

ready, set, slow

How to Improve Your Energy,
Health, and Relationships
Through the Power of Slow

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7 Minutes of Magic

 **sounds true**
BOULDER, COLORADO

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Introduction

The soft overcomes the hard.
The slow overcomes the fast.
Let your workings remain a mystery.
Just show people the results.

—Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 36

Imagine for a second that you hurried through the most precious moments of your life. Having your fortieth birthday dinner at your favorite restaurant would be a battle against the clock. There you'd be, eating as swiftly as possible, scarfing down that freshly caught lobster and caviar like a golden retriever who hasn't been fed in days. Imagine chugging that premium Italian glass of wine, whose grapes were slowly grown in the mountains of Sicily . . . like a dry-mouthed runner at the end of a half-marathon.

And then there's that romantic night in the bedroom with your partner. You burst open the door, not because of your uncontrollable passion. Oh, no. You've got no time for sexy entrances. No time for sweet nothings and gentle caresses. No time for romance. Instead, you both engage in a clumsy, rapid fumble through intimacy, skipping the buildup and crossing the finish line as quickly as possible before briskly falling asleep.

How about that trip to Paris you've always dreamed of? You get to the airport and hop in a cab, which zooms all over the city at record speed, just enough to catch a glimpse of the Eiffel Tower, the exterior of the Louvre, and the underbelly of the Arc de Triomphe, before speedily delivering you back to the airport.

Paris? Tick.

Sounds ridiculous, right? But let's not hoodwink ourselves into thinking that we don't do a less dramatic variation of this with the gift that is our daily life.

Nobody wants to rush around like a headless chicken, yet this is how modern life tends to feel. What we actually *want* to do is to slow down, savor the beautiful moments of life, create more of them, and make them last as long as possible. We all want to relax more, stress less, and live in a state of inner peace. We all want to create more special moments in time where the beauty of the moment unfolds, blossoms into presence, connection, and bliss. We want to drink the sweet nectar of life and live it to the max, in full health, with vibrant energy, enthusiasm, love, joy, and happiness. And that requires a different pace, which requires *slowing down*.

That's not to say that after reading this book, you won't lead a very productive life or be able to act quickly when you need to. Slowing down doesn't equate with laziness and sloth; rather it fuels our endeavors in a way that stress never could. I've seen it happen a thousand times, and a thousand times again, in the clients I've worked with over thirty years of Slow Method practice.

The Slow Method

The Slow Method has three unique elements taken from the wisdom of many forms of Eastern meditation, Chinese martial arts, and Taoist philosophies. All of these timeless practices are incredible tools to optimize modern life. These ideas are far from new, but this book is the first of its kind to bring all the slowness principles together in a way that's accessible and practical for everyone.

So what is the Slow Method? It's a collection of revolutionary yet simple practices that can be broken down into three simple principles:

- Principle 1: Slow Mind
- Principle 2: Slow Body
- Principle 3: Slow Relationships

These practices have changed my life and the lives of countless others. We now have a million-strong community forming part of the Slow Revolution, and it's growing every day. I've dedicated thirty years of my life to teaching well-being through slowness, and I've seen the results firsthand. Miracles happen when we ease off the throttle.

The Slow Method was born at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The sun was rising and shining through the misty marine layer, and the slow-moving fog brought about a feeling of stillness and awe within me. I was nineteen at the time, and I happened to be sitting on a bench watching a group of the most peaceful people I'd ever seen.

They moved and flowed in unison, with peace and grace. They looked as if they were part of nature itself, moving with as much lightness as the wind through the trees. I remember asking myself, *What on Earth are they doing?*

This question set me off on a journey of discovery that transformed my mind, body, and soul and set the foundation for the Slow Method you'll learn in this book. The practices of Qi Gong and Tai Chi (which you'll see people doing in every park in China as well as San Francisco) taught me countless valuable lessons, but among the most important was that my mind and body were intrinsically connected. If I slowed my body, my mind would follow. And if I slowed my racing mind, my body could, and would, respond. It was from that place of inner balance and self-care, I would later learn, that out-of-this-world relationships with others could bloom.

Qi Gong has been called “the art of effortless power” and originated some five thousand years ago in ancient China. Qi signifies life-force energy, referring to a mysterious force, an electricity, that courses through the mind and the body, creating movement and animation. Qi is the electrical impulse that beats the heart. Qi is the light in the mind that creates images. Qi is the power that moves through the organs, muscles, ligaments, and bones.

