

Chapter 8

Empowering Your Mind

Topics in this Chapter:

- * Exploring the value of your mind
- * Clearing the clutter of your thoughts
- * Integrating meditation into your daily life

Of all the tools you have to work with in your life-journey, the most important is your mind. Without your mind, you wouldn't even remember the people and experiences that have been most important to you or the valuable experiences you've had. Without your mind, you wouldn't even be able to contemplate who you are.

The clarity of vision in your eyes is important. Your ability to speak is important. All the functions of your body and senses are useful. Nevertheless, your mind is the No. 1 tool for any endeavor in life — including on the path of spiritual evolution.

The Amazing Value of Your Mind

Ancient spiritual scriptures and modern neuroscientists agree that what you know, see, hear, taste, and feel is experienced in, through, and with your mind.

Neuroscience says that even an object that you perceive as being outside of yourself is not experienced outside yourself, but in your own brain and mind. Even a pain you feel in a part of your body is not being experienced in that part of your body, but again, in your brain and mind.

Here's a simple scientific explanation of the electro-chemical brain processes that come together to create the experience of pain in a stubbed toe:

- 1. Nerve impulses that signal pain travel from your toe through the branches of your nervous system.**
- 2. These impulses move up through your spinal cord and into the parts of your brain that deal with pain, as well as to areas of your brain that represent that particular toe.**
- 3. This combination of electric and chemical activity culminates with you experiencing brain patterns that communicate a feeling of pain in your toe.**

And voilà! Stubbed toe pain.

Don't Forget

Just as the experience of a stubbed toe is taking place in your brain and not your toe, so all of your experiences of the physical world are also taking place in your brain and mind.

Be Careful

This example isn't intended to limit the process of personal experience to only what scientists know of the brain and mind. Certainly, whatever is creating your experience of the world is far more amazing than modern science can capture.

Opening up your creative mind

Even if you don't consider yourself to be an artist, improving your creative skills will inevitably improve all the different areas of your life. Whether or not you choose to take up specific arts such as painting, cooking, writing, photography, garden designing, crafts, or singing and playing music, you knowingly or unknowingly are already an artist of the amazing creative artwork that is your whole life.

Because you're already an artist, why not strive to be a great one? Whether you're setting up your living space, cooking a meal, or teaching your children right from wrong, doing whatever you do with a creative and spiritual flow enhances all your actions and helps turn whatever you do into a spiritual practice. Every activity in life is enhanced by doing it artfully or creatively.

One way to improve the creative artistry of your works is to keep your focus on what you are doing and not on what material benefits you may receive from it. For many people, the initial impetus to do something is sparked by hopes of increasing their income or receiving other benefits.

However, when you're actually in the midst of doing an action — writing the book, designing the recipe, sewing the costume, or building the structure — your creativity tends to flow more smoothly when you remove your focus from the desire or greed that may have motivated you to begin the action and shine the light of your focus on the action itself and on staying open to a creative flow through your connection with the universe.

In recent decades, nearly every field of creativity — including science, music, philosophy, the arts, and even spirituality — has unfortunately turned into one more avenue for commercial profiteering. Today's greed culture became especially obvious to me when I started offering my creative spiritual works, including an extensive Web site of writings, video, music, and other spiritual multimedia resources, for free.

During my vibrant decade of monastic-style ashram living, I became very comfortable with the idea of offering creative service without looking to receive anything in return, other than the honor and joy of being able to do it.

When I left the ashram to go to Hollywood, I found a very different culture that was still creative and artistic, but often focused on material benefits and “getting ahead.” Friends would invite me to come to meals or parties so that I could meet people who “could be a good contact for you,” instead of thinking about who would be interesting or uplifting for me to meet. One coworker in my early years of news editing gave me a stern lecture about how the union rules said that I had to request overtime pay for working through a missed lunch even if I hadn’t been hungry when asked to work through the hour. This focus on hourly wages was very new for someone like me who hadn’t counted an hour for pay in ten years.

