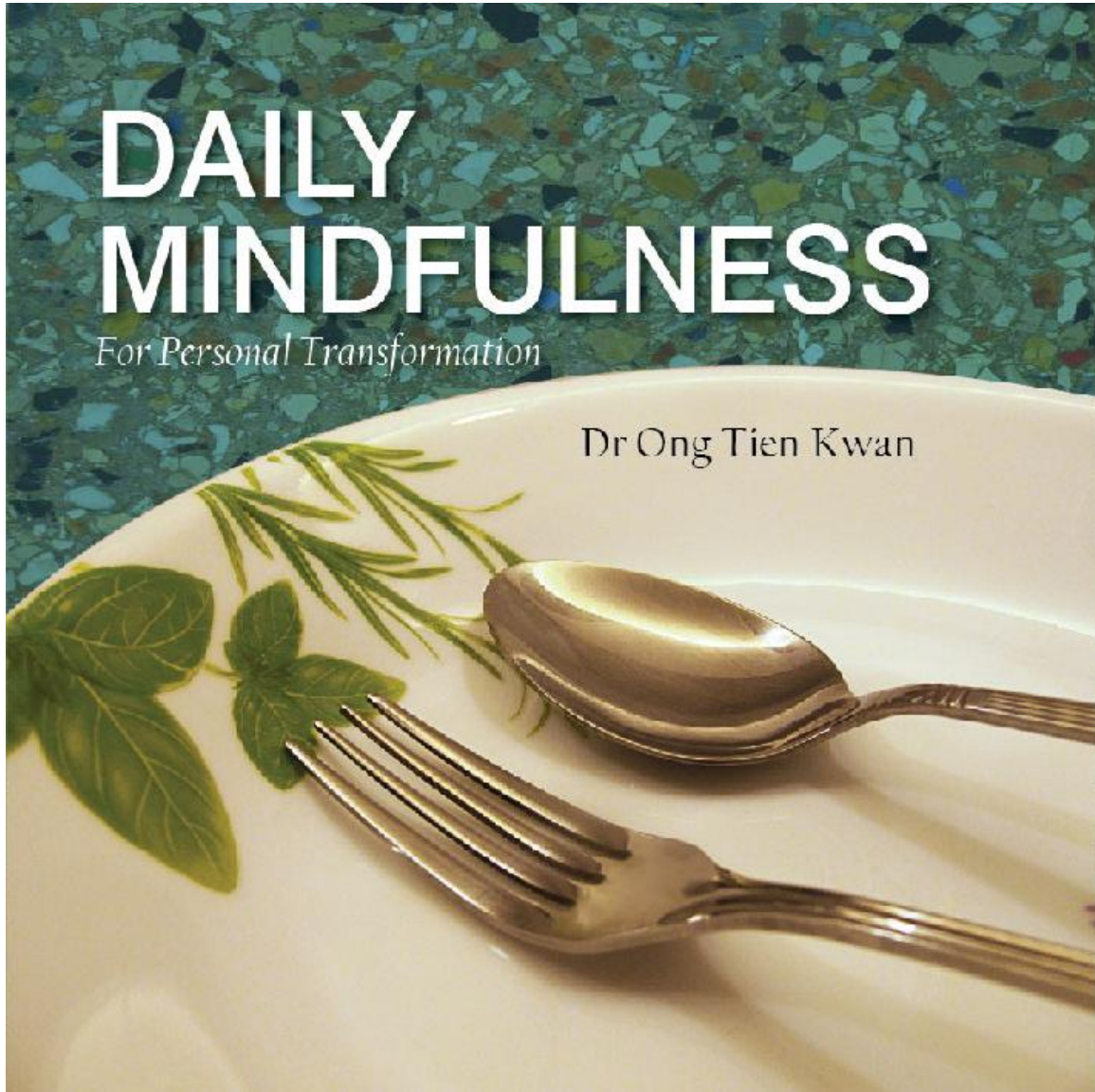


# DAILY MINDFULNESS

*For Personal Transformation*

Dr Ong Tien Kwan



# **DAILY MINDFULNESS**

**For Personal Transformation**

**By Dr. Ong Tien Kwan**

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## FOREWORD

This book is about how to use mindfulness in your daily life to affect a change in the way you perceive the world and in the way you think about life. It is written for general audience, regardless of your religious background, although I must first forewarn you that there are some references to Buddhist teachings.

On the other hand, if you are a Buddhist, you must not read this book as if the information here is entirely derived from the teachings of the Buddha. It is not. You will find references to some ancient teachings as well as teachings from other spiritual traditions.

It is written in a way that, hopefully, a modern reader can relate to and understand, given that there have been lots of coverage on spirituality and new age beliefs in recent years, particularly since *The Secret* movie became a worldwide phenomenon.

So, if you are a Buddhist and a purist to the Buddha's teachings, this book may not be your cup of tea. On the other hand, if you are willing to open up your mind, then you may be able to find that the information here is useful for personal transformation, and this is ultimately the intention of this book.

Dr. Ong Tien Kwan

November 2013

# CONTENT

1. MINDFULNESS
  - 1.1 Introduction
  - 1.2 What is Mindfulness
  - 1.3 The Usefulness of Mindfulness
  - 1.4 How to Achieve Mindfulness
  - 1.5 Meditation
2. THE EVERYDAY MIND
  - 2.1 Introducing the Everyday Mind
  - 2.2 Mental Habits
  - 2.3 A Fear-Driven Mind
  - 2.4 Befriending the Fear-Driven Mind
  - 2.5 Beliefs, Needs and Motivations
3. THE QUIET MIND
  - 3.1 Introducing the Quiet Mind
  - 3.2 Nature of the Quiet Mind
  - 3.3 Finding the Quiet Mind
4. DAILY MINDFULNESS PRACTICE
  - 4.1 Self Knowledge
  - 4.2 Mind is the Forerunner of All States
5. INVERTED THINKING
  - 5.1 What-Is is Done, Focus on the Task at Hand
  - 5.2 Benefits of Inverted Thinking
6. LEARN TO FOCUS
  - 6.1 What You Focus on Grows
  - 6.2 Right Focus
7. MINDSET

**7.1 Definition of Mindset**

**7.2 How to Create a Vibrational Match (Mindset)**

**7.3 Consciously Wear a Mindset**

**7.4 How to Wear a Specific Mindset**

**8. MENTAL HYGIENE**

**8.1 Inner Dialogue**

**8.2 Differentiating Facts from Fictions**

**8.3 Mental Habits**

**8.4 Beliefs**

**8.5 Managing Fear**

**9. YOUR EMOTIONS AS YOUR GUIDANCE SYSTEM**

**9.1 If You Are in Pain, You Are in Error**

**9.2 Befriending Your Emotions**

**9.3 Why Work with Emotions?**

**9.4 How to Work with Emotions**

**9.5 Methods and Techniques**

**9.6 Releasing Pent-Up Energy in the Body**

**9.7 The Pool of Pain**

**9.8 Finding Relief**

**9.9 Hidden Needs**

**10. MINDFULNESS, COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS**

**11. A DAY OF MINDFULNESS**

**12. THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS**

So mindfulness suggests a level of awareness that is higher and more superior to our everyday awareness, and it is superior precisely because it is purposeful, in the present moment and non-judgmental.

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## **Chapter One**

### **MINDFULNESS**

#### **Introduction**

Of late, mindfulness has become a very fashionable word.

We have mindfulness being emphasized repeatedly in meditation practice, particularly in the Buddhist traditions such as mindfulness of the breath and mindfulness of mental phenomena (more popularly known as insight meditation).

Mindfulness is also a favorite keyword in psychiatry and psychology these days. We now have Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to help those who are coping with stress and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for treating anxiety and depression, and many other mindfulness-based therapies.

Many of the current self improvement gurus are also incorporating mindfulness into their talks, lectures and workshops.

The simple reason why mindfulness is so popular these days is because it works.

Ask those who have been meditating for a while and they will tell you that mindfulness works for them. For the healthcare professionals, mindfulness works as a tool in treating patients with stress, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental illnesses. Mindfulness works even for physical illnesses. Mindfulness is useful in palliative care and in the dying process.

The goal of this book is to show you how to use mindfulness for self knowledge. Here we use mindfulness as a tool to shine light into the inner working of our everyday mind



so that we can familiarize ourselves with our mind, understand how it works and in the process learn to know ourselves better. Whatever change you want to effect in your life, you must begin with an awareness of the limitations. Only then can you and will you put in the effort to initiate the change.

So let us learn a little bit more about mindfulness and see how we can use it to work for us in our day-to-day life.

## What is Mindfulness?

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, who first popularized mindfulness in the West and is the creator of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way. Specifically, he emphasized that mindfulness is paying attention **on purpose**, in the **present moment**, and **non-reactively** or non-judgmentally.

Paying attention suggests having a certain level of awareness. We are aware that we are awake. We are aware that we are driving when we drive a car. We are aware that we are eating when we eat. So we do have a certain level of awareness or paying attention in our daily life. How then is this form of paying attention different from the awareness we have on a daily basis?

Well, as the above definition of mindfulness suggests, our everyday awareness is not up to mark when it comes to paying attention purposefully, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. In fact, our everyday awareness is often not as purposeful as we would like it to be. For example, I was once on the way to a particular place but took the wrong turn because I had automatically taken the same route that I used to go to work everyday. I was not paying enough attention to where I was supposed to go. Often, I have found myself thinking about other things when I was watching a television drama or reading the newspapers, or even when someone was talking to me. Too often I found myself pre-judging someone or something before verifying the facts.

So mindfulness suggests a level of awareness that is higher and more superior to our everyday awareness, and it is superior precisely because it is purposeful, in the present moment and non-judgmental. However, unlike our everyday awareness, mindfulness requires a higher level of concentration. It requires purposefully putting in the effort or energy to directing our attention to a particular object and to keeping our attention there for a particular period of time. In short, we must be able to have our thoughts or awareness directed and sustained at our object of observation.

## The Usefulness of Mindfulness

Why is this particular form of awareness more useful than our everyday awareness?

The Tibetans liken mindfulness to shining the light from a lamp onto the writings and carvings on the wall of a darkened cave. This purposeful action focuses our attention on the writings and carvings on the wall and the light allows us to see them clearly in all their details.

This is in contrast to trying to see the writings and carvings on the wall in the dark where most of the details will be missed and all that we can see are blurry images. This seeing in the dark is the analogy of our everyday awareness.

Thus, when the mind is mindful, it can see clearly whatever it pays its attention to. This is its usefulness.

## How to Achieve Mindfulness

It is observed that when the mind is undistracted from its object of observation, its concentration increases. This concentration, when directed back onto the object of observation, creates a virtuous cycle that leads to an ever increasing level of concentration. This increased level of concentration, together with the single focus on the object, gradually stills the mind from even subtle distractions.

As concentration increases and distractions decrease, there is increased clarity of the mind. With this clarity and brightness, it becomes easier to see the true nature of the mind, which is joyous, peaceful and loving.

In Buddhist meditation, this gradually increasing concentration and experiencing of the true nature of the mind leads to special concentrated states called the *jhanas*. The lowest level of these *jhanas* is the first *jhana* and with increasing concentration and steadiness of the mind, it moves through to the second, third and fourth *jhanas*.

It is stated in the Buddhist scriptures that with the mastery of the fourth *jhana*, one can develop certain psychic powers such as clairvoyance, clairsentience, extra-sensory perceptions (ESP) and other mental phenomena. There are also other higher states of *jhanas*, from the sixth to the eighth *jhanas*, but we need not concern ourselves with these levels for now.

For most ordinary folks, achieving the *jhanas* is quite a challenge. Although not impossible, the achievements of the *jhanas* require long term dedication, persistence and mental discipline that few possess. However, most of us have at one time or another experienced this same deep concentration and one-pointedness of mind. If you had ever experienced being so absorbed in an activity, such as reading a storybook or tinkling with a hobby, to the extent that everything else was shut out of your awareness except what you were focusing on, then you would have experienced a deeply concentrated mind before. Unfortunately for most of us, we cannot achieve this state of deep concentration at will.

So for most of us, the question is this: without achieving the *jhanas*, will mindfulness still be possible and will it be just as useful?

The answer is a resounding YES!

Here again, we can use the analogy of the dark cave.

A fully concentrated mind is like a very bright lamp that can illuminate the entire cave so that we can see everything on the wall in great detail. At a glance, we can see the complete picture. So a mind in the fourth jhana can easily see and understand the true nature of existence because it can see everything clearly and in its totality.

On the other hand, if we have only a small lamp, then the illumination of the cave is not as clear. Still, we can see better than seeing without the lamp at all. Although we cannot see the entire cave, we can use the small lamp to illuminate a certain part of the cave, study that part in detail before moving on to other parts of the cave. In this way, although slower, we can still eventually see and understand everything as we piece together the big picture in our mind.

Our everyday awareness is akin to seeing in the dark, stumbling along and not truly seeing reality as it is.

With a bit of mindfulness training, we can be like the small lamp. When we direct the light from this lamp onto what is important for us to understand the true nature of existence then we will gather bits of insights or realizations which we can string together to get further and greater insights.

The simplest and most common form of mindfulness training is meditation.

## Meditation

The purpose of meditation is to quieten the chattering mind. The practice of meditation takes us away from the familiar everyday thinking mind to the less familiar quiet mind. It helps us to get re-acquainted with our inner quiet mind, to befriend it, to be comfortable with it and to embrace it. Ultimately, what we want to do is to reclaim it as our own and to abide in it.

After all, this is the abode of the gods (*brahma vihara*).

