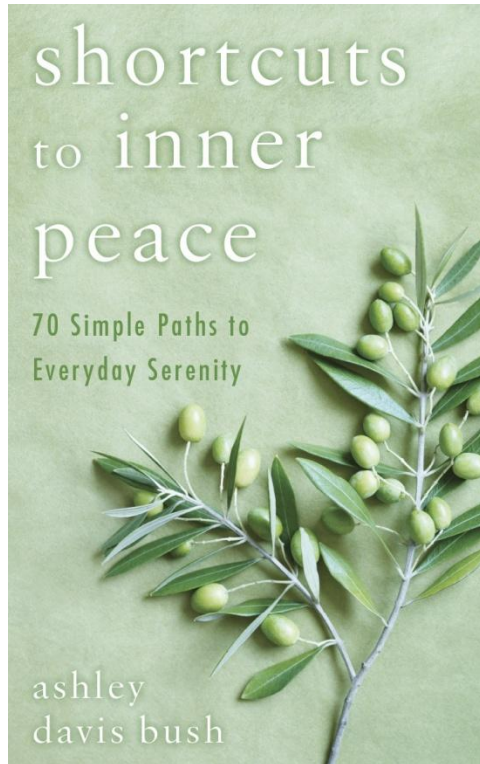


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SHORTCUTS TO INNER PEACE

New Book Provides Strategies for Living a
Stress-Free Life

Seventy-five percent of adults experienced moderate to high stress levels in the prior month, according to a recent study conducted by the American Psychological Association. The strains of ordinary daily living in modern society are taking their toll on us. Couple them with life-changing events – death, divorce, unemployment, bankruptcy, and foreclosure –and we have an America battling fear, anxiety, depression, overwork, low self-esteem, and chronic stress. We are missing the joys of living.

Quite often – perhaps multiple times a day – something causes us to feel stressed or pushes a button. We can

easily fall victim to it and go into an angry rage, feel depressed, or feel overwhelmed and undervalued as we deal with someone or something unpleasant. Or, in that moment, we can choose a different response and take a new path towards calm and a stress free day. We can find happiness and contentment without changing the world around us.

A new book offers a simple system for hitting the pause button in life and resetting it.

“We all want inner peace in our lives,” says Ashley Davis Bush, the author of ***Shortcuts to Inner Peace: 70 Simple Paths to Everyday Serenity*** (Berkley, Trade Paperback, \$15; ISBN: 978-0425243244, November). “Yet, we often think that we need to change our circumstances in order to feel peaceful or that we need to be immersed in spa-like surroundings in order to find tranquility. We can’t always escape to a retreat or go on vacation. But we can learn to change our stress response and learn to find calm in the midst of chaos.”

“We all do our best to choose a lifestyle that will make us happy,” says Ashley. “But what we find is that there are so many challenging situations out of our control. We need to find a way to achieve mental clarity and calm that is independent of our circumstances.”

Her book offers tips, guidance and easy concrete tools for anyone to de-stress a situation whether it relates to work, parenting, relationships, holiday gatherings, household chores, finances, or any facet of life.

Ashley offers 70 easy Shortcuts or practices that are paired with and triggered by ordinary daily activities. In this way, our daily routine becomes the gateway for accessing our innate inner peace.

She provides real life examples and specific daily triggers to help us weave a thread of calm through our days. Some of the daily triggers covered in her book include when you:

- are stopped at a red light
- wash your hands
- drink your morning coffee
- transition from work to home
- have a stressful evening with your children
- feel tense or overwhelmed
- are waiting in a line
- are checking emails
- are paying bills

Ashley, a licensed psychotherapist and grief counselor, has nearly a quarter-century of experience in improving one's mental health. Her new book shows how one can easily and quickly practice inner peace, even amidst the most stressful, annoying, or challenging situations. When integrated as new, daily habits, the Shortcuts will consistently create a calmer and more peaceful inner world. Weaving the Shortcuts through the day (new habits attached to new existing habits) creates a fabric of well-being that opens up a whole new world of feeling grounded, anchored, and peaceful. Each Shortcut offers a moment of stillness and redirection that replenishes and restores the body mind, heart, sense, and spirit. The Shortcuts are a fast, easy and fun way to wake up to life and to start feeling a whole lot better, now!