Therefore, after my Hollywood years, when my life shifted into a more reclusive time of writing, singing, producing uplifting videos, and creating Web site offerings, I decided to go back to my more comfortable tradition of approaching my creative works as freely offered service. Although this approach brought some lean financial years that were somewhat out of balance, still it was worth going through these challenges to be able to offer spiritual resources as I thought they should be offered — freely.

During my monastic years, I’d been blessed to have access to an abundance of inspiring videos, audiotapes, and spiritual teachings, and now I wanted to share my spiritual resources in the same free spirit through these online offerings. The “google gods” were kind in giving my pages good rankings, and many guests have come from around the world every day to enjoy the free multimedia spiritual resources.

However, some acquaintances, colleagues, and book marketing experts seemed to be upset by the idea that I was wasting all this Internet traffic flow without capturing e-mail addresses or pushing products and advertising, especially when they knew I was living on meager funds. For some, their concern was based on wanting the best for me, and for others, it seemed that my commitment to sharing rather than selling broke some kind of unspoken business law about the importance of maximizing financial profits. More than one person became angry when I refused his moneymaking suggestions and explained that my goal was to give these works freely, without capturing anything from guests other than hopefully their enjoyment and upliftment.

In truth, my commitment to keep these works freely available was not only altruistic, but also a way to tap into greater creativity. Many artists, scientists, and philosophers throughout time have discovered this secret — that divinely inspired creativity often flows best when you work with full focus and freedom from materialistic desires and intentions.

Even on a neuroscience level, parts of your brain that deal with creative, holistic, and spiritual consciousness issues tend to be on the other side of the aisle from the parts of your brain that deal with business or bookkeeping tasks. Certainly, some people have achieved a good combination of these abilities, but others whose priority is focused on spiritual awareness or creative expression may prefer not to get too bogged down in too many contracts and business deals — and thus you have the archetypal “starving artist” syndrome. Some artists find that focusing too much on selling can eventually turn into selling out.

Adversity reveals genius, prosperity conceals it.

—Horace

If you want to open up your mind's creative abilities, one suggestion is, if circumstances permit, to move forward with your artistic endeavors without worrying too much about how to sell what you do, but with a higher intention of wanting to use your time on earth to express something wonderful. Through the efforts of many poor but prolific artists came the great renaissances of philosophy, arts, and music, along with world-shattering scientific and philosophical paradigms. These productive artists focused on inspiring audiences with their wisdom, talents, and spirit, above merely looking for a way to cash in for big bucks.

With an artistic mindset, you can create your own renaissance in whatever fields of expression inspire you. With a creative approach, you can even craft your view of the world into one that will transform and uplift your experience of the world. You may still receive big bucks from your creative works, but either way, your focus will be on the spiritual creative flow as you dance a glorious dance of being you.

Change your outlook, change your life

It sounds simple, doesn't it? Change your outlook, and you change your life. In reality, however, it isn't always so easy to change your outlook from within that outlook. As Albert Einstein said, "The significant problems we face can never be solved at the level of thinking that created them."

This is the challenge of spirituality — to move beyond common, materialistic worldviews into a greater vision that will create a greater world. You can also call this optimistic approach *higher possibility thinking*, where you're imagining the best of what could be. In many cases, it is your imagination that holds the key to envisioning and creating a more wondrous life (see Chapter 15).

Many spiritual teachers and philosophers, east and west, past and present, have declared that your mind actually *creates* your reality.

Spiritual Wisdom

All that we are is the result of what we have thought.

— Buddha

The act of contemplation creates the thing contemplated.

— Isaac D'Israeli

According to your faith, be it done unto you.

— Jesus (Matthew 9:29)

If you think you are free, you are free. If you think you are bound, you are bound. For the saying is true: You are what you think.

— Ashtavakra Gita

The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

— James Allen (1864-1912)

Attributing the creation of the outer world to your mind can sound silly, narcissistic, and even ridiculous. After all, if you were in control of this world, things would look very different, right?