The Qi Gong masters used their bodies to mirror the movements of nature—the way a cloud would float across the sky or the river would flow down the mountain or the tree would sway in the wind. This allowed practitioners to feel connected to all of life: life all around them and the life within them.

Qi Gong was the precursor to practices like Tai Chi, which uses the same principles—relaxation, slowness, flow, and energy—as its foundation. The application and history of Tai Chi are related more to martial arts, whereas Qi Gong is more of an energy cultivation practice for health and healing. Both Qi Gong and Tai Chi move the body slowly, rhythmically, and with the full self (integration of body, mind, emotion, and energy) to create the feeling of wholeness.

The body and mind are two instruments in the symphony of the self, and practices like Qi Gong, mindfulness, and meditation are like the expert conductors, creating harmony among the individual instruments. This interested me more than anything else ever had. I went on to train with many different master teachers of Qi Gong and Taoist philosophy (more on that later), including Master Mantak Chia. At the age of twenty-four, after graduating in psychology from the University of California, Berkeley, I found myself at his healing arts center in Thailand. Mantak Chia is one of the world's foremost authorities in Eastern esoteric practices. And it was under his loving wing that, in his own words, I went from a student to a master myself. Now it's your turn.

Welcome to the Slow Revolution!

The Qi Gong masters of antiquity all agreed that when you slow down, you absorb more positive, life-giving energy, something we're in dire need of. This is called "acquiring Qi." We all absorb energy without even being conscious of it in modern life, although we tend to acquire the not-so-pleasurable type of Qi instead, picking up stress, anxiety, other people's negative vibes, and low-frequency emotional energy. We go quickly, get caught up in whirlwinds of negativity, and move fast *in the wrong direction*. We work hard but rarely get what we truly want. We are striving for more productivity and wealth but end up with a lack of purpose. Consequently, we feel exhausted, with no skills to soak up the good stuff again.

In this book, I delve into what I call "Quick Myths," misguided beliefs that often result in this depleted or negative Qi, burnout, and disconnection. You'll encounter several sections dedicated to exposing these myths, each one followed by a "Slow Reality" segment. These sections serve as mental Post-it notes aimed at embedding lasting insights in your long-term memory.

Through the three principles you're about to learn, you'll start acquiring more of the Qi you actually want: peace, love, vitality, health, healing, tranquility, connection, and general positivity (called "righteous Qi"). You'll begin to absorb it on a regular basis in everything you do—so much so that these states of being will become part of who you are.

The best part? It will happen effortlessly. There's no need for extreme changes in your life. The tools you're about to learn go far beyond a series of Qi Gong movements, as you'll find in my previous book, *7 Minutes of Magic*. Although some basic exercises are included in *Ready, Set, Slow*, many of the exercises I'll ask you to do include changing the *how* of your daily activities, as opposed to the *what*. The Slow Method works with the life you already have, making small, incremental changes to the way you live and relate. By the time you finish this book, you'll feel it in your body. You'll feel it in your breath. You'll feel it in your mind. And you will feel it in your relationships, including the one you have with yourself.

Living slow rebels against the status quo and is the key to achieving *anything* our hearts truly desire.

QUICK MYTH: In order to get more positive energy, you need to immediately make a huge effort to transform everything: quit your job, get a different partner, palm off your kids as much as you can, and set completely different goals. Be a new person!

SLOW REALITY: Real change comes when we make small yet purposeful changes to the *way* we live our lives. It's all about living with slowness, with flow, and with mindfulness, bringing value to yourself as you are and shining a light on the magic that is already present in your life.

Throughout this book, I will share the principles, and proven methodologies, for accessing the magical benefits of slowing down. I'll do so in clear, practical ways that will help you create lasting change in your mind, body, and relationships, that is, your life as well as the lives of your loved ones. We will address topics ranging from rewiring the mind to combating stress and anxiety to connecting deeply with those you love—your friends, family, colleagues, and romantic

partner if you have one. The mind chapter has a special focus on your psychology and emotional landscape, the body chapter on your physical well-being and energy levels, and the relationship chapter on self-love, conscious communication, and sex. Most of the sexual content and tools included in this book can be used with or without a partner, so don't feel put off if you're single.

My hope is that after reading this book, you'll have all the tools you'll ever need to redesign your mind, body, and relationships for the better, and in a way that brings forth the best aspects of yourself.

This book centers on nurturing and reshaping the most exceptional aspects of the human experience. It guides you to embrace more of those heightened experiences of love and joy, extend their duration, and skillfully create moments that will be etched in your memory forever.