Ashley's work with clients reflects a unique blend of psychological and spiritual perspectives aimed to help people transform their challenges into opportunities for growth. She invites readers to activate their own well-being as part of their daily schedules. Grounded in neuroscientific principles, the Shortcuts draw on both Western and Eastern traditions and they only take a minute or two to be effective.

Shortcuts include:

Catch and Release – When taking a shower in the morning, think of your three top worries. Release each one into the water and down the drain. As we increase our awareness of negative thoughts they begin to lose their strength.

Stop, Drop, and Roll – When stopped at a red light, drop into your heart and “roll” out goodwill to fellow travelers. Say or think something like: “May you know happiness.” Warm feelings toward others activate calming aspects of our own nervous systems.

How Low Can You Go? – When putting a key in a lock (of your house, your car, your office), imagine that you are unlocking the stress in your body. Let yourself pause for a slow, deep breath. Deep exhalations activate the parasympathetic nervous system.

See-Food – When you are having a meal, look at your food and ask yourself, “Where did this food come from?” (Cheese from Vermont? Grapes from Chile?) Seeing the interconnectedness of life of which you are a part provides a broader perspective for reflection.

Remember This – When you’re waiting in line or have an unexpected wait (for a download, for a prescription) ask yourself “What do I need to remember?” Keep asking yourself this question until you start to get substantial answers like “I need to remember what really matters in life.”

“This book shows how our daily patterns, our relationships, and our senses along with our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits are just waiting to lead us to a place of deep peace and pure serenity,” concludes Ashley. “This book will show you what to do, offering easy instructions on how to get where you want to go: home to yourself. Get ready to feel grounded and peaceful no matter what your circumstances, your health, your past, or your future.”

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Ashley Davis Bush Biography

Ashley Davis Bush, LCSW is a licensed psychotherapist and grief counselor in private practice. She is the author of several self-help books: *Transcending Loss*, *Claim Your Inner Grown-Up*, and her new book, *Shortcuts to Inner Peace: 70 Simple Paths to Everyday Serenity*. Her 23 years of work focuses on coping with losses, searching for meaning, maximizing one's potential, finding inner peace, and navigating transitions.

Ashley is a contributing Lifestyles writer for www.USDailyReview.com. Ashley also publishes a monthly newsletter, *Still Waters: Tools and Resources for Living Deeply*. She facilitates two Facebook support groups, one for grievors (facebook.com/transcendingloss) and one for finding inner peace (facebook.com/shortcutstoinnerpeace).

Ashley holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Smith College and a Masters in Social Work degree from Columbia University. She has a certificate in Contemplative Studies through Smith College School for Social Work. Ashley worked in community mental health in New York City for ten years and has been living and working in southern New Hampshire since 1997.

She is a frequent public speaker and workshop teacher. Since 1992, she has delivered keynote speeches to professional and community organizations across the country and has taught workshops on the subjects of: stress management, anxiety, inner peace, grief and loss, parenting, personal empowerment, divorce, and transitions.

As the author of three self-help books, she has gained an audience who responds to her empathic and accessible style. Her first book, *Transcending Loss; Understanding the Lifelong Impact of Grief and How to Make it Meaningful* (Berkley Books, 1997), continues to sell well after 14 years. Her second book, *Claim Your Inner Grown-up: 4 Essential Steps to Authentic Adulthood* (Penguin 2001), was a finalist in the "Books for a Better life" award. Her latest book, *Shortcuts to Inner Peace*, is the culmination of many decades of personal and professional experience.

She was recently featured on FoxNews.com, modernsage.com, belief.net, and the savvygal.com. She also appeared on NPR's The Diane Rehm Show, MSNBC-TV, and The Gordon Elliot Show. She also co-hosted a radio show for two years on Portsmouth Community Radio.