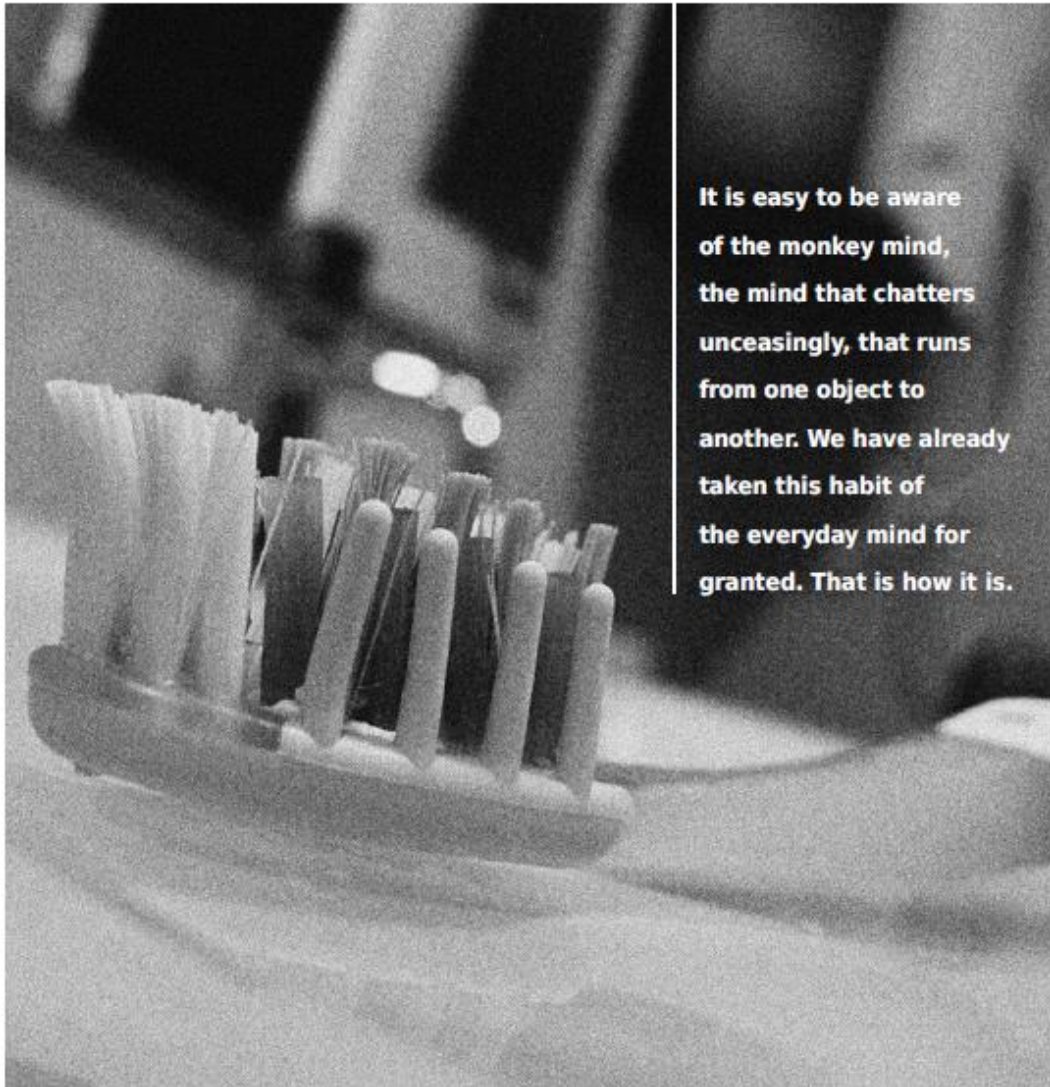
How do you quieten a chattering mind? The answer is by tying it to a post. In this way, the chattering mind, like a monkey, can run and jump from one place to another, but always within the confines and perimeter of the rope and post until it eventually tires itself up and rest. This is actually what happens when you focus your mind on a single object of meditation. This is thought directed (*vitaka*) and sustained (*vicara*).

Once the chattering mind loses steam, it takes less effort to sustain the concentration on the object of meditation. As the concentration increases from access concentration to absorption concentration, the focus, clarity and energy of the mind increase in tandem. You are now beginning to come face-to-face with the nature of the quiet mind. As your sense of pleasure (*piti*) and happiness (*sukha*) increase, your focus becomes more and more one-pointed (*ekagatta*).

When finally all pleasurable and happy sensations fall away, leaving only one-pointedness of the mind, you have now entered into the fourth *jhana*. It is at this level that psychic phenomena can be developed.

However, one need not wait until the achievement of the fourth *jhana* to benefit from the fruits of meditation or the rewards of a quiet mind. This is because as your mindfulness and concentration increase, your resistance and struggle with your everyday mind (the monkey mind) decrease, and that in itself takes you closer to the core of your creative essence – the quiet mind.

So, before we go any further, let us learn a little bit more about the two aspects of our mind – the everyday mind and the quiet mind.



It is easy to be aware  
of the monkey mind,  
the mind that chatters  
unceasingly, that runs  
from one object to  
another. We have already  
taken this habit of  
the everyday mind for  
granted. That is how it is.



## **Chapter Two**

### **THE EVERYDAY MIND**

Our everyday mind is the chattering mind. It is constantly thinking, seeking, judging and planning. Why does it do that? Perhaps the reasons are:

1. Out of Habit
2. It believes this is the way to get things done, to achieve anything
3. It is afraid to stop thinking, to learn what it might discover about itself

What would happen if we were to stop thinking? Would we cease to exist, to experience? Would we dare to try and find out?

Perhaps we are simply afraid of our own quiet mind – afraid of discovering its limitless power, and unmasking our own pretense to be vulnerable and weak.

It is important to get to know the quiet mind. However, we must first know our everyday mind. Thus, we need to befriend our everyday mind, get to know it intimately without fearing it or judging it. There are many opportunities for us to befriend the everyday mind. During meditation is one of them but we can also know our everyday mind well in our daily activities.

#### **Mental Habits**

It is easy to be aware of the monkey mind, the mind that chatters unceasingly, that runs from one object to another. We have already taken this habit of the everyday mind for granted. That is how it is. When we continue to observe this everyday mind, we begin to notice more habits.

Some of these **mental habits** are:

1. Focusing outwardly instead of inwardly
2. Personalizing an experience, self-centeredness
3. Making assumptions, not differentiating facts from fictions
4. Tendency to focus on the negative, worst case scenario
5. Judging, blaming, criticizing, belittling
6. Naming, labeling, compartmentalizing
7. Generalization
8. Likes and dislikes, attachments and aversions, greed and hatred
9. Proliferating, fantasizing, dramatizing, busying (restlessness)
10. Looking back with guilt, shame, anger, blame, regrets
11. Looking forward with fear, anxiety, worries

It is important to realize that none of these habits are good or bad. They are skills or tools for specific purposes and outcomes. When used skillfully, they can be very useful and beneficial. When used indiscriminately, they can lead to harm. The idea is for us to be aware of these tendencies within our everyday mind so that we can consciously know the **motivations** and **needs** that drive our mental, verbal and bodily actions. In this way too, we can come to know our true self more intimately.

Why is the everyday mind always doing? Not resting? Not staying quiet? Observe carefully and you will find fear – the fear of not doing. Why is there such a fear? What is the belief that drives this fear? Is it true?

Our everyday mind works according to one primary belief. It believes that the self is vulnerable, its safety threatened. This belief gives rise to the emotion of fear. Based on this belief, it goes to great lengths to protect the self. It creates all kinds of defenses to shield the self from perceived harms or threats.

## **A Fear-Driven Mind**

If you examine closely, you will realize that our everyday mind runs very often on fear. It is often a fear-driven mind. Since according to the law of sympathetic resonance (or the law of attraction) we attract similar vibrations, it is no surprise that we attract and encounter fearful and unpleasant experiences in our lives.

To cure ourselves of this false belief, we need to learn more about this emotion of fear. We need to befriend it and eventually remove it from our system.

## **Befriending the Fear-Driven Mind**

Befriending our everyday mind is befriending our fear-driven mind. By befriending it, we want to intimately know its habits, and we use this intimate knowledge to help it transform itself.

So how do we befriend this fear-driven mind? Firstly, we begin by being aware of and acknowledging its existence. We do so with patience, with gentleness, with acceptance. We embrace it and acknowledge its usefulness and service. At the same time, we also acknowledge that we can be better and transcend all self-imposed limitations.

## **Beliefs, Needs and Motivations**

What are these self-imposed limitations? They are our beliefs.

If we observe our deepest thoughts, we will soon realize that we have perceived needs arising from very ancient and ingrained beliefs. We have lost the belief in our own spiritual nature that is complete and whole. Instead, we perceive lack and incompleteness, and therefore see the need to be more, to want more, to desire more. We have bought into the illusion of fulfilling these inner self-created needs and desires from things we find in the physical world. This is craving and greed.

We perceive a lack of safety in our being because we see the vulnerability of our physical being instead of the invincibility of our spiritual being. Thus, we have the perceived need to be safe, to be in control, and at the other extreme to be aggressive against perceived threats. This is anger and hatred.

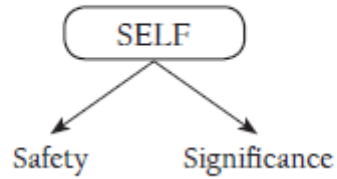
The core problem, therefore, is our wrong beliefs. This is delusion.

Ignorant of this delusion, we are motivated to think, say and act in ways that will fulfill these perceived needs to be safe and secured.

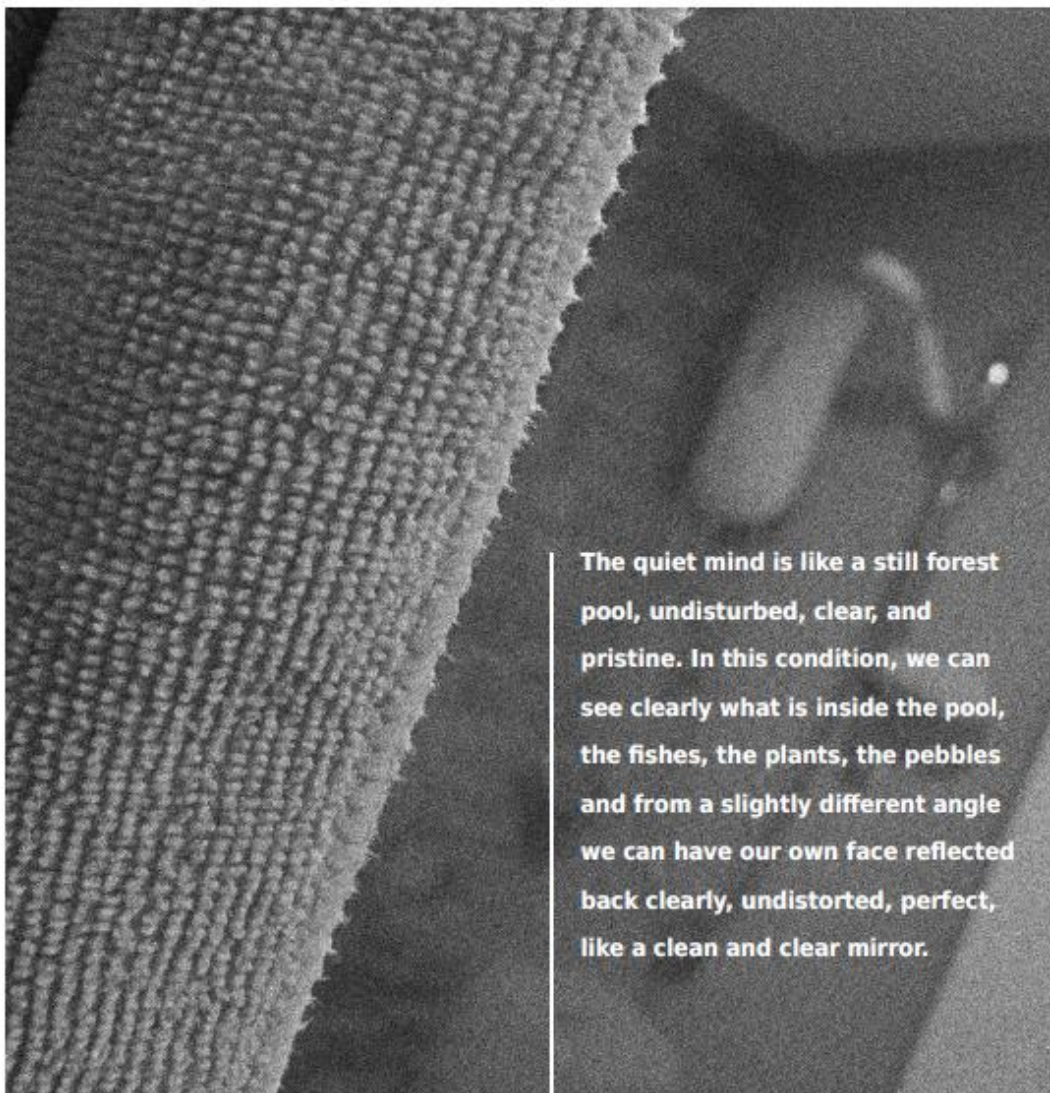
Another important perceived need of the self is the need to be significant and accepted, and the need to give meaning or purpose to our life. This need is another motivating force that drives our life.



### Perceived Needs of the Self



On the other hand, if we know the absolute truth about our true essence, then there is nothing lacking and nothing to fear. After all, as stated in *A Course in Miracles*, **nothing real can be threatened and nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.** In other words, our true essence is indestructible. It is unconditioned. What we perceived as “real”, however, is nothing but a mind-created reality. It arises dependent on certain conditions and then it passes away. It is impermanent.