Well, this topic is one that you have to entertain and consider without becoming hardnosed about the details. Yes, you're creating the world, and no, you're not creating the world. If you expect spirituality to fit into neat little boxes and labels, then you're going to have a very limited experience of spirituality. Give yourself the freedom to imagine and explore the meanings behind teachings such as, "Your mind creates this world," and, "It is done unto you as you believe."

Don't Forget

In spirituality, you can be divine and limited at the same time. This universe is simultaneously perfect and imperfect, formless and in form, and eternal and bound by time (see Chapter 14).

This theory that your mind is creating your world suggests that:

- **Your limits and obstacles in achieving your goals are exactly what you think they are.** If you think that you have to follow the same path that others in your family or culture have taken, or if you believe that you don't have the ability, resources, or good karma to achieve your deepest heart's desire, then you won't even try to move beyond the limitations your mind has put into place. You may not even begin to consider what your true goals should or could be.
- **Everything you see and know is colored by the glasses of your memories and thoughts.** Some Indian scriptures demonstrate the idea that everything you see and experience is being interpreted through your mind, memories, and thoughts using the simple analogy of seeing a snake in a rope. If you see a plain old useful rope on the ground but think it is a poisonous snake, then your internal experience of fear is the same as it would be if that rope were an actual snake. Your outer actions would also reflect this projection as you stop what you're doing and run away in fear, perhaps never to even discover that it was only a rope.
- **Your destiny unfolds according to the thought-seeds you've planted.** Clear intentions focus your conscious and subconscious mental energies on creating a destiny that reflects your intentions and beliefs. So many famous celebrities and artists tell of making efforts throughout their youth to practice and develop the skills that became their future success.

- **You are who you think you are.** Your thoughts and actions are inherently guided and limited by your self-concepts. If you identify yourself as being a kind and generous person, then you will rise to the occasion to express these qualities in situations that arise in your life. Your expressions of kind and generous qualities through your thoughts and actions are in harmony with the kind and generous person you think you are.

Be Careful

Who you think you are often comes from who others think you are, so unless you use contemplation to discover more about who you really are, you may take on the opinions of others as your own and limit your view of your current and potential greatness through their limited views of you.

- **Changing your vision literally changes the world.** Imagine that! Seriously — imagine it right now!

One Indian scripture goes so far as to boldly declare that “The world is as you see it.” The Sanskrit of this phrase has a nice ring to it, so I’ll share it with you: “*Ya drishti, sa srishti*.” Literally, this phrase means, “As your vision is, so this creation is,” or more simply, “The world is as you see it.”

This phrase doesn’t just refer to some pop psychology, “I’m okay, you’re okay” kind of concept. This “*Ya drishti sa srishti*” means that the world is flexible and inherently molded by how you see it — that your perception is also your reality. This ancient spiritual concept of “the world is as you see it” is also echoed in the science of quantum physics, where scientists have discovered that the very act of observing the world affects what you are viewing. You can find out more about how your mind is a cocreator in Chapter 15.

Be Careful

Be careful not to fall into a guilt trip as you begin to realize how responsible your mind is for all the situations in your life. Along with your increasing awareness of your mind’s power, be sure to include a sense of trust that everything is fine, as you learn and grow in your journey through life.

Taking steps to refine your mind

Refining your mind gives you the clarity to create a better outlook and improve your life. Three ways to refine your mind are contemplation, meditation, and communion with spirit.

- **Contemplation** includes cleaning up, organizing, uplifting, and taking control of the thoughts in your mind — watching, directing, and guiding your thoughts to find greater awareness and understanding. (For more on contemplation, see the section “Contemplation: Clearing the Clutter,” later in this chapter.)