Ashley and her husband, Dan, have a blended family of five children and four pets and they reside in Epping, New Hampshire. For more information, please consult www.ashleydavisbush.com.



About Transitions and Loss Counseling, PPLC (TLC)

TLC is owned and managed by Ashley and her husband Dan. The mission of TLC is to improve people's lives, offering them support and guidance to facilitate their emotional and spiritual growth. To achieve this mission, they provide therapeutic services, workshops and seminars, on-line support and written materials designed to stimulate healing.

Q&A

Ashley Davis Bush *Shortcuts to Inner Peace*

1. **Ashley, your new book, *Shortcuts to Inner Peace*, proposes 70 simple paths to everyday serenity. What’s the secret to attaining “inner peace”?** The secret to attaining inner peace is in changing how we react to our circumstances. It is our stressful response to challenging circumstances that creates conflict in our bodies and in our minds. When we begin to create restorative pauses in our day, we learn to respond to our challenges in ways that are less stressful; we begin to discover our innate peacefulness. The source of inner peace lies within each and every one of us.
2. **If our everyday lives are more complicated and stressful, how do we find the time or place to slow down or quiet our busy world?** That’s the beauty of Shortcuts – they require no extra time, money, or effort. They are essentially restorative pauses that we slide into our everyday, ordinary activities. Each Shortcut is designed to be triggered by an existing experience, which increases the likelihood of its use. Think of that bottle of vitamins that we never remember to open. But pair taking a vitamin with the trigger of drinking orange juice, and suddenly we remember to take our vitamins! Linking a well-being exercise with routine activities means you *can* find the time. Anyone can find serenity every day, in the everyday things that they’re already doing.
3. **As a licensed psychotherapist you have probably tried to counsel thousands of patients on how to de-stress. Why do people find it so challenging to live a less stressful but reinvigorated life?** We tend to get very caught up in, and reactive to, the circumstances in our lives. We don’t realize that it’s how we react to our circumstances that causes our stress, not the circumstances themselves. Our thoughts are stressful, which trigger stressful physical symptoms, which triggers more stressful thoughts. Life becomes a lot less challenging when we realize how much power we actually have within our own minds. We have the ability to stop the stress cycle. When we do allow ourselves to pause and halt the spiral of nonstop stressful thinking, we open ourselves to the possibility of a new way of living.
4. **Sometimes bad things happen – we are downsized at work, a pet dies, or a parent gets ill. How does one seek inner peace amidst genuine chaos or turmoil?** These are exactly the situations -- the ones we have no control over -- when it’s important to mobilize our resources and look at the power that we do have. Using the Shortcuts creates pauses in our busy lives that rejuvenate our awareness of our innate inner peace, that place of peace that we all have access to any time, in spite of our circumstances. And what we find is that when we approach our challenges with a greater sense of inner peace and stability, we cope better and we’re able to affect positive change in our lives and in the lives of people around us.
5. **You went through a divorce in your mid-40’s. You know firsthand the challenges of transitioning into a new relationship, especially with kids. How does one find inner peace when it comes to dating, marriage, or divorce?** Again, finding real peacefulness in our lives is independent of our circumstances. Reconnecting with a sense of inner peace even in the midst of chaos is what *Shortcuts to Inner Peace* is all about. Peacefulness is available to all people in all situations because the wellspring of peace lies within. Two of the key aspects to managing stress in the face of situations out of our control are learning to ‘go with the flow’ (one of the Shortcuts) and learning how to accept ‘what is’ without resistance. The Shortcuts help us to do this in small, manageable ways. And as Shortcuts

become habits in our lives, the wiring in our brains actually changes so that we find that we are automatically responding to situations that previously felt unmanageable (like dating, marriage and divorce) in ways that are less stressful, even enjoyable.