The quiet mind is like a still forest pool, undisturbed, clear, and pristine. In this condition, we can see clearly what is inside the pool, the fishes, the plants, the pebbles and from a slightly different angle we can have our own face reflected back clearly, undistorted, perfect, like a clean and clear mirror.



## **Chapter Three**

### **THE QUIET MIND**

We are all familiar with the everyday thinking mind. This is the mind we associate with as “our” mind. This is the mind we use to solve problems, find solutions, judge, criticize and blame. This is the mind we are familiar with.

There is another aspect of our mind we are not so familiar with. I called this aspect of the mind “The Quiet Mind”. At its quietest, this mind is completely still, without thoughts. It has a completely different nature in this state – a state that is far more appealing, powerful, desirable and magical.

If we were to be able to fully harness the power of our mind, we should familiarize ourselves with this quiet mind.

When the mind stops thinking, what we get is a quiet mind, a mind that is still, tranquil, peaceful. This is the mind that we have long forgotten. We are so used to the constantly thinking mind that we are no longer aware of the existence of this quiet mind. The quiet mind has become a stranger to us. We are no longer familiar with its nature, its power, its wisdom. We have pushed it beyond our conscious awareness, into our subconscious mind.

#### **Nature of the Quiet Mind**

Yet, if we were able to access our quiet mind at will, we will have access to the most powerful and creative force in the universe. It is in this quiet mind that creation begins.

It is here that all wisdom resides. It is here that clarity, knowledge and intuition are in abundance. It is here that one is said to be in oneness with God.

The quiet mind is like a still forest pool, undisturbed, clear, and pristine. In this condition, we can see clearly what is inside the pool, the fishes, the plants, the pebbles and from a slightly different angle we can have our own face reflected back clearly, undistorted, perfect, like a clean and clear mirror. From this spring of stillness and tranquility comes forth love, kindness, compassion, joy and bliss of life. Such is the nature of the quiet mind.

It is this quiet state of mind that we hope to find and achieve in our meditation. It is this peace that Muslims value, as shown in their greetings of each other. But this is not a peace that one can find outside of oneself. It is found only within.

On a day-to-day basis, for most people, to be able to find and center ourselves into this quiet mind is no easy feat, yet it is important to cultivate this ability so as to derive the many benefits it offers. Even on its own, the ability to be centered in this mental state of quietness brings immediate sense of peace and tranquility to our life. It also increases clarity and concentration of the mind as well as brings forth more intuitive ability. It is the spring of all positive thoughts and emotions, and the beginning of all manifestations and abundance.

## **Finding the Quiet Mind**

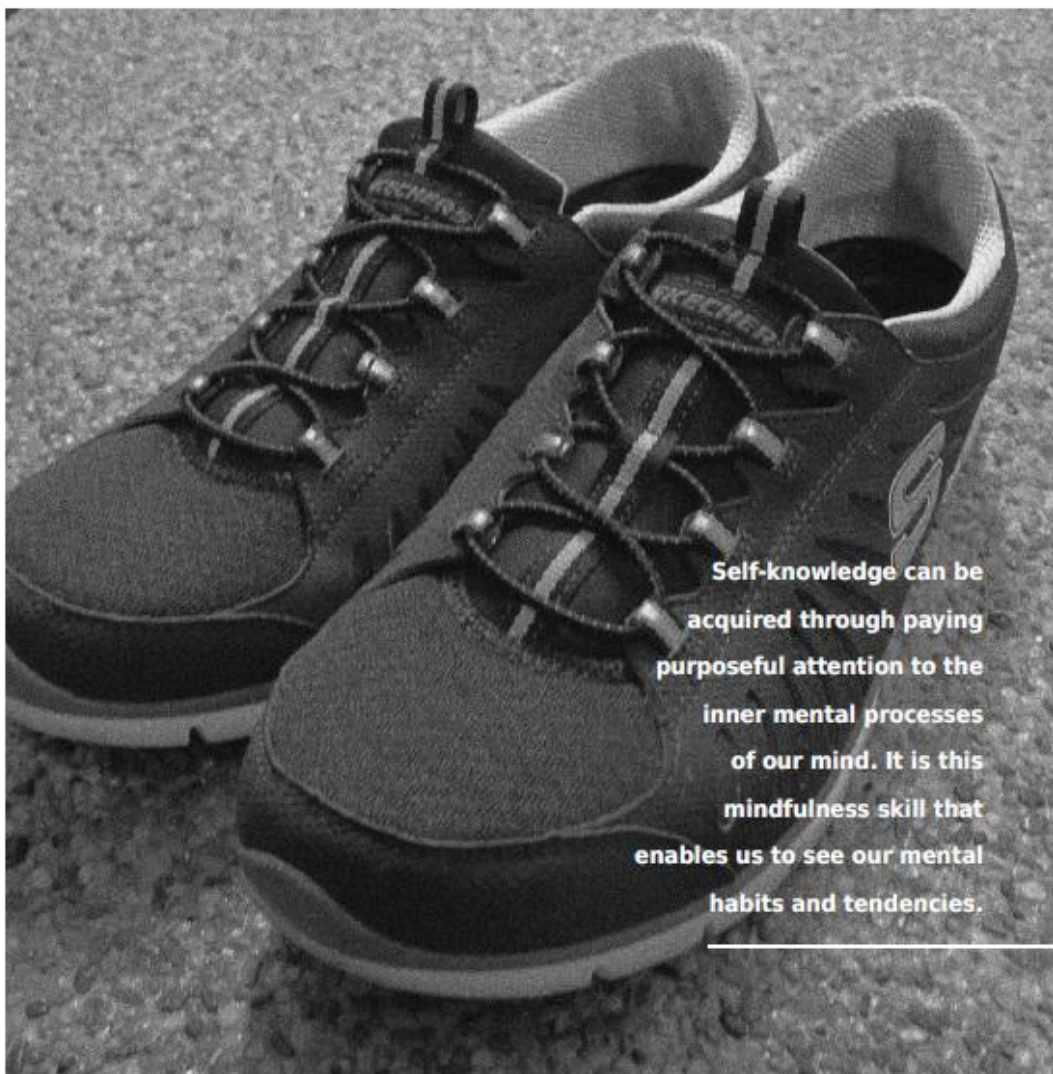
The quiet mind is already there within each of us, awaiting our re-discovering of it. To find it, we need to unlearn our habit of thinking unceasingly, and instead learn to slow down our thinking until thought stops altogether (difficult but not impossible). All the tips we get in our meditation, from focusing on our breath or the tip of our nose to focusing on a light source, eventually lead to the calming of our thoughts and the stilling of our mind.

It is this state of tranquility, the deeper the better, that unfolds all the secrets of the universe – from the secret of outer physical manifestations to the secret of inner psychic power and phenomena. The sages of old recognize the unlimited potential of this state of mind and sought, through their diligence and training, to achieve it at will.

For most people who are concern with day-to-day living and not truly interested in enlightenment yet, finding the quiet mind offers a host of other practical benefits as

well. Even the ability to glimpse or look into the working of the everyday mind can lead to insights that can transform our thinking and our lives.

This is what I hope to achieve here.



Self-knowledge can be acquired through paying purposeful attention to the inner mental processes of our mind. It is this mindfulness skill that enables us to see our mental habits and tendencies.



## **Chapter Four**

### **DAILY MINDFULNESS PRACTICE**

Having practiced and taught meditation for many years, I often come across people who have tried meditation and claimed that it is of no benefit to them. So let us first take a look at your expectations from your meditation practice.

There are many reasons why one embarks on meditation practice. It is therefore important to be clear about what you want to achieve out of your practice, and whether your expectations are reasonable and achievable or not.

Many have the belief that meditation is the cure for all their problems in life. They have heard so much about the benefits of meditation that they believe it can bring them freedom from their sufferings. This belief is not necessary wrong because meditation, when practiced to its ultimate conclusion, can indeed release one from worldly sufferings. This is, after all, the goal of meditation in the teachings of the Buddha.

However, this kind of ultimate achievement requires total dedication to your practice. Most lay people are unlikely to be able to devote the time and energy necessary for such a goal. Even those who have embarked on a life of renunciation from worldly pursuits may find it a real challenge to reach this level of dedication and practice to achieve total emancipation from sufferings. That is why there are very few monks who are truly enlightened.

So it is unlikely that one can become fully enlightened by practicing meditation as a lay person. This kind of unreasonable expectation is bound to lead to failure and disappointment.

## Self Knowledge

Having said that, I believe it is still useful to practice meditation in your daily worldly life. Why do I say that? This is because the practice of meditation leads to an increased level of mindfulness, and it is this increased mindfulness that we can use as a skill or tool to look at and examine our inner mental processes and phenomena, and thereby discover and understand ourselves better. This self-knowledge is the key to personal transformation.

Little wonder then that the ancient sages said:

“Know thyself, know thy enemies.  
In a hundred battles, win a hundred victories.”

Self-knowledge can be acquired through paying purposeful attention to the inner mental processes of our mind. It is this mindfulness skill that enables us to see our mental habits and tendencies. Through watching them mindfully, we will discover how those same habits often lead us astray from achieving the positive outcomes that we hope to get through our verbal and bodily actions. We will also discover how the self, often motivated or driven by fear, make choices that are less than wise.

Once we are aware of our negative or unskillful mental habits – and they are many, I can assure you – we can then determine to do something about them. Basically, we can change them or replace them with more positive mental habits.

The bottom line is that such self-awareness is necessary before change can be initiated, and mindfulness is the tool to bring about these insights and awareness.

In my Personal Transformation workshops, I use mindfulness as the primary tool to achieve this self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-understanding even as I use other tools to assist participants in managing their inner emotional issues and to initiate change in their lives.

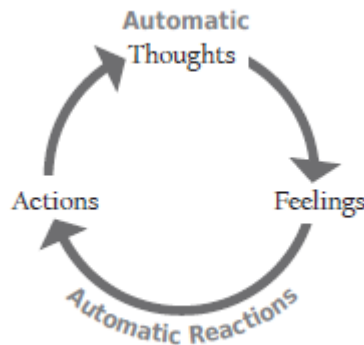
Let us take a look at some of these methods and practices now.

## Mind is the Forerunner of All States

If you are mindful enough of the inner mental processes, the primary thing that you will discover is that your mind is the forerunner of all the good and bad mental states. In fact, this fact has been established in psychology and is the foundation of many of the



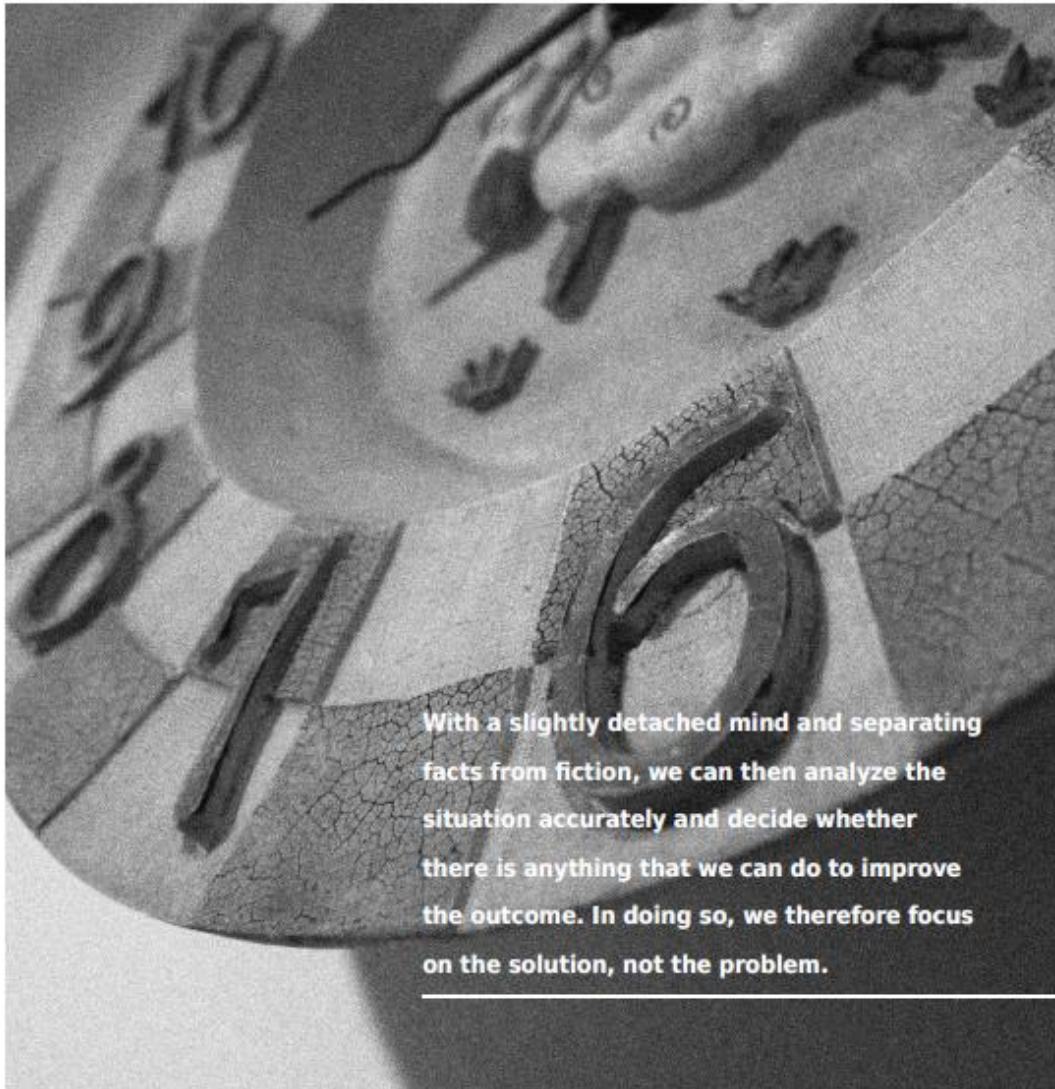
new therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) therapy.