- **Meditation** is a practice of peaceful introspection that helps you increase your mental strength and clarity by focusing your mind and quieting your thoughts. (I cover meditation in the upcoming section “Meditating: Silent Mind, Holy Mind.”)
- **Communion with spirit** is not really a practice that you do to refine your mind as much as a gift that comes when your mind has become more refined. Through your contemplation and meditation efforts and the magical sprinkling of divine grace, you come to feel near, within, and in an ongoing interaction with spirit, God, or universal Consciousness. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 9.)

Saying it another way

Here are quick descriptions of contemplation, meditation, and spiritual union:

1. First you focus your mind — contemplation.
2. Next you quiet your mind — meditation.
3. Then there is no mind — spiritual union.

Recognizing and Clearing Your Mental Clutter

Arrange whatever pieces come your way.

— Virginia Woolf

Imagine that you are walking around all day, picking up every object you see. Several things happen:

- Your pockets become full and heavy.
- Your hands are occupied with holding all kinds of things.
- Your ability to walk and maneuver is impaired due to carrying so many objects.
- If you need to find a particular item in your pockets, you have to empty a big messy pile and sort through it until you find the desired object.
- You’ll likely become tired and irritable from the inconvenience of carrying so many things around with you everywhere you go.

Now, imagine that these objects are the thoughts in your mind. Day in and day out, you think this thought: read this book, have this conversation, wish this, wish that, fear this, fear that, think, think, think about what, who, where, when, why did this happen? How can you make that happen? Who do they think they are? Do they like you? What was it you were supposed to pick up after work? You've got mail, void where prohibited, please stand behind the red line, details at 11, ring! ring! Who's there? Are you ready to make a commitment? Tell me what you think, tell me what she thinks, when did you first notice the swelling? Can I help you? Can you help me? Do you know what that person did years ago? Who does he think he is? Does she, he, it really love me? What is that supposed to mean? Did you call to confirm your appointment? Did you get those reports done? Did you buy gas on your way home? Did you take out the trash, do the dishes, feed the dog, pay the bills, pick up the kids, mow the lawn, buy that gift, cash your check, go to work, go to school, go to the store, to the recital, to the movies, to dinner? Did you do this, do that, go here, go there, be this, be that, go, go, go, go, do, do, do, do, be, be, be, be. Aaaarrggghhhhhhhhh!!!! Welcome to a cluttered mind!

Sending your mind to the naughty corner

When you're misbehaving and acting in ways you know are not helpful or right, you can follow the example of television nannies and send your mind for a time out in the "naughty corner."

Just as with a child, you should do this gently and firmly. When you've misbehaved in some way, find some time to sit by yourself, quietly. Consider what you can learn from the situation that would improve your actions in the future. Observe your feelings — it doesn't really feel so good when you do something you know is wrong, does it? This uncomfortable feeling of having caused harm through your words or actions can certainly be punishment enough to inspire you to change. Think about ways you can make amends or improve things next time around. Ask for blessings and give thanks to divine spirit for giving you the opportunity and guidance to take one more important step on your big, universal, spiritual journey. Then give yourself a loving hug and move forward into a new day.

Spirituality and common sense both say that if you can learn to keep your thoughts in their proper places, you won't have to walk around holding such a big mess of thoughts. A clear and uncluttered mind leaves you free to accomplish all that you really want to do.

Start cleaning up the clutter of your mind and heart just as you would straighten out your garage or organize your office space. Here are a few examples of the kind of clutter that you can toss out (no tax deductions for these donations, though).

You can throw away your:

- Unresolved anger toward someone from a long time ago
- Guilt and shame over things you have done or said in the past
- Fears and paranoia about what may happen in the future
- Feelings of hopelessness and depression — these emotions are like thieves that sap your energy and joy
- Unimportant goals that are in conflict with your greater goals

You can't hire a maid service to do this kind of cleaning – it's up to you to clear the clutter in your own mind. In the next section I give you tips on how to clear different kinds of mental and emotional clutter.

Using contemplation to clear your mental clutter

I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, "Where's the self-help section?" She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

— George Carlin

The basic idea behind contemplation is to become the director of your mental movies and the conductor of your symphony of thoughts.