6. **The office is where we spend most of our day. It's so easy to get angry with someone, or fearful, or stressed out when dealing with co-workers, managers, customers, etc. Can one find wellness at work?** Absolutely! There is a section in *Shortcuts to Inner Peace* called "Shall We Dance?" and it contains Shortcuts that help us manage stressful interactions with others. There have been many times in interacting with people that I have found my own inner peace to be only skin deep. The Shortcuts in this section help us to engender more understanding, compassion and love in our communications with others. And when we begin to cultivate more peacefulness at the office, the example is sure to rub off onto others.
7. **The holidays should be a time of happiness, rejoice, and connecting with family and friends. Instead it seems like from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day we experience everything but that. Why?** The stress of the holidays happens for a variety of reasons. For many, the media creates a frenzy of commercialism, creating pressure to purchase goods and services (with financial stress as a probable result). For others, the increased pace of parties, school concerts, house decorating, baking, shopping, etc. adds a virtual part-time job of obligations on top of already full schedules. And for others, the emphasis on joyful family time creates sadness because they've either lost a loved one, don't have a special loved one, or have tension in their family dynamics. The stress of the holidays causes us to miss the very joys that we seek to create. Shortcuts help us to pause the stress spiral and gain perspective in a way that rejuvenates us and allows us to experience the true joy of the holidays.
8. **As 2012 approaches what advice can you give to those seeking a calmer, more fulfilling lifestyle?** This is the year to make your peace of mind a priority! Most New Year's resolutions are doomed to fail because they involve significant lifestyle changes that are hard to sustain (like going to the gym three times a week or eating less carbs and more veggies). The Shortcuts (as new habits attached to existing habits) are easy to integrate into every single day. They help you calm down, quiet your mind, open your heart and connect you to a more fulfilling state of being – and they do this in an easy and virtually effortless way. The Shortcuts are a sustainable resolution that will create a positive transformation.
9. **Why do you think we are rarely aware of how our thoughts trigger our reactions to stress?** It is simply a hard fact that most of us are not aware of how our brains produce a non-stop river of thoughts. Some of our thoughts are happy and some are stressful. It is usually when we really begin to suffer, when stressful thoughts begin to take over the majority of our thinking that we gain the incentive to find ways to take a break from our thoughts. And when we first do this, it is kind of like waking up; we realize that we can observe our thinking. With this awareness comes the ability to observe our stressful thoughts and choose healthier responses. Shortcuts are all about creating tiny restorative pauses in our lives within which we can make more peaceful choices. Over time these new choices become a way of life. This is the power of the Shortcut.
10. **Many of your suggestions for finding a way to disrupt the spin cycle of stressful thoughts are intended to create a long-term transformation. How will we retrain ourselves to react more positively to typical stress triggers?** It is all in the power of practice. The Shortcuts system (linking tools to triggers) is based on the premise that 'small things add up to big results over time'. One of the most amazing finds of modern neuroscience is that the brain is very plastic, it actually changes throughout our lives in response to not only external stimuli but also to the way that we think. The brain registers a new experience or thought by connecting our neurons in ways that they hadn't been connected before. The more often we repeat the new experience or thought, the stronger the circuitry

becomes. Over time, new healthy habits of reacting to typical stress triggers actually become wired into our brains and become our new automatic responses.