Take a good look at the diagram above. What it shows is that your emotions are preceded by thoughts and your actions or behaviors are driven by your emotions. From here, you can realize that whether you feel happy or sad is determined by the thoughts you hold. This is an important insight because it shows us that we can determine our own state of mind.

Happiness or sadness is determined by the thoughts we hold, not by external things, people or events. External things may trigger or influence our thoughts but this is only because of our old mental habits of perceiving life. This habit is called reacting to the effect, and is the opposite of what we should do - responding to the cause. This way of perceiving life has been called “inverted thinking”.

Without going into specifics, we can see here that if we can get our thoughts right, we will have the appropriate feelings and that will lead to the appropriate actions.



With a slightly detached mind and separating facts from fiction, we can then analyze the situation accurately and decide whether there is anything that we can do to improve the outcome. In doing so, we therefore focus on the solution, not the problem.

---



## Chapter Five

### INVERTED THINKING

#### ***What Is* is done, Focus on the task at hand**

Our 'normal' thinking process focuses on external events. Our everyday mind perceives *What Is* (present actuality) and reacts to it, mostly in a negative way. Needless to say, this only leads to more sufferings for us.

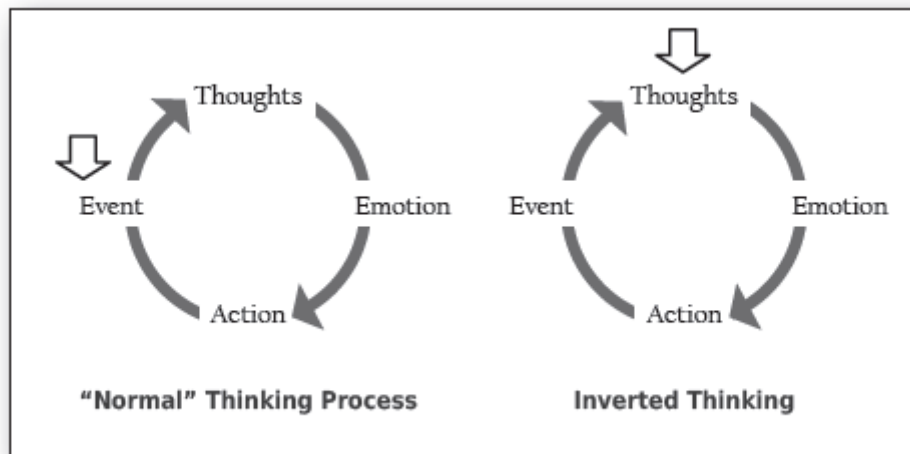
On the other hand, inverted thinking achieves a different result. In inverted thinking, we are required to see *What Is* as the final outcome or fruition of what we have already planted in the past. We cannot change this *What Is* anymore, so there is no benefit whatsoever in griping or complaining about it. In fact, complaining only makes things worse for us.

Instead, inverted thinking reminds us to focus our attention on the present moment, seeing it as an opportunity to shape our future outcomes. It invites us to look within, at the source of creation itself, and not outward at the finished results.

In looking inward, we are reminded to slightly detach ourselves from the event so as not to personalize the event too much. In most cases, it is the deep personalization of event that further magnifies and worsens the outcome. So this first step in itself can lead to a better outcome. Next, we mindfully separate facts (actuality) from mere speculations, assumptions and critical judgments that are so habitual and automatic in our everyday mind. This is another habit that complicates and worsens the situation as it limits our ability to see clearly and completely (tunnel vision).

With a slightly detached mind and separating facts from fiction, we can then analyze the situation accurately and decide whether there is anything that we can do to improve the

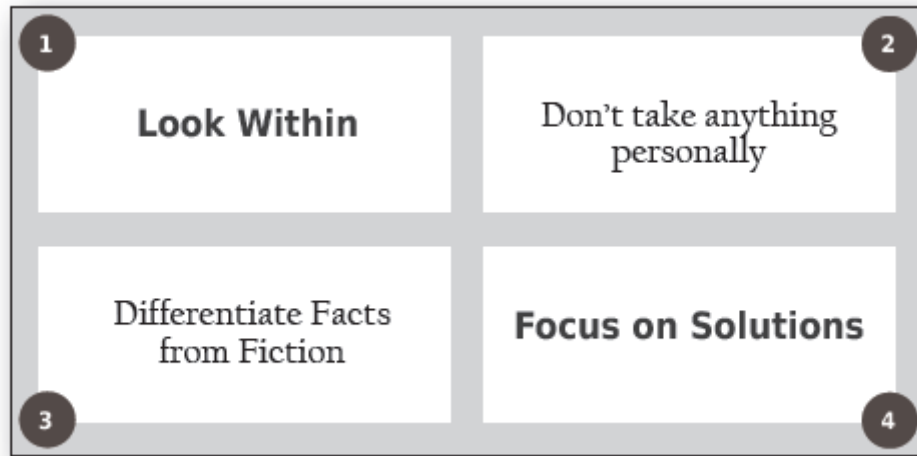
outcome. In doing so, we therefore focus on the solution, not the problem. If there is something we can do about it, then we do it. If there is not, then we learn to accept it with grace. Remember, this is the lesson from the Serenity Prayer.



In short, inverted thinking is a way of thinking that has the following steps:

1. Look within at the source of creation and point of power
2. Depersonalized or put a distance between self and the event

3. Differentiate facts from fiction created by the mind, such as assumptions, speculations, dramatization, expectations, generalization, etc.
4. Focus on solutions instead of the problems



### Benefits of Inverted Thinking

So inverted thinking achieves the following:

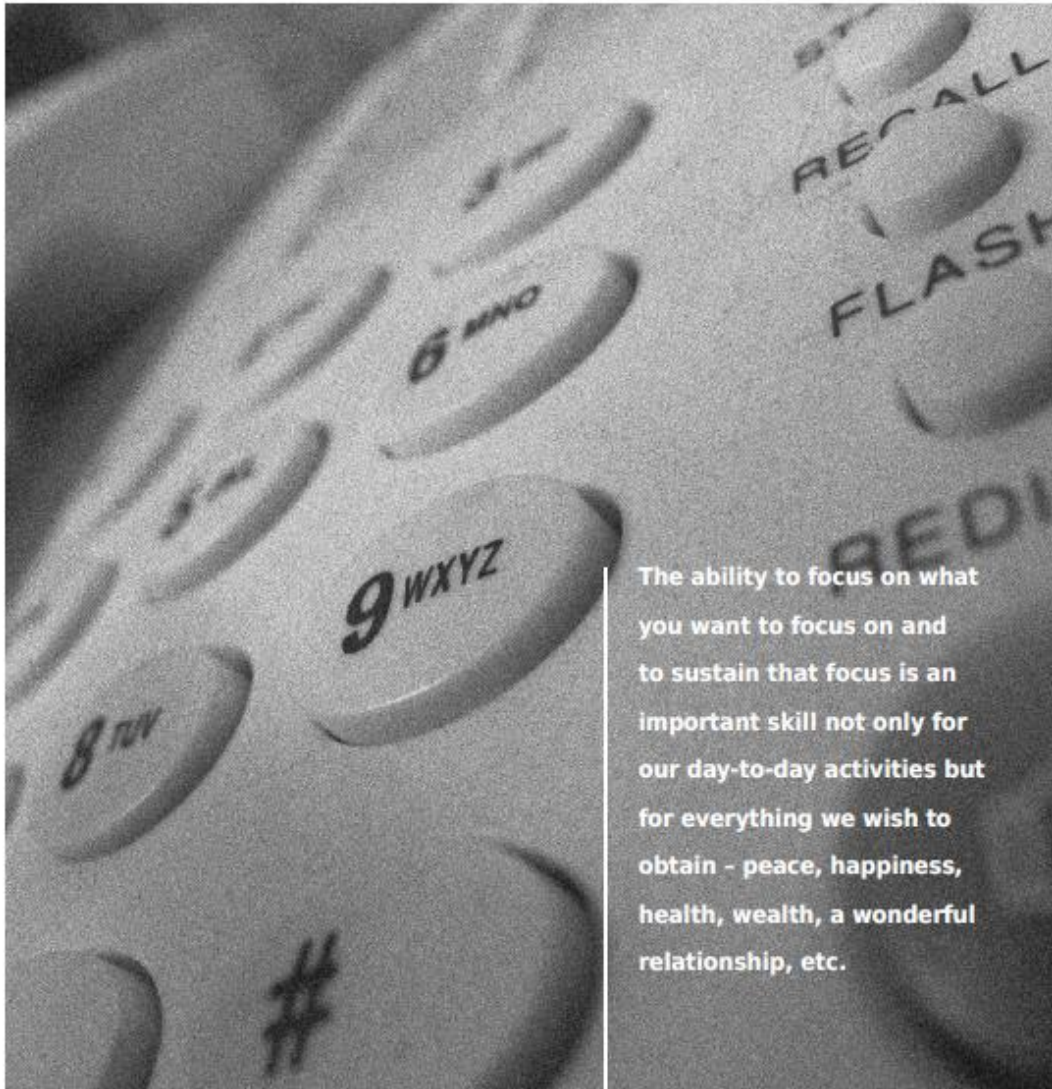
1. It stops us from reacting to *What Is*, thereby stopping our usual habits of complaining and grumbling before they proliferate further. This alone helps to reduce our negative mental habits.
2. It forces us to take responsibility for the *What Is* that we have created, and in doing so leads to three other desirable outcomes:
  - a. We validate that we are the creator of our own experiences and we tear down the belief that we are a victim of chance, fate or a malevolent universe,
  - b. We stop the blame game that we are so fond of playing, and
  - c. We learn and practice acceptance – accepting *What Is* without aversion or attachment.

3. It leads us to seize the present moment as an opportunity to create and to affect our present and future outcomes, thus giving us a choice we did not have before. When we wisely use this golden opportunity to focus only on positive thoughts and emotions to affect the best possible outcome, we are assured of a better life experience now and in the future. This is because how we respond to *What Is* now affects the final fruition of what we have created from our past as well as plant the seed for future fruition.

Now, for those of you who have come across the Law of Attraction, made wildly popular by Rhonda Byrne in *The Secret* movie, here is the interesting thing – your power of creation or your ability to manifest begins here in the present moment in your thoughts. It is in the NOW that you have the point of power to create. We fail to create consciously because we are more often than not thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Even when we are in the NOW, we are reacting to the effect (external events) instead of responding to the cause (the thoughts we hold).

In short, this inverted thinking is how you can make the Law of Attraction works for you.

Another thing you would realize is that your happiness is entirely in your hands. Your happiness is yours to lose since it is not dependent on anything outside of you. It is only dependent on your thoughts. Only you have control over your thoughts. Therefore, you are 100% responsible for your own happiness or lack of it.



The ability to focus on what you want to focus on and to sustain that focus is an important skill not only for our day-to-day activities but for everything we wish to obtain - peace, happiness, health, wealth, a wonderful relationship, etc.



## **Chapter Six**

### **LEARN TO FOCUS**

#### **What You Focus on Grows**

One of the most important mental skills that we have not fully mastered is learning to focus on what we want, on what is positive or desirable. To focus on something is to be aware of it right here and now, in the present moment.

Our everyday mind is not very good at this. It does manage to focus on things we need to do whenever we need to do them but it cannot sustain this focus for long. In fact, it tends to drift away from the object of focus after a moment. Take our driving, for example. When we drive to work in the morning, we set our mind on our destination and we are aware of all the things we need to do to start and move the car on the road, but after a while, our mind drifts off to more mundane things as our “driving-mind” goes into autopilot mode. In other words, we have shifted our focus from driving to thinking or fantasizing or planning or something else.

The ability to focus on what you want to focus on and to sustain that focus is an important skill not only for our day-to-day activities but for everything we wish to obtain – peace, happiness, health, wealth, a wonderful relationship, etc.

Remember that whatever you focus on grows, so focus only on what you want instead of focusing on what you do not want. Remember the following story of the old man and the tigers.



### ***The Old Man and the Tigers***

*Once upon a time, there was an old man who was about to die. Before he died, he wanted to impart to his son a valuable lesson. So he asked his son to his death bed. When the son arrived, he said to him, "Son, there are two tigers in my heart. One is called Love and the other is called Fear. They are constantly fighting each other." "Who will win, father?" asked the son, and the father replied, "The one I feed".*

### **Right Focus**

We are unconsciously and carelessly focusing on what we do not want, and thereby feeding more energy to manifesting them in our life. For example, whenever we encounter a disagreeable comment from others, we automatically go into the habit of defending ourselves (regardless of whether the comment is justified or not), making up justification or conjuring up a rational excuse to explain away the perceived negative comment. Some may even react with their own judgments, criticism and blame.

At best, this sort of reaction serves only to alienate us from our friends who are genuinely interested in giving us their honest feedbacks so that we can improve ourselves. At worse, our defensive reaction may worsen the situation and may lead to a disagreement or even a verbal confrontation.

