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# Eckhart Tolle, meditation and the meaning and benefits of inner peace

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Have you ever been caught up in a wave of anger, craving or worry where you felt the emotion carry you away like a wild horse you could not control? Most of us have experienced the strength of these energies and wondered how to work with rather than be ruled by them.

Have you felt such a wave of unruly emotion but been able to bring awareness to it and observe it instead? An important shift takes place: the awareness creates space and allows us to see other possibilities than just acting out whatever we are feeling. This is more akin to riding a horse we have begun to train.

The healing power of bringing awareness to our experience—just as it is here and now—is what Eckhart Tolle calls the “power of now.” Tolle, who is giving a [rare public talk in Washington](#) Thursday night at the Warner Theater, points to the freedom and inner peace that comes from opening fully to this moment without judgment, resistance, or holding.

For over 2,000 years, [Buddhism and other wisdom](#) traditions have taught that there is a way out of the stress and suffering that can fill our lives, and a possibility of living a life free of suffering. [Mindfulness](#), the practice of opening fully to our [experience in this moment](#)—the joys and sorrows; the good, the bad, and the ugly—is the gateway to this deep freedom of the heart.

In recent years, the wisdom of these ancient teachings has been confirmed by scientific studies, which demonstrate that we can train our minds, change our brains, increase our well-being, and radically lessen such afflictive states of mind as anxiety and depression.

One [recent study](#) showed that the structure of the brains of participants in an eight-week mindfulness meditation program changed with an average of just 27 minutes of meditation a day. Results from brain scans revealed an increase in gray-matter density in areas of the brain associated with memory, self-awareness, compassion and introspection, and a decrease in density of gray matter in areas associated with stress and anxiety.

Other studies have shown that meditation may [lower blood pressure](#), slow the [progression of HIV](#), [reduce pain](#) help break addictions, and even ward off the [effects of aging](#).

Supported by these recent scientific studies, meditation has come into the mainstream:

- Veterans returning from combat are being [taught meditation](#) and yoga to help lessen and heal the traumas of war.
- Students in classrooms across the country are learning to strengthen awareness, resilience, and focus through mindfulness practices.
- In hospitals and other health-care settings, mindfulness practices are proving a highly cost-effective way of dealing with chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and other conditions.

More people are practicing meditation and mindfulness and opening to the power of being present with what is—the National Institutes of Health reported that 20 million adults in the U.S. meditated in 2007, up from 15 million five years earlier.

A great challenge of our time is to bring these [practices of awakening](#) and inner freedom to help transform the social and global suffering that is all around us—including wars, torture, and the destruction of the natural world.

We have wonderful examples in leaders such as the [Dalai Lama](#) and [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) of individuals whose compassion and wise action have changed the hearts of millions and, in Burma—if not yet in Tibet—helped make significant social and political change.

Eckhart Tolle's visit this week to Washington brings to our community another wise and visionary leader who points to a new consciousness arising and new ways of living together in the world.

Humanity, says Tolle, is faced with a choice of finding new ways to live together or continuing the cycle of violence and conflict. “If the structures of the human mind remain unchanged, we will always end up re-creating the same world, the same evils, the same dysfunction.” Creating peace in the world begins with saying “yes” to what is and then from a heart-space of compassion and non-reactivity working to alleviate the suffering of the world.