11. **You note that many of us tend to feed our stress by blaming our circumstances for our condition rather than seeing how we participate in creating our stress. Isn't it hard for us to take accountability?** Yes it is. The first step in taking accountability is recognizing accountability, recognizing that it really is our brains response to our conditions and not the conditions themselves that cause stress in our lives. Shortcuts help us both to develop an awareness of how our thoughts participate in our stress response and to change how we respond to our challenging circumstances.
12. **Stress-reduction programs offer concrete ways to create "outer peace" by changing outer circumstances (such as managing your time, diet, etc.). What's wrong with such an approach?** Traditional stress reduction programs can be very helpful in living healthier lives. There are some aspects of our lives that we have control over and keeping our bodies healthy and managing our time are crucial steps in reducing stress. But the problem with many of these approaches is twofold: our circumstances change in ways that are out of our control and even the nicest circumstances don't necessarily lead to a sustained feeling of inner peace. For example, a person could schedule a daily walk on the beach but still mentally review their stressful 'to do' list with every step. Another person could have an anxiety attack on the massage table. Also, our schedules and diets are always changing in ways in which we cannot control. When we depend on changing our outer circumstances for stress-free living and feelings of inner peace, we give up our own power for inner wellness and joy and become dependent on temporary and inadequate solutions. Inner peace is an inner job.
13. **Which tried-and-true healing techniques are your shortcuts based on?** The Shortcuts are based on Eastern and Western traditions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, positive psychology, affirmations, visualizations, mindfulness, yoga, breath work, energy meditation, mind-body medicine, the relaxation response, metta (lovingkindness). The long term benefits of the Shortcuts are strongly grounded in the science of neuroplasticity.
14. **What is the science behind these shortcuts?** The Shortcuts work for two scientific reasons. First, neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change as a result of experience . . . that is, the reality that neurons that fire together, wire together. Therefore, when you intentionally create habits that create feelings of awareness, open heartedness, gratitude, and serenity, you actually strengthen those neuronal pathways in the brain. Second, each of the Shortcuts activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the calming 'rest and digest' system of the body.
15. **So when you feel stressed and in need of a break, what do you do?** I practice the Shortcuts, of course! The Shortcuts are useful because they can be used all day, every day, and require no special conditions. That said, any person who takes their well-being seriously should have a tool- kit of resources that they turn to for rest and renewal. For me personally, other tools in my resource kit would include: read a book or magazine, listen to music, meditate, watch a movie, talk to a friend, play with a pet, spend time with my husband and/or children, take a walk, do some yoga, practice breathing exercises, sip a hot cup of tea, take a bath, journal, sing, connect with nature, or take a nap.

Praise for *Shortcuts to Inner Peace*

“*Shortcuts to Inner Peace* mines mindfulness techniques in a delightful, easy to apply way. Following the exercises would change anyone’s day for the better.” --**Sharon Salzberg, author of *Real Happiness and Lovingkindness***

“The peace we seek is right inside us. Ashley Davis Bush’s ‘shortcuts’ are simple yet powerful techniques that train the mind and heart to more naturally access this inner peace.” --**James Baraz, co-author of *Awakening Joy*, founder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center**

“Ashley Davis Bush helps you take do-able steps that are truly shortcuts to happiness and inner strength. I love this down-to-earth, honest, and useful book.” --**Rick Hanson, Ph.D., co-author of *Buddha’s Brain***

“If your life is too busy to meditate, this book is for you. It’s a treasure trove of elegant strategies for freeing the mind from its own devices.” --**Christopher K. Germer, Ph.D., author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion***

“I’d recommend this to anyone who wants to live a richer more peaceful life.” --**Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., co-author of *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook***

“Read this wonderful and creative book now and set the compass of your life on a new direction.” -
--**Ronald A. Alexander, Ph.D., author of *Wise Mind Open Mind***

“Practicing just one of these shortcuts could well transform you life - this book is truly a delight.”
--**Martin Boroson, author of *One-Moment Meditation: Stillness for People on the Go***

“Ashley Davis Bush is a virtuoso at creatively sneaking mindfulness into daily activities.”
--**Bodhipaksa, author of *Living as a River***

“We highly recommend this book to inspire a calmer and more peaceful life.” --**C. Alexander Simpkins, Ph.D. & Annellen M. Simpkins, Ph.D., authors of *Zen Meditation in Psychotherapy***

“*Shortcuts to Inner Peace* should be required reading for anyone living in the twenty-first century.”
--**Shawn Talbott, Ph.D., author of *The Secret of Vigor***

“*Shortcuts to Inner Peace* is a treasure chest of simple and effective ways to quiet your mind and body.” --**Dr. Fred Gallo, energy psychology pioneer and author of *Energy Tapping for Trauma***

“*Shortcuts to Inner Peace* provides us with inspiring strategies to negotiate daily life.” --**Rubin Naiman, Ph.D., author of *Healing Night***

Selected Excerpts

Shortcuts to Inner Peace

Ashley Davis Bush

Stressed Out

Let's face it, sometimes life can feel relentless. Most of us feel like we're on some version of a gerbil wheel trying to balance work, relationships, home health, and leisure time (with leisure time usually coming in last place.) And just when you have one area worked out to your satisfaction, something goes out of whack in another area. It's as if we never get caught up – the trash is emptied and another basket is filled, the bills are paid and the next round comes in, the e-mails are answered and a dozen more pop up.