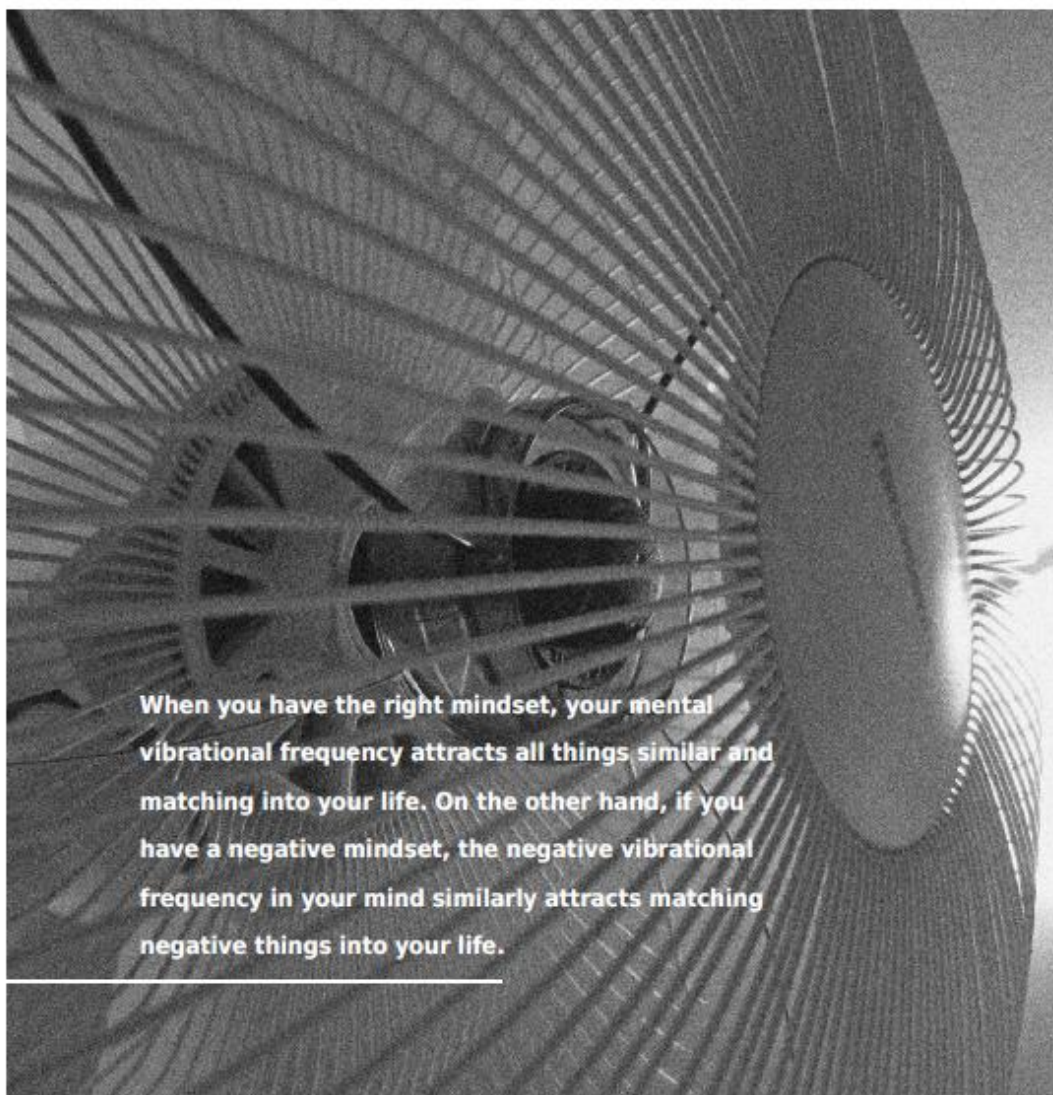
We can, of course, avoid this by learning to focus on what truly matters.

The first thing we need to realize in focusing is that we need to focus inward at our mental habits and mental processes, not outward at the external objects.

Next, we need to focus on the solution, not on the problem. Again, focusing on the problem only enlarges the problem. What we do when we focus on the problem is that we go automatically into things such as speculations, assumptions, critical judgments and other unhelpful mental habits that further complicate and worsen the situation. The end result of this practice is a very narrow tunnel vision of the situation that automatically excludes possible solutions from surfacing.

On the other hand, when we focus on the solution, we reduce the ego-to-ego conflicts, become clearer in our thinking and thus allow solutions to flow smoothly into our mind.

As we learn to focus in this way, we will gradually acquire a new way of thinking. It is this particular way of thinking that will eventually determine the transformation in our life. It is then that we know that we have acquired a new mindset.



When you have the right mindset, your mental vibrational frequency attracts all things similar and matching into your life. On the other hand, if you have a negative mindset, the negative vibrational frequency in your mind similarly attracts matching negative things into your life.

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## **Chapter Seven**

### **MINDSET**

What do we mean when we say that we should cultivate a certain mindset? What exactly is a mindset?

#### **Definition of Mindset**

Mindset is defined as a particular way of thinking. It is a set of attitudes or disposition of the mind that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations. Therefore, a mindset is a particular vibration or attitude held by the mind. Once we hold a certain mindset, we tend to think, talk and behave in accordance with it. Thus our thoughts, speech and actions are reflections of our mindset.

Our mindset can be set in two ways.

1. The first is dependent on the beliefs we hold to be true. These beliefs are generalization of our views about life and the world we live in. Once accepted as truths, they become like an operating system (OS) in a computer, running in the background to process all inputs in accordance with it.
2. There is another way we can program our mindset which is independent of the world. This is by making a conscious choice as to which vibrational match we want. In fact, a mindset is simply a set or group of thoughts that set our mind in a certain vibration. For example, an abundance mindset leads to an abundance-type of thoughts, speech and behavior. This happens because with an abundance

mindset, the mind is vibrating at a particular frequency that attracts similar vibrational thoughts, thus leading to similar words and behaviors.

Knowing this, we can now simply set our mind to an abundance mindset by creating a vibrational match to abundance.

### **How to Create a Vibrational Match (Mindset)**

You can create a mindset for just about anything. All you need to do is find a vibration for the thing you want and then hold a vibration that matches it in your mind. Let us use the abundance mindset as an example.

The first step is to find, recognize and familiarize yourself with the abundance vibration or frequency. You can achieve this by dipping into your own memory or life experiences. Go back to a time in your life when you feel truly abundant, opulent and liberating.

Next, feel that vibrational energy, bring it back and incorporate it into your present mindset, making it a dominant part of your present mind. Have it firmly imprinted there.

Finally, you can now use this abundance mindset as your new guiding principle for all your thoughts, speech and actions.

If your life experiences do not have any memories of abundance, you can still find the abundance vibrational match by putting yourself in the shoes of those who live abundantly. Feel the abundance in their lives and make that feeling a part of your own. Own that feeling of abundance for yourself, in your life right here and now.

This explains why when you feel bitter, envious or jealous of those who are more successful than you, you set yourself up for failures in your own life. After all, those negative feelings do not create a vibrational match for abundance. Instead, they actually hinder your efforts to be successful and rich. Instead, have a mind of gratitude that these successful people have shown you that your own goal, your own success, is possible because they have done it already. They have shown the way, cleared the path and made it easier for you to follow.

This also explains why having the right mindset for the right goal is so important to your success. When you have the right mindset, your mental vibrational frequency attracts all things similar and matching into your life. On the other hand, if you have a negative mindset, the negative vibrational frequency in your mind similarly attracts matching negative things into your life. That is why those who have the right mindset

see the world as working to benefit them while those with the wrong mindset see the world as working against them.

### **Consciously Wear a Mindset**

Do you know that you can wear a particular mindset of your choice every day?

When you wear a mindset, you will then view the world from this particular mindset lens, very much like viewing the world through a pair of colored glasses. If the glasses have red lenses, you will see everything in reddish hue. If the lenses are blue, then everything is in bluish hue.

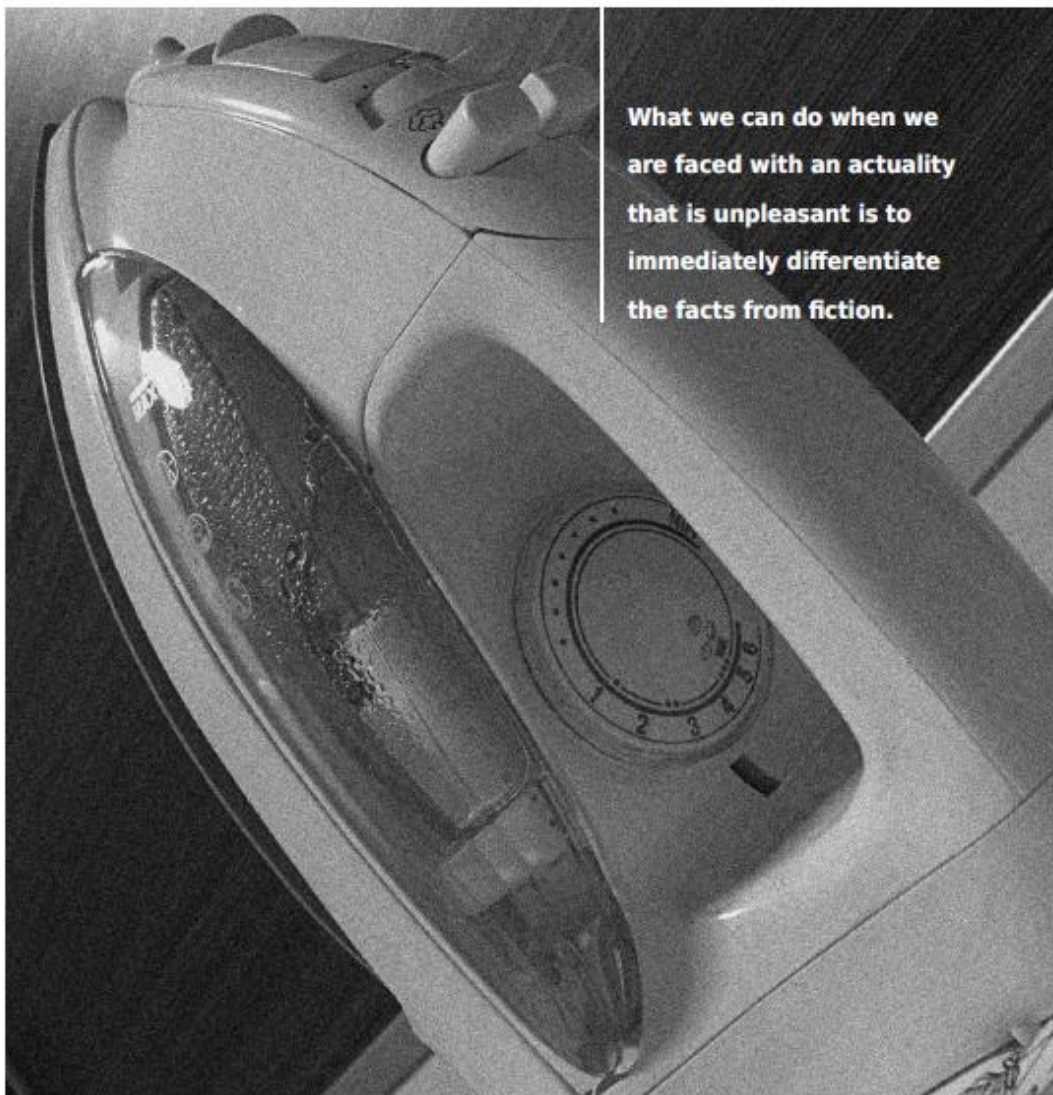
In the same way, when you wear a certain mindset, you will view everything that you encounter – people, places and situations – in a particular way. Thus, when your mindset is of abundance, you will see abundance in everything. When your mindset is of joy, you will view everything in a joyous way.

Thus, let us choose consciously to wear a positive mindset each day. Some of the more common positive mindsets are unconditional love, kindness, generosity, compassion, joy, abundance, gratitude, peace, contentment and equanimity.

### **How to Wear a Specific Mindset**

The first thing in the morning when you wake up, clear your mind of all thoughts. Then, consciously choose a mindset that you will wear for the whole day. Perhaps you would choose to wear the mindset of abundance. Allow this mindset to settle in nicely, sinking into and flooding every single cell in your body. Then, set yourself up to see or perceive everything through these lenses of abundance.

With this exercise, you will soon realize that you can train yourself to allow your mind to determine the quality of your day instead of allowing external things to determine it.



What we can do when we  
are faced with an actuality  
that is unpleasant is to  
immediately differentiate  
the facts from fiction.





## **Chapter Eight**

### **MENTAL HYGIENE**

#### **Be the Gardener of Your Mind**

To cultivate the mind is to keep our mind clean, free from defilements and negative thoughts. In a sense, we can call this mental hygiene.

A good analogy of this mental hygiene is the garden. To keep a beautiful garden, we must constantly be alert to the growth of weeds in our garden. When we see them, we pull them out by the roots so that they will not stay, grow and proliferate. The longer we allow the weeds to grow in our garden, the harder it becomes for us to get rid of them later. The same is true for the defilements and negative thoughts in our mind. Thus, it is important for us to be a good gardener of our mind.

An even better solution is to prevent the weeds from ever landing on our garden in the first place.

For this, a better analogy is the sentry who filters and allows only authorized personnel to enter a well-guarded and restricted building or space. In the case of our mind, we will allow and accept only positive thoughts.

Thus, to keep a proper mental hygiene, we must be both a good sentry and a good gardener.



