



WELLBEING
WITH KATIE BYRNE

Living for now and not the faraway ideal

Happiness and mindfulness aren't destinations that we arrive at after passing certain milestones, writes **Katie Byrne**

A FEW years ago I visited a yoga retreat on an island in Greece and immediately made the acquaintance of one of the owners.

She was a fantastically funny former festival organiser and all-around good-time girl whose storied past made me dizzy with envy.

Her erstwhile career, which I quizzed her about daily, sounded like one long night out. It was a dream job, by anyone's standards, and yet she wasn't entirely happy.

She told me that she had been brought up on a farm and had always wanted to get back to nature. Hence her plan was to work hard and one day move to the country.

That day came sooner than expected. A string of small fortuitous events led to her leaving London and opening the yoga retreat. Within a year she had swapped DJ bookings and laser lights for sustainable living and vegan cooking.

Her rationale for fast-tracking her retirement plan was interesting. "Some people work hard so that they can one day leave the rat race and live in the country," she explained. "Why not just skip the rat race part and do it now?"

She was ahead of her time in many ways. We're hearing a lot more about young people who are opting to live life in the slow lane, just as the idea of taking a number of mini retirements rather than one long one is gaining ground.

Of course, you could argue that these intrepid souls are unencumbered by children, negative equity and elderly parents. Adventures are always easier with less baggage... However, you could also argue that these types of people see advantages where others see obstacles.

Money is often the first consideration when we think of taking the road less travelled. Curiously, we are less inclined to consider

the equally important factors of time and energy.

The time/energy/money triangle explains the interplay of these finite resources during the various life stages.

During our youth, we have seemingly boundless time and energy. However, we generally don't have the money to optimise our freedom.

During our child-rearing middle years, we have money and energy but little time. In old age, we have time and money, but little energy.

Wise people, when mapping out their goals, are mindful that time and energy have currency. They use what they've got when they've got it.

Meanwhile, the rest of us bemoan our lack of money even when we have considerable time and energy on our side.

We also fail to utilise the opportunity of good health. A quote that has been misattributed to the Dalai Lama (it is in fact from *An Interview with God* by James J Lachard) sums this up beautifully:

"Man surprised me most about humanity because he sacrifices his health in order to make money.

"Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future.

"He lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived."

We all have grand plans, but we also have timelines. *When the kids are older. When the mortgage is paid off. When my mother is feeling better...* It's worth asking yourself if these are necessary milestones, or obstacles that you have

put in your own way. More to the point, are you preparing to make changes or unconsciously resisting them?

We are conditioned to believe that we should only make changes when we are in possession of the perfect trine of time, energy and money. The truth is that this is a rare aspect. It's the exception, not the rule.

Likewise, while we are led to believe that the milestones of life follow a sequential order — mortgage, marriage, children, career success — we know from experience that it doesn't always happen this way.

When we're too rigid about these milestones, we never get to explore the opportunities that life throws our way. We also prevent ourselves from enjoying the present moment when we focus on some faraway ideal.

We tell ourselves that we'll be happy when we lose a stone, just as we assure ourselves that we'll become more mindful just as soon as we pay off that niggling bank loan.

We easily forget that happiness and mindfulness aren't destinations that we arrive at after passing certain milestones. Happiness and mindfulness are states of mind. They aren't subject to external conditions.

As Marianne Williamson writes: "Ego says, 'Once everything falls into place, I'll feel peace.' Spirit says, 'Find your peace, and then everything will fall into place.'" Indeed, the very factors that we believe will bring us happiness are generally only achievable with a positive state of mind. Everyone has a theory on timing. Some believe that there's never a good time; some believe that everything happens in "God's perfect time".

Either way, it's important to remember that things rarely unfold in a sequential fashion. The big opportunity could come next week; the love of your life could arrive tomorrow and happiness is a decision that you can make right now.

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