There's *always* something to do, someone to get back to, something to pay, somewhere to go, and something to clean, fix, adjust, improve, or organize on the endless wheel of life. Circumstances are constantly in flux so that in spite of our diligence, life presents us with one task after another.

Responding To Stress

Ironically, we feed our stress by blaming our circumstances for our condition rather than seeing how we participate in creating our stress. In fact, we are usually completely unaware of how our *reaction* to a situation exacerbates our stress. Think about how people react differently to the very same situation. For example, throwing a dinner party for twelve could be creative fun for one person but nerve-racking for another. Living in a big city could be a thrilling rush for one person but an overwhelming nightmare for someone else.

Clearly some of us are wired to sustain a little more stimulation than others, but it's our minds themselves that really claim the power over how we react to potential stress. Imagine being stuck in traffic, late for a meeting. One person's heart rate rises as she goes into panic mode. Another person, as calm as the Dalai Lama himself, surrenders peacefully to whatever time he arrives.

The event is neutral. Our response creates stress or reduces stress.

Our Stress Response

How much time and energy would you say gets absorbed by your reactions to stress? How many wasted hours, days, weeks, and years are consumed with your unproductive agitations? Most of us make ourselves literally sick from our responses to life. It's as if we float on the surface of life, caught in the choppy waves of circumstances. Little do we know that if we allowed ourselves to sink down, there would be a calm, quiet stillness completely undisturbed by the waves. The problem is that rather than taking a moment to sink to the blissful depth, we typically use our energies trying to tame the waves.

Outer Peace vs. Inner Peace

Stress reduction programs offer concrete ways to create “outer peace” by changing outer circumstances (such as managing your time more effectively, going on vacation, keeping your keys in one spot, making sure your locks are secure) and/or offering specific ways to help your body manage stress (such as with diet, rest, and exercise). Although these lifestyle modifications can be extremely helpful, they don’t lead, in and of themselves, to a sustained feeling of inner peace.

The problem is twofold. First, outer peace doesn’t necessarily lead to inner peace. You could be lounging on a tropical beach but still be consumed with your to-do lists, worries, and resentments. You could be on the massage table but still wondering how many e-mails you’ve gotten in the past hour. And if you’ve ever tried traditional meditation, you know that you can be amidst deep silence and still have an overactive mind.

Second, the conditions of successful outer peace don’t last. Sure, it’s possible to relax and unwind with the proverbial bubble bath, but the relief is temporary. Needing outer peace in order to achieve sustained inner peace is a setup for eventual failure.

Shortcuts To Feeling Calm

Through intentionally summoning a feeling of calm, we literally change the chemistry of our bodies by activating our parasympathetic nervous systems, which, in turn, creates more serenity in our bodies. So when we go to our peace place frequently, peace becomes a habit newly wired into our brains.

Fortunately, we can go there anytime – on a crowded subway platform, in the doctor’s waiting room, in the grocery store line (in fact, going to this peace place is one of the *Shortcuts*, “Take Me Away”). We have the power to feel calm and centered in the midst of any raging storm.

Finding Peace Without Vacationing Or Going To A Retreat

Like so many, I had seen glimpses of inner peace (mostly on retreats and in silent places), so I knew the feeling was possible. But I couldn’t depend on those few and far between moments. The right conditions happened too infrequently. I didn’t want to be a “vacation” peaceful person. I wanted to live and breathe peace – to have it be my default setting. I knew the lake of calm was just below the surface...an inner spaciousness full of magic. But I still wasn’t sure how to get here and how to stay there.

Then the *Shortcuts* came along to show me the way.