## Inner Dialogue

As you are trying to change your present mindset, you will begin to recognize the presence of an inner dialogue within. Let's put mindfulness into action:

- Recognize your present fixed inner dialogue. See how it focuses on judging, criticizing, blaming, assuming, personalizing and the importance of doing. See its negatively-focused tendency.
- Now, recognize that you have a choice to change this. Make that choice to change.
- Talk back to this fixed inner dialogue with a new, more positive mindset – one that emphasizes on positive thoughts, growth and well being.

## Differentiating Facts from Fiction

We need to train our mind to differentiate facts from fiction, or what is the actuality (reality) from our own mental speculations, assumptions and critical judgments.

The actuality (sometimes called reality) or what I refer to as the **What-Is** is what we have created or manifested. It is the fruition, result or consequence of our past thoughts. It already is, and we cannot change that, no matter how unpleasant the result may be. We only need to learn to accept it, to allow it and to take responsibility for it. The more we fight it or resist it, or the more we focus our energy on it, the bigger it grows.

Now, why would we want to do that to ourselves? Yet, that is precisely what most of us do. Thus, what begins as a small problem gets compounded and amplified.

What we can do when we are faced with an actuality that is unpleasant is to immediately differentiate the facts from fiction – our own mentally created speculations, assumptions and judgments that can easily proliferate from a small flame into a gigantic uncontrollable fire of fear. The moment we are mindful enough to do that, we immediately contain the potential problem. This is what is called damage control.

Next, we focus our attention on what we can do to effect a better outcome, if possible. Often, the best outcome is when we are able to fully take responsibility for the situation

we have created and allow it to unfold without any resistance. It is surprising how even a seemingly big problem can dissolve just like that.

At this point, the best advice is one from the Serenity Prayer, which I would like to repeat here:

*Lord, grant me the courage to change the things I can change,  
The serenity to accept the things I cannot,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

It does take courage to effect change. Do take note, however, that very often the change needed is not so much to change the external object (people, place or situation) as it is to change our own internal mental processes, such as changing our perceptions, replacing resistance with acceptance, and trusting the universe to offer the best possible outcome for our growth.

## **Mental Habits**

As we examine the inner processes of our mind, we will discover that we hold many mental habits that are not necessarily useful to us. In fact, some of them can be downright bad for us. It must be said, though, that mental habits have their uses but what is important is that we must be aware of their limitations.

Habits such as making **assumptions** or jumping to conclusions before verifying the facts can be detrimental to the well-being of our mental and emotional health as well as the health of our relationships. Too often, these assumptions get in the way of good communication and lead to misunderstanding and quarrels. This is particularly true when two persons believe that they know each other enough to make basic assumptions about each other. Often, husband and wife get themselves entangled in unnecessary disagreements because of this.

**Blaming** is another mental habit that is unproductive and harmful. Blaming here includes blaming oneself as well as others. Blaming arises from the need to be perfect or right, and the inability or unwillingness to accept responsibility for our own part in the creation of the situation. It also indicates that we do not accept ourselves as we are, together with all the flaws. Good and bad within us come in a package. Remember that we are human, not perfect, and that “*to err is human, to forgive divine*”.

One of the most common mental habits is the urge to **judge** and **criticize**. As in blaming, criticizing can be directed both at ourselves as well as others. Often, those who are most critical towards others are also those who criticize and blame themselves. It is as if they seek and expect perfections – in others as well as in themselves – and are easily upset when things are not as perfect as they want them to be.

Some people have the mental habits of **dramatizing** things and events. Small issues become magnified and made more complex than necessary. They have the habit of dramatizing just about everything in their lives – the people they meet and their experiences. To a certain extent, just about everyone dramatizes. It is just a matter of the degree we do it that is different.

**Expectation** is another area we should watch out for, particularly when our expectations are too high or unrealistic. Having unusually high expectations of ourselves only lead to unnecessary self-created stress.

We also tend to unnecessarily **personalized** all our experiences. While a personalized experience can be more intense, it can also be more threatening to our ego or self so that we uncharacteristically lash out at someone whom we perceive to be critical or judgmental towards us.

Last but not least, we make **generalization** too often. This is a form of profiling. Generalization is useful but has its limitation. For example, just because we have been cheated by a person from a different country does not mean that we cannot trust everyone from that country. Likewise, a woman whose husband has been unfaithful may make a generalization that all men cannot be trusted, thereby preventing herself from getting involved in another relationship.

The above examples are simply a list of the more common mental habits. This list is by no means exhaustive. I am sure you will be able to recognize a few other mental habits not listed here.

## Beliefs

By definition, a belief is an acceptance of truth about something, often associated with strong emotional investment. A person who holds a certain belief does not normally require evidence to back up his or her belief. He or she is content merely to “know” that it is true. Because of the emotional investment associated with the belief, it is therefore difficult, although not impossible, to change a person’s belief.

In the spiritual sense, we cannot really know absolute truth. Since we live in a relative universe, every “truth” is merely a relative truth. In the Buddhist suttas, only an *arahant*, who has overcome all the ten fetters, including ignorance, can know the absolute truth. The rest of us can merely speculate about absolute truth, with no way of verifying it.

Since all truths in this relative universe are relative, it is not very helpful to classify beliefs into “right” or “wrong” beliefs. To insist that my belief is right and yours is wrong only invites trouble. However, it may be more useful for us to group beliefs into skillful and unskillful beliefs (or useful and harmful beliefs). Depending on what you hope to achieve, some beliefs may be beneficial and useful in achieving that goal while other beliefs may retard, hinder or even harm you.

A belief is merely a perception of reality, arising from an individual’s perspective. Thus, as far as we are concerned, there are no right beliefs or wrong beliefs, only skillful or unskillful ones. This is an important point to remember when we decide to change our beliefs. Instead of holding on to an old unskillful belief that is holding us back from achieving our goals, why not change or replace the belief with a skillful one that helps us to achieve our goals?

## Managing Fear

Fear is the mother of all negative emotions. Fear is the root cause. Fear manifests itself in many forms and situations. Fear arises out of our mental habits of (a) focusing on the negative, and (b) proliferating thoughts. The root cause of fear is delusion. Thus the often quoted acronym for fear – False Evidence Appearing Real – is very appropriate and accurate indeed.

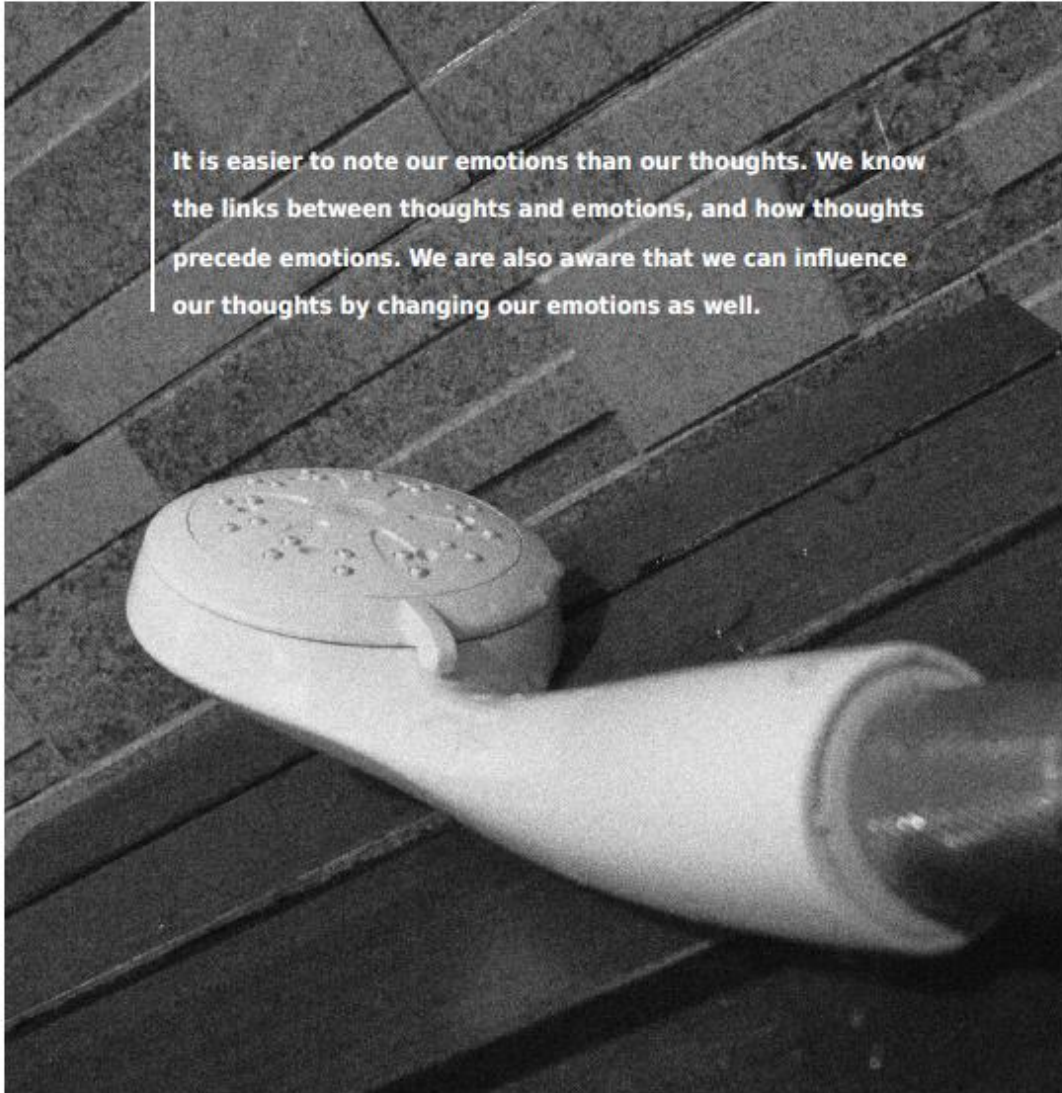
In managing fear, the goal is simply to find relief. Once relief is found, it can be a springboard to having better and more positive thoughts and emotions.

Some of the thoughts that I find useful for me in finding relief from fear are listed below:

1. ***We are spiritual beings coming here for a physical experience. We are NOT physical beings coming here for a spiritual experience.*** This thought removes us from the trap of seeing ourselves from the perspective of a physical being, and elevates us to see ourselves as spiritual beings. This important shift is necessary as it frees us from the attachments to certain expectations and outcomes that we desire but may not get.

2. ***Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.*** This passage comes from “A Course in Miracles”. In viewing the situation from a spiritual perspective, we are reminded that Absolute Reality cannot be threatened by anything. The physical world is simply a mind-created world, and is often regarded as an illusion or “*maya*” by the ancients. Since our essence is of the Absolute, our safety is assured, although in our delusional thoughts this fear for our safety is the underlying root cause of all fears.
3. ***“Lord, grant me the courage to change the things I can change, the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and the wisdom to know the difference”.*** This Serenity Prayer is a strong reminder that there are situations that we can do something about and situations that we cannot do anything about. In the first situation, we need courage to effect change. In the latter situation, we need serenity to accept what we cannot change. Acceptance may be easier to come by if we have faith in the fairness of the universe, in knowing that whatever unfolds for us is just and appropriate for our spiritual learning and growth.
4. ***What-Is is done. Direct our attention to what we can do NOW.*** This is a reminder that whatever we are experiencing now is the fruition of our own manifestation. Through our unconscious mental habits in the past, our present reality is the unfolding of those negative mental habits or *kamma*. So What-Is is already done. We cannot do anything about it. What we can do, however, is how we respond to this current reality. We can choose to respond to it unconsciously and negatively as we have habitually done before or we can choose to respond to it more consciously and positively. In choosing to respond more consciously and positively, we can effect a better outcome and experience.

It is easier to note our emotions than our thoughts. We know the links between thoughts and emotions, and how thoughts precede emotions. We are also aware that we can influence our thoughts by changing our emotions as well.





## **Chapter Nine**

### **YOUR EMOTIONS AS YOUR GUIDANCE SYSTEM**

#### **If You Are in Pain, You Are in Error**

The quiet mind is within us. It is the real us which we have forgotten. It is now time to re-acquaint ourselves with our quiet mind, to familiarize ourselves with it again, to befriend it and to love it, and we can achieve that by using our emotions as our personal guidance system.

Here is how it works:

The core of this quiet mind is the essence of all that you are, all that you can be. Whenever you move away from this essence, this core, you feel negative emotions. The further you move away from it, the more intense is the negative emotions. On the other hand, when you move towards this core, this essence, you feel positive emotions. You are on the right track. The closer you are to this core, the more intense the positive emotions are.

In order to familiarize yourself with who you really are, to know the real you, you have to constantly move towards this essence. Your emotions will tell you whether you are on the right track or not.

The rule of thumb is this:

“If you are in pain, you are in error”

I came across the above quote in Michael Ryce’s book entitled *Why Is This Happening to Me... Again?* This is really a very good mantra. It is short and easy to remember, and can be used to immediately remind us that our thoughts are in error whenever we are in

pain or fear. This also means that we can use our emotions to assist us in becoming aware of and changing our erroneous thinking.

## Befriending Your Emotions

In order to be able to use our emotions as a guidance system, we need to be totally familiar with them. Instead of fearing our emotions, we need to make friends with them. We need to understand what our emotions mean and what messages they are telling us. We need to learn as much about our emotions as we can.

Let us start with the basics.

When we talk about feelings, we are actually referring to two big groups of sensation:

1. **Physical sensation**, such as pain, hot, cold, pressure
2. **Mental sensation**, such as joy, gladness, relief, frustration, anger. Mental sensation is also called emotion.

