

## Want Peace and Tranquility? Be Like a Zebra!

ZEBRAS' BRAINS HAVE NOT DEVELOPED A PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX THAT ALLOWS THEM TO WORRY ABOUT THE FUTURE AS WE HUMANS DO. **BY TONY O'DRISCOLL**

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**D**uring these tumultuous times of unprecedented change, I often find myself wishing I was a zebra.

Why a zebra you might ask? Because neuroendocrinology researcher and author Robert Sapolsky taught me that zebras do not get ulcers. Why don't they get ulcers? Because their brains have not developed a pre-frontal cortex that allows them to dwell on the past or worry about the future as we humans do. Zebras are not capable of escaping the present moment because they do not have the mental machinery to do so. And so, unlike so many of us humans desperately seeking to quiet the incessant chatter in our minds by practicing mindfulness, zebras have no problem adhering to spiritual teacher Ram Dass' mantra to "Be Here Now"—because they always are!

While grazing peacefully in the open savanna, the zebra's mind is not busy imagining a future where a lion pops out from behind a tree to tear it to shreds, nor is it busy digging through the recesses of its grey matter to find something in the past to feel bad about. The zebra is just there, fully conscious and aware of the cud that is being chewed, the light breeze creating patterns in the tall grass, the scent of the emberglow flowers off in the distance, and experiencing the gift

that is the present to its absolute fullest.

### HIJACKED FROM THE PRESENT

One thing we do have in common with zebras is that we, too, are creatures of habit. So when things in our environment change, the little voice within our head kicks in and begins to recall incidents from the past or imagine situations in the future that jack up our anxiety and stress levels, crowding out our ability to appreciate the present moment. In short, our human ability to separate stimulus and response through inner dialogue, recall, and imagination creates unnecessary stress and anxiety that hijacks us from the reality of the present moment.

Today, every human being on the planet finds themselves in that eerie and arresting liminal space that lies between the familiarity of what was and the uncertainty of what might be. As a result, each of our inner voices is working overtime, and the level of inner chatter, stress, and anxiety is reaching epidemic proportions.

So next time you find yourself in an endless doom loop of despair, pining nostalgically for a past that no longer exists or worrying frantically about a future that may never materialize, just "re-mind" yourself to be like a zebra so you can get back to being here now! 🦓



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