At the end of the day, your life is just that: *yours*. And it's time we start living our lives with mastery, as opposed to remaining bound to the clock.

Modern life can be wild, can't it? We often have the pedal to the metal, giving it all the gas we possibly can with the other foot pressing firmly on the brake. We are using up our fuel and getting nowhere. *Nowhere*. But our capitalist society tells us to keep going, to speed up and go ever faster on an intangible treadmill that doesn't seem to have a STOP button. Why?

The Myth That Faster Is Better

The pervasive myth that faster is somehow better wreaks havoc on our mind, body, and most precious relationships.

Do it faster, do more of it, and finish the job in record time. Daily life strives for speed.

Technology sells the illusion that if we buy a “better” smartphone that carries out the most complex tasks as well as having four different cameras and a robot that can do a backflip and beat a chess master at her own game in record time, we will be stress-free, entertained, and happy. If we develop AI to manage the mundane, self-functioning factories that shoot out plastic products more optimally than human hands ever could and talking speakers that have a name and know what we need to buy online before we do, life will be a breeze.

In actuality, we have all of this right now. Yet despite these major advances in technology, we still scurry from one moment to another at a frantic, hectic pace, trying our best to get through our day and cross items off our dreaded, never-ending to-do lists. Just look around you. Is it just me, or does it seem that society is getting more stressed out, burned out, unhappy, sick, overweight, and depressed? Unfortunately, the statistics back me up. I’ll share them with you later.

That said, as opposed to merely surviving our daily experience and getting it over and done with as quickly as possible, I do believe there exists a vastly improved approach. Drawing on the philosophical wisdom of the East and merging it with Western science, I advocate the notion that rather than just surviving, humanity is capable of thriving.

This doesn't mean changing *what* we're doing per se but rather the way we go about doing it. By slowing down and bringing rhythm and harmony into our daily experience without compromising our productivity, our levels of well-being would skyrocket. And the dismissive idea that "we have bigger fish to fry" than tending to our 360° health is a total misunderstanding of the importance of well-being.

Let's step back and look at the goal of life. What is it exactly that we are all striving to achieve? Although our dreams wear many masks, what most people want for themselves and their loved ones, more than anything else, is to be healthy and happy.

Is modern life helping us achieve those things? For the majority, the answer is no. Not by a long shot.

In defense of modern life, it's undeniable that it has helped us grow and develop. The American dream has inspired contentment in many, at least in the short term, and has encouraged us to achieve a steady income, build a solid career, and have a fruitful family life. There's nothing wrong with that. What's more, technology has supported those of us who work remotely, and the same devices that give us the means to work have gifted us with instant audio and video communication with our nearest and dearest no matter where they are in the world. Then there's medicine. I'm a huge advocate of Chinese medicine and acupuncture, but the moment you break your arm, are injured in a car crash, or have a severe infection, you shouldn't rely on herbs. You'd be going to the hospital, an establishment that wouldn't exist without cutting-edge modern research. And within hours, you'd be on the mend. Modern life can be miraculous, and the list of its benefits is long.

Long, not infinite. Despite rapid advances in medicine, for example, we have more illnesses to deal with than ever before. Cancer is on the rise. Furthermore, approximately 42 percent of recently detected cancer cases in the United States, amounting to approximately 805,600 cases in the year 2022, may have been totally preventable with lifestyle changes. This includes around 19 percent of cancer cases attributed to smoking and at least 18 percent of cases resulting from a combination

of factors such as alcohol consumption, an unhealthy diet, and a lack of exercise and physical activity.¹

The rate of depression (now considered to be a disability), especially in the younger generation, is also increasing astronomically each year. Currently, depression is said to be one of the leading causes of many other disabilities worldwide, and according to the World Health Organization, around 280 million people around the globe are currently suffering from this mental health condition. That number of people is equivalent to approximately 83 percent of the entire population of the United States.²

It's safe to say that despite our incredible innovations, people experience more stress and illness, have less energy, and are too busy to spend time with those they love. Furthermore, many people are fixated on their personal devices and are becoming more and more disconnected from nature, each other, and their purpose in life. More on that later. In a nutshell, we're depleted and stressed out. We are wired but inexplicably tired. Modern life with all its cutting-edge technology, despite all its promises, hasn't helped create the thriving human race it promised.

QUICK MYTH: Living life in the fast lane and being busy gets you where you want to go in life. When it comes to living life to the max, it's all about hustle!

SLOW REALITY: Slowing down helps you enjoy life as it is right now and have a clear, informed vision of where you want to go in the future.