It is important to know the difference between these two groups because the first is present in our primary experience and the second is what we get in our secondary experience. Primary experiences are sensations we feel when an external object gets into contact with our sense organ, triggering a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensation. Secondary experiences are sensations we get when we interpret this primary sensation in our mind, filtered through our personal likes and dislikes, beliefs, prejudices, biases and assumptions.

That is why the sage says that "**pain may be unavoidable but suffering is optional**", for pain is a physical sensation while suffering is depended on the state of mind.

Can you give an example of a pain that is not only tolerable but may even be welcome? How about the pain of child birth? There are also examples of some people, uncommon though this may be, who actually derive mental pleasure out of physical pain.

## Why Work with Emotions?

There are a few reasons why we choose to work with our emotions.



1. It is easier to note our emotions than our thoughts. We know the links between thoughts and emotions, and how thoughts precede emotions. We are also aware that we can influence our thoughts by changing our emotions as well. In other words, it works both ways.
2. We can get instant relief and emotional wellness, a sense of improvement and welcome change (good for now).
3. In the long run, it makes it easier to turn our thoughts downstream, releasing or letting go of resistance, struggle and fear, and facilitate positive manifestations (good for future).

## How to Work with Emotions

Just like a carpenter who needs to use some tools to shape a tree trunk into something he can use, we too need the appropriate tools for our emotional work. The prerequisites are **courage** and **honesty**. The phrase “Honesty is the best policy” is most appropriate for this type of work.

The tools we need are **mindfulness** (constant non-judgmental self awareness) and **letting go** (release, forgiveness). If we have not use these tools for a long time, we need to sharpen them now, and continue to do so from time to time.

We need to also learn to let go of the habit of blaming and judging ourselves as well as others as they not only serve no useful purposes but often time aggravate an already unpleasant situation.

## Methods and Techniques

We have many methods and techniques in working with emotions, both gross and subtle emotions.

For gross emotions, such as extreme anger, it is useful to be able to release those pent-up negative energy in a way that is not harmful to self and others. Positive expression of such intense negative emotions is therefore beneficial so that they are not trapped in our physical body or mental psyche.

Suppressing (consciously) or repressing (unconsciously) emotions is not a healthy habit as whatever emotions that are suppressed or repressed tend to re-emerge later in more

harmful forms when we least expect them, thus the saying, “**Whatever you resist persists**”.

### **Releasing Pent-Up Energy in the Body**

We can positively release pent-up energy in our body in two ways – through physical expression or verbal expression.

I have seen the release of pent-up energy in an angry woman who directed her anger outwardly by throwing and smashing old plates and cups into a fire place. Others have done the same by punching vigorously on a punching bag. Going for a long distance run is another good way of releasing pent-up energy in the body. In fact, any form of physical exercise will do.

Verbally, we can scream our lungs out, so to speak, to release pent-up energy in our body, but please make sure you do this in an appropriate environment. Otherwise, your neighbors might think strangely of you the next time they see you. In some workshops, the participants are asked to “huff and puff” or participate in certain ritualistic play until they feel that they have emptied out their pent-up energy. A least dramatic form of verbal release, but effective nonetheless, is simply to talk about your anger and frustration with someone who is a good listener. This helps to ventilate your emotions. There is great power in verbalizing an emotion. Some people find release in music. Lastly, there is always the universal form of emotional expression – crying.

### **The Pool of Pain**

There are too many instances in our life as we grow up where we have knowingly or unknowingly suppress our emotions, and over time these suppressed emotions sunk deeper into our psyche and we forgot how and why they got there in the first place. These unresolved negative emotions locked up deep in our psyche are what we call our pool of pain.

One way to transform ourselves is to work **through** this pool of pain. This is where awareness before change holds true. We need to make ourselves aware of the various forms of negative painful emotions in our pool of pain, to help bring them up to the surface where we can explore, embrace and express them positively, thus transforming them into more positive energy.

## **Exploring Subtle Emotions**

With mindfulness and compassion, we can now begin to explore our emotions.

In doing so, it is useful to be able to recognize and name the emotion. However, this is not always possible and not always necessary. What is needed is simply to recognize that there is a negative emotion and we want to release it. It may have been useful for us to have such an emotion in the past but it has outlived its usefulness now. We thank it for its services in the past, and we are now ready to move on. We embrace it and let it go.

Other good techniques of release are Lester Levenson's Release Technique or the modified Sedona Method of Hale Dwoskin.

## **Finding Relief**

How do we move from a negative emotion to a positive emotion? According to the Abraham's teachings, we do this by finding incremental relief. The spectrum of negative emotion to positive emotion swings from depression on the one end to bliss on the other end, and many incremental levels in between these two. Every time you find relief in a negative emotion, you are effectively moving towards the positive end of the spectrum.

Depression → Anger → Frustration → irritation → Hope → Optimism → Gladness →  
Happiness

Finding relief is essentially reducing resistance, struggle and fear. Each time you find relief there is a little less resistance, a little less struggle, and a little less fear, and a little more hope and optimism.

**"You Are Where You Are, and That's OK"**

- Abraham

There is no need to look for the cause of our miseries or to place blame on anyone. It is no use and can be counter-productive to our goal. All we need to do is let go of the

resistance, let go of the struggle and the fear. Let go of the need for control. Let go of the need for certainty. Simply let go and enjoy the ride.

Wherever you are, just let go.

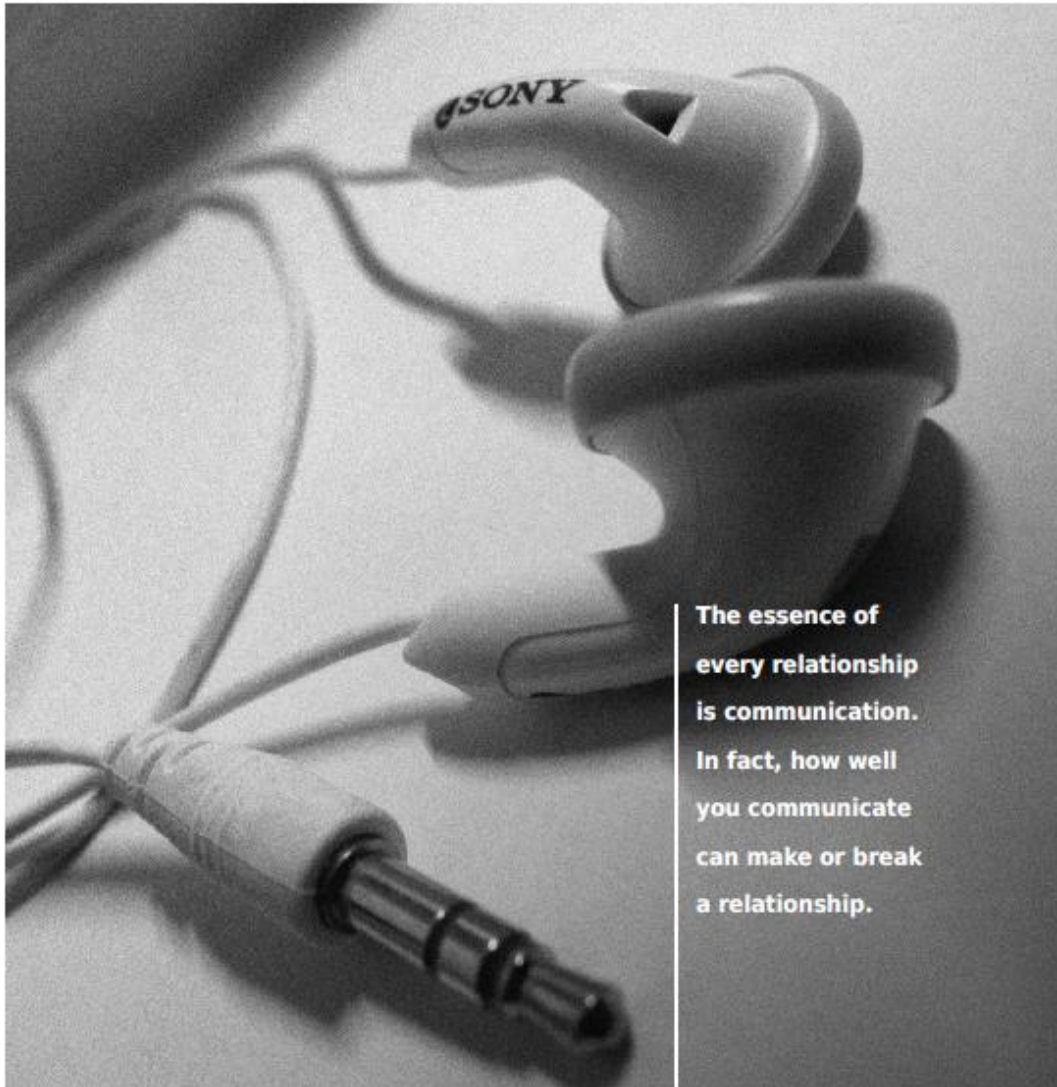
## **Hidden Needs**

We have needs and we have desires. Needs are what we believe we cannot live without. Some of our core needs, according to Lester Levenson, are the need for acceptance, the need for control and the need for safety. Basically, we need to feel safe and be loved. By we here, I am referring to the self. It is the self that needs to feel safe and be loved.

Thus, we have the needs to be appreciated and, at times, to be pampered. We have the needs to be significant, that is to say, to feel important. These are usually hidden needs, meaning we do not actually advertise these needs because to do so makes us feel needy and weak. They are therefore suppressed and eventually repressed, and may one day re-appear in the form of illness that requires others to nurse us.

Desires, on the other hand, are what we want but can do without, such as our wanting to be rich, successful and happy.

When we look deeply, we will realize that our needs are also nothing but desires. We merely believe we cannot live without our needs but this is nothing but a false belief by the self. In our pure essence, there is nothing that we need. We do not lack anything since our essence is the source of all things. In this sense, our essence can be said to be perfect and complete.



The essence of every relationship is communication. In fact, how well you communicate can make or break a relationship.



## **Chapter Ten**

### **MINDFULNESS, COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS**

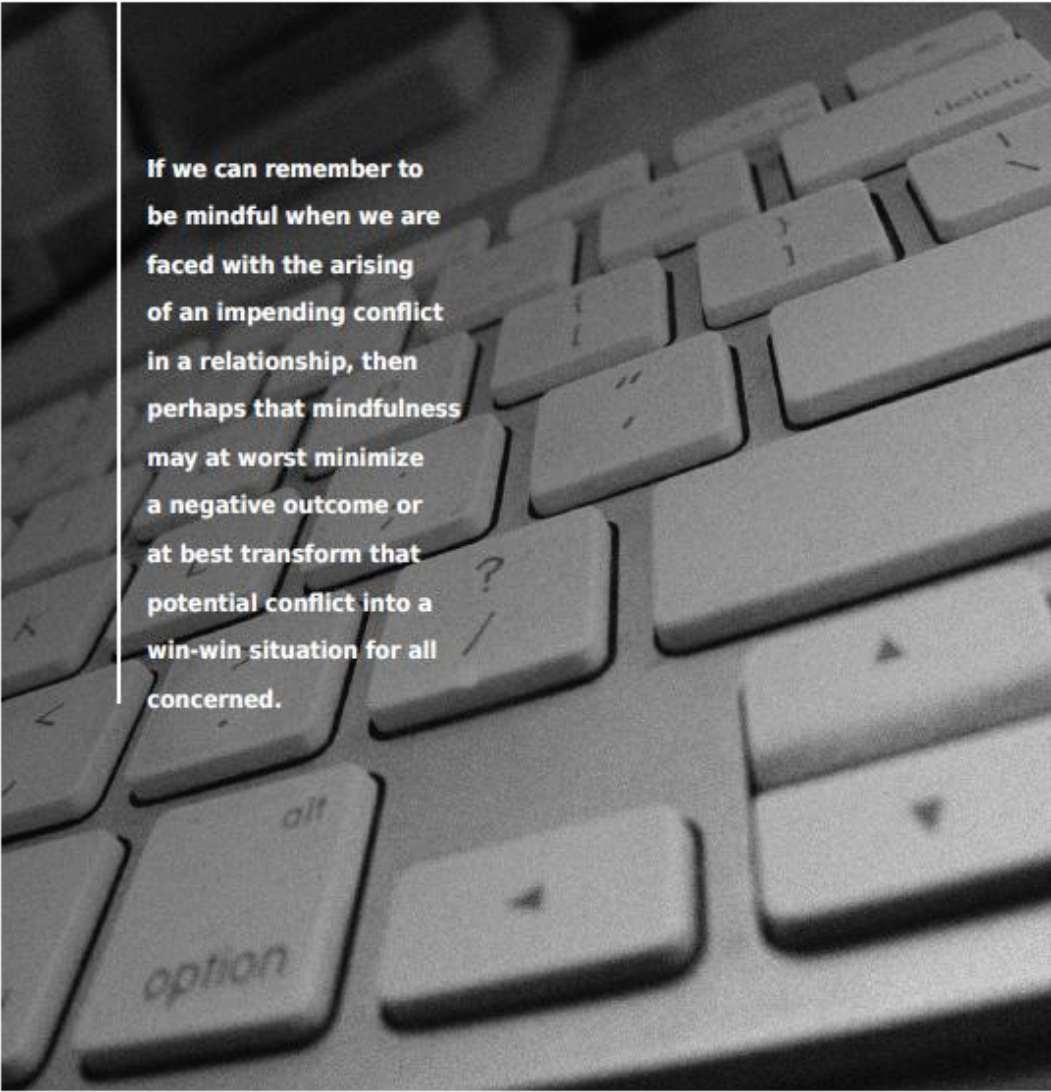
The essence of every relationship is communication. In fact, how well you communicate can make or break a relationship. So it is imperative that we learn to communicate well.

