potato and watching TV all day? Or would you make a list of things you want to do before the inevitable death and live your remaining life to its fullest? Hopefully, you'd choose the second option.

If we become aware of the certainty of death, we will understand the importance of becoming the first plum tree—the one that started working early for its flowers to bloom.

At last, but not least, remind yourself daily that although your life is yours to live, it is not a thing that you can possess. This fact is demonstrated by the Buddhist word jomyo—signifying a pre-determined lifespan.

We all have our jomyo—our lifespan that was established the moment we were born. Yet nobody knows the exact length of their jomyo. The belief of jomyo describes life as a gift presented to us, not something that belongs to us. While some people are given bigger gifts than others, Zen Buddhists assure that it is not something to be worried about. At the end of the day, the value of our lives is not determined by how long they last. What is important is how we spent the gift that was granted to us.

You don't have to spend a life full of stress and hecticness. Each time you say, "I'm too busy," you're actually embracing the business that you complain of. You can improve your life immensely by refraining from greed and living a simpler lifestyle. Remember, life is short. Your gift might be shorter than others, so try to get the most of it. Start simplifying your life to become happier each day.

Actionable advice:

Focus on your food.

We often rush our food. We grab a sandwich on our way to work as breakfast and eat dinner while watching the television. However, Zen Buddhism advocates the idea of "eat with our whole hearts." This teaching encourages us to focus on our meals when we eat. The next time you eat your meal, turn off the TV and focus on enjoying your food.

## Zen: The Art of Simple Living by Shunmyo Masuno Book Review

You don't have to spend your life stressed and miserable. Each time you think, "I'm too busy", keep in mind that you are the one who chose to live like that. You can better your life by abstaining from greed and living a simpler life. Remember, life is short. And you might not have much time left. Simplify your daily practices to become more content with life.

Focus on your food.

When it comes to food, we often care about convenience. We grab something to eat on our way to work in the mornings and eat dinner while watching the television. Zen Buddhism reminds us to "eat with our whole hearts." They encourage us to focus on our meals without any disturbances while we eat. Thus, the next time you prepare your food, keep the TV turned off and enjoy your food in a peaceful silence instead.

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