

Focus as an Antidote for Wanting to Do Everything

I have a problem, and I think most people do as well: I want to do everything.

OK, not actually every single thing, but I want to do more than I possibly can:

- I want to do everything on my long to-do list, today
- I want to take on every interesting project
- I want to say yes to everyone else's requests, even if I know I'm already too busy
- I want to travel everywhere, and see everything that's interesting
- I want to try every delicious food, and I always want more of it (and I always eat too much)
- I want to watch every interesting TV show and film
- I want to read everything interesting online
- I want to take on a lot of interesting hobbies — each of which would take me many hours to master
- I want to spend time with everyone I love, with every friend — and also have a lot of time for solitude!

Obviously, this is all impossible. But I bet I'm not alone in constantly wanting all of this and more.

There's a term for this in Buddhism that sounds judgmental but it's not: "greed." The term "greed" in this context just describes the very human tendency to want more of what we want.

It's why we're overloaded with too many things to do, overly busy and overwhelmed. It's why we're constantly distracted, why we overeat and shop too much and get addicted to things. It's why we have too much stuff, and are in debt.

Greed is so common that we don't even notice it. It's the foundation of our consumerist society. It's the ocean that we're swimming, so much a part of the fabric of our lives that we can't see that it's there.

So what can we do about this tendency called greed? Is there an antidote?

There absolutely is.

The traditional antidote to greed in Buddhism is generosity. And while we will talk about the practice of generosity, **the antidote I'd like to propose you try is focus.**

Focus is a form of simplicity. **It's letting go of everything that you might possibly**

want, to give complete focus on one important thing.

Imagine that you want to get 20 things done today. You are eager to rush through them all and get through your to-do list! But instead of indulging in your greed tendency, you decide to simplify. You decide to focus.

Let's talk about the practice of complete focus. It can be applied to all of the

The Practice of Complete Focus

This practice can be applied to all of the types of greed we mentioned above — wanting to do everything, read everything, say yes to everything, go everywhere, eat all the things.

Identify the urge: The first step in this practice is to recognize that your greed tendency is showing itself. Notice that you want to do everything, eat everything, and so forth. Once we're aware of the tendency, we can work with it.

See the effects: Next, we need to recognize that indulging in the greed tendency only hurts us. It makes us feel stressed, overwhelmed, always unsatisfied. It makes us do and eat and watch and shop too much, to the detriment of our sleep, happiness, relationships, finances and more. Indulging might satisfy a temporary itch, but it's not a habit that leads to happiness or fulfillment.

Practice refraining: Third, we can choose to refrain — choose not to indulge. The practice of refraining is about not indulging in the greed tendency, and instead pausing. Noticing the urge to indulge, and mindfully noticing how the urge feels in our body, as a physical sensation. Where is it located? What is it like? Be curious about it. Stay with it for a minute or two. Notice that you are actually completely fine, even if the urge is really strong. It's just a sensation.

Focus with generosity: Then we can choose to be generous and present with one thing. Instead of trying to do everything, choose just one thing. Ideally, choose something that's important and meaningful, that will have an impact on the lives of others, even if only in a small way. Let this be an act of generosity for others. Let go of everything else, just for a few minutes, and be completely with this one thing. Generously give it your full attention. This is your love.

Clear distractions: If necessary, create structure to hold you in this place of focus. That might mean shutting off the phone, turning off the Internet, going to a place where you can completely focus. Think of it as creating your meditation space.

Practice with the resistance: As you practice focus, you are likely to feel resistance towards actually focusing and doing this one thing. You'll want to go do something else, anything else. You'll feel great aversion to doing this one thing. It's completely fine.

Practice with this resistance as you did with the urge: noticing the physical sensation, meditating on it with curiosity, staying with it with attention and love. Again, it's just a sensation, and you can learn to love it as you can any experience.

Let go of everything, and generously give your complete focus to one thing. Simplify, and be completely present.

You can do this with your urge to do all tasks, read all things, do all hobbies, say yes to all people and projects. But you can also do it with possessions: choose just to have what you need to be happy, and simplify by letting go of the rest. You can do the same with travel: be satisfied with where you are, or with going to one place and fully being there with it.

You don't need to watch everything, read everything, eat everything. You can simplify and do less. You can let go and be present. You can focus mindfully.

If you'd like to train in this kind of focus, **train with me in my Mindful Focus Course.**