There are two main components in communication – listening and relaying information. The first requires that we learn the art of active and non-judgmental listening. The second requires us to relay information effectively without mixing facts with fiction.

It will not be possible to cover everything about communication in this short chapter. The goal of writing this, therefore, is merely to highlight the usefulness of inverted thinking in communication, and indirectly in creating and preserving a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship.

If you observe carefully, you will notice that most relationships will encounter times of disagreements and conflicting interests. Quite often, it is at these times of conflicts that relationships turn sour when not properly and carefully handled. Inverted thinking is particularly useful in preventing the arising of conflicts, in containing any escalating conflicts and in minimizing damage in a conflict.

Through a process of looking inward and depersonalizing the event, we can look at facts without adding unnecessary assumptions, speculations, criticisms, blames, judgments and dramatization that would aggravate the situation. In this way, we avoid hurting the ego and can better focus on seeking a solution that is acceptable to the parties involved.



If we can remember to be mindful when we are faced with the arising of an impending conflict in a relationship, then perhaps that mindfulness may at worst minimize a negative outcome or at best transform that potential conflict into a win-win situation for all concerned.



## **Chapter Eleven**

### **A DAY OF MINDFULNESS**

Here is an example of how you can practice mindfulness for a day. We take into account here that most people have serious difficulty keeping their mindfulness even for a moment, let alone for 24 hours. Even long time practicing meditators cannot achieve a 24-hour mindfulness uninterrupted.

So realistically we set a more achievable goal for ourselves. The goal is to create a schedule that would remind us to be mindful daily, and especially during times when having mindfulness would be able to make the most difference to an outcome. For example, if we can remember to be mindful when we are faced with the arising of an impending conflict in a relationship, then perhaps that mindfulness may at worst minimize a negative outcome or at best transform that potential conflict into a win-win situation for all concerned.

This daily schedule is simply an example of how you can make mindfulness work for you on a day-to-day basis.

#### **1. Begin the day with meditation**

I like to begin my day with about 30 minutes of meditation. However, for beginners, I would suggest meditating for about 15 minutes to start with. The goal of this early morning meditation, best done the moment you wake up from sleep, is to clear the mind and anchor it in peace and equanimity. Keep it there in a state of equanimity for as long as you like. Allow yourself to enjoy this state of tranquility and peace, and remember this state so that you can easily access it again as and when you want it.



For me, this tranquility is best achieved with breathing meditation. Using the breath as the object of meditation, I am aware of my in-breath as I am breathing in. I am aware of my out-breath as I am breathing out. Whenever my mind stray away from the breath and I am aware of this straying, I gently bring my attention back to my breath. I remember not to be upset with myself for the straying mind. Letting go of the need or habit of being upset with myself or blaming myself for the straying mind, I gently guide my attention back to my breath.

Focusing on my in-breaths and out-breaths in this way, I will slowly increase my concentration and clarity, and my mind will settle down and become tranquil. I then stay in this tranquility for as long as I can.

## **2. Purposefully choose a mindset for the day**

Having anchored my mind in this state of peace, I now direct my attention towards establishing a mindset for the day. As explained before, we can allow our mindset to be determined by external events or we can take charge and set our own mindset from the beginning. Choosing our own mindset is equivalent to choosing a mind state because once a mindset is chosen, it automatically pre-determines the state of mind and the way we will respond to external events. This is called responding at the cause and not reacting to the effect. This way of thinking is also called inverted thinking and is a good way to remind us to see cause as cause and effect as effect. This is very different from our everyday mind that sees cause (thoughts) as effect and effect (external events) as cause.

For example, if I choose gratitude as a mindset, then it is as if I have put on a pair of glasses that will allow me to see every experience through the lens of gratitude. I feel grateful in having a healthy body when I wake up this morning. I feel grateful for the peace in my heart. I am grateful for a healthy and loving family. I am grateful that I have another day to do good work. Basically, I am grateful for all the good things in my life and I go through them one by one with gratitude. Then, I follow this up by seeing everything I experience on this day through the lens of gratitude.

This is actually a very simple exercise but doing it on a consistent basis can dramatically change your life.

### **3. Pay attention to your mental habits**

Make it a point to see how many mental habits you can identify in a day. One effective way of doing this is to keep a journal. Even if you can identify one mental habit for that day, it would be a good start. As you watch your thoughts more regularly, you will be able to recognize more of these mental habits. Remember ABC – awareness before change. You need to be aware of your negative mental habits first before you can begin to change them.

If you are aware of your negative mental habits as they arise, you can stop them or replace them more easily with good mental habits than when you were to notice them after they have built up momentum. Naturally, if the mental habits have run their courses, then it is too late. Still, you can reflect on them and make a determination to catch them earlier the next time they arise.

### **4. If you are in pain, you are in error**

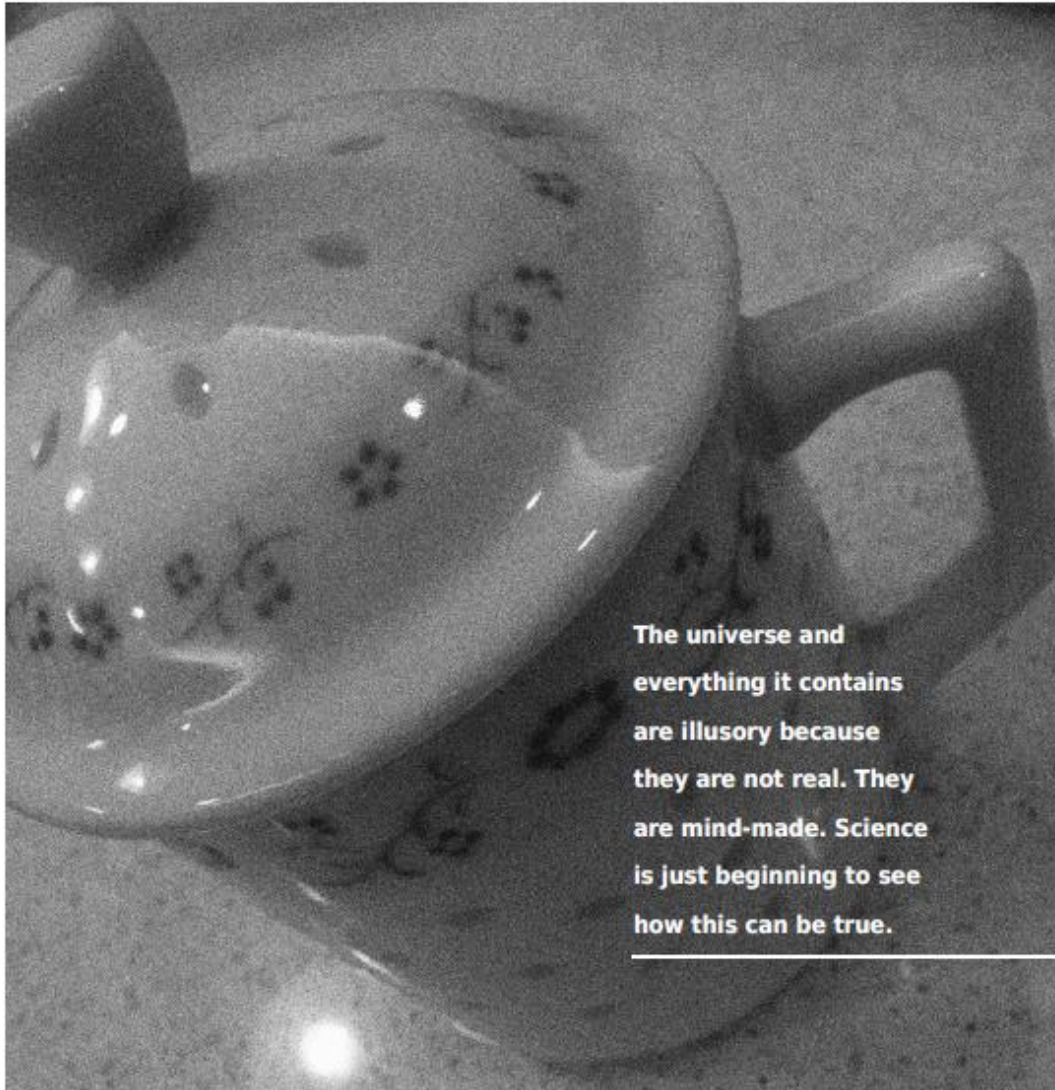
Your true spiritual essence is peace, which is the nature of a still mind. Therefore, whenever you move away from this core or center of equanimity, you would have ruffled the stillness, creating a disturbance or defilement of the mind.

This disturbance can be grouped into two different types – the type that the self likes (attachments) and the type that the self dislikes (aversions). The first type gives us pleasure while the second type gives us pain. They are both merely different sides of the same coin.

Thus, whenever you are in pain, you know that your thoughts have been disturbed. Remember that our thoughts give rise to our emotions. So whenever you are in pain, you can be sure that there is a negative thought behind it. To know that you have unskillfully created that negative thought also means that you can change it and this is extremely empowering and life transforming. It means your state of mind – your happiness – is not dependent on anything outside of you. It depends only on how skillfully you can generate a positive thought or state of mind.

## **5. End the day with peace**

Finally, as the day comes to an end, it is useful to once again sit in meditation so that we can center again in peace. A peaceful mind leads to good sleep and is the best medicine for good health – spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically.



The universe and everything it contains are illusory because they are not real. They are mind-made. Science is just beginning to see how this can be true.

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## **Chapter Twelve**

### **The Concept of Emptiness**

Participants of my Personal Transformation Course workshops would notice that one important concept has yet to be discussed in this book – the concept of emptiness. Essentially, this Mahayana concept says that everything in this relative universe is without any intrinsic value except that given by our mind. Understanding this concept can help us to see the true nature of things, to discard unskillful and limiting beliefs, and to make it easier to learn acceptance and letting go.

Both the Hindu religion and Buddhism taught that the universe we live in is illusory or *maya*. The universe and everything it contains are illusory because they are not real. They are mind-made. Science is just beginning to see how this can be true. Through quantum mechanics, scientists now know that the entire universe is like a hologram, and Michael Talbot explained this very well in his book, “The Holographic Universe”.

So in a sense, this universe is empty.

Another angle to this emptiness concept is that there is no intrinsic value in things except that which we give to them. For example, a diamond is seen as valuable to us. Yet a diamond is merely a “stone” to someone living in the deep jungle because it serves no value to them. Another example of how value can evolve is the demand for special car registration numbers in Malaysia. Initially, the road transport department simply gives out these numbers freely. Today, because of high demand for special “lucky” numbers, the department is charging good money for these special numbers.

There is still another aspect of this emptiness that is more useful to us. It is the emptiness of our thoughts and beliefs. Even these thoughts, which we cherish as ours, have no intrinsic value except that which we give to them. Knowing and realizing this fact can make it easier for us to let go of our limiting beliefs, expectations and concepts.

When you look at the work of Byron Katie, Bruce di Marsico and Michael Ryce, you will see a similarity in their works. They all work on changing beliefs. After all, a belief is merely a ***perception*** of reality. It is not reality itself. If the belief is not useful for your growth, then simply drop it or replace it with a better one. This is only possible because our beliefs too are empty of any real value.

In fact, it is precisely because of this emptiness that everything is possible.

## **Summary**

Human beings constantly seek happiness. The pervading belief is that our happiness comes from the people we love, the things we want and possess, and the achievements we worked for. In short, we think that our happiness comes from things outside of us.

On the other hand, spiritual masters and sages of old have consistently told us that this is not true. They say that our happiness can only be found within us but they have not clearly told us why this is so.

Modern psychology now tells us that our thoughts directly influence our state of mind. Whether we are happy or sad depends directly on what we think. Even though we know this, our everyday mind still has the old habit of focusing our attention on what is outside of us and thereby allowing what is outside of us to influence our thoughts. Common sense tells us that if our happiness is dependent on other people, things or events outside of us, we can never truly be happy because they are outside of our own control. Only our mind is within our total control.

Therefore, if we want to attain any form of happiness at all, we must now train our mind to focus within and to think differently from what we are used to. Inverted thinking is one way to achieve this. This is achievable only when we have the mindfulness to track our thoughts and focus our attention on things we choose rather than allowing the mind to run amok on its own, thus the need for meditation and mind cultivation.

Through mind cultivation we will be able to realize that the happiness we seek for has always been available inside us. It is, in fact, the nature of the quiet mind.

## NOTE

A few names were mentioned in this book. They mostly, but not all, belonged to individuals who are in the field of self-help and personal growth. Readers are advised to visit their respective websites for more information about their work.

1. Michael Ryce
  - a. Author of “Why Is This Happening to Me... Again?”
  - b. Website: <http://www.whyaagain.org>
2. Lester Levenson
  - a. Founder of the Release Technique
  - b. Website: <http://www.lesterlevenson.org>
3. Hale Dwoskin
  - a. A student of Lester Levenson, who created the Sedona Method
  - b. Website: <http://www.sedona.com>
4. Bruce di Marsico
  - a. An American psychotherapist who developed the Option Method
  - b. Website: <http://www.optionmethodnetwork.com>
5. Byron Katie
  - a. An American author and speaker who developed a method of self-inquiry called “The Work”
  - b. Website: <http://www.thework.com>
6. Michael Talbot
  - a. The author of “The Holographic Universe”, a book that espoused a theory that the physical universe is akin to a giant hologram
7. Abraham’s Teachings
  - a. Abraham is said to be a name given to a group of entities that channeled through Esther Hicks. Their teachings include the Law of Attraction
  - b. Website: <http://www.abraham-hicks.com>



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