You don't have to just sit back and be at the mercy of all the unnecessary or even harmful thoughts that pass through your mind. The spiritual practice of contemplation helps you let go of unproductive thoughts and neutralize their effects in your life.

Instead of letting your mind do every random thing it wants to do — thinking about this person or that problem, and obsessing over and over about the same details without ever finding a solution — you can begin to take control of your own mind. Just as with an undisciplined child, you can guide your mind with loving and gentle direction when possible and a firm hand when necessary.

Consider

Uncluttering your outer life — your environment, relationships, schedules, and communications — also helps to bring more inner peace. Less clutter outside can mean less clutter inside!

It's natural for negative feelings and emotions to come into your mind. What you need to do is to learn how to clear them away. The following sections offer ways to get rid of cluttered, harmful thoughts through contemplation and applying a spiritual point of view.

Get rid of anger

Instead of letting anger fester for months, years, or decades, you can contemplate exactly why and with whom you're really angry. Is your anger based, in part, on some earlier experiences in your life? Sometimes unresolved angers from the past can project unfairly on people in the present.

If you're angry at someone, try to understand the other person's point of view. Are they just a total jerk with utterly unredeemable qualities, or is it possible that they think they are acting correctly? Consider what you'd like to say to the person and imagine how they may respond – try to put yourself into their shoes.

Don't Forget

Remember that whatever anger you're feeling is in you, and not in anyone else. Your state of mind and actions are your responsibility; other people's state of mind and actions are theirs. Even if you need to address someone else's actions outwardly to protect yourself or others in the future, you can still strive to do so without getting entangled in the gnarly webs of ongoing anger.

A great way to release anger is to move your awareness and understanding into the spiritual realms of trusting that a benevolent universe is bringing exactly what you need to experience. Remember that every person in this world is a spark of the divine. Every experience is a pleasant or unpleasant gift from a friendly God who loves you and wants to help you grow on an eternal, spiritual level, even if this growth requires you to go through some challenging times. Look at the person you're angry with and remember that ultimately it's not about them, but about your relationship with the divine.

Even while honoring and feeling your emotions, you can simultaneously know that you and every person, place, and thing are part of a grand universal dance of creation — the divine play of life. Consider that the person who has made you angry may have been handpicked by the divine director to play their role in your life movie, and enjoy the show.

Unravel feelings of sadness

Getting rid of sadness can be tricky, because sometimes you may feel sad even while things are going pretty well in your life. At other times, you may be sad because your life is especially difficult. Your sadness may also be part of a “dark night of the soul” experience that is preparing the way for greater happiness in the future.

In some cases, sadness may indicate a chemical imbalance in the brain, or it may be a response to allergens and toxins that are so prevalent in today's world. In this section, I'm referring to more common forms of sadness such as those that come from boredom, disappointments, or dissatisfaction with the circumstances of your life.

When you're feeling sadness, instead of rushing off to distract yourself with sense indulgences or numbing yourself with intoxicants, overwork, or shopping, you can use contemplation to search inside yourself and discern why you're experiencing sadness. Is it based on not getting what you want? Is it a sign that something is out of place in your life? Is this sadness an inevitable part of the process of growing up and remembering who you really are?

Consider

If you're feeling overwhelmed with sadness, sit quietly and allow your mind, heart, and spirit to settle into the hand of grace that always exists within each moment — if you but take the time to stop and remember. Honor your feelings of sadness, but be ready to let go of them as you move back into greater happiness.

Doubt your doubts

If it's true that your thoughts create and reflect in the world around you, then what do you think doubts do to your life? They keep you from having, being, and doing what you want. Doubts sow the seeds of failure in your mind and heart.

I'm not talking about the kind of doubt that makes you reconsider whether something or someone is in the right place in your life or whether your actions are correct. These beneficial kinds of doubt are called *discernment*, which is a good spiritual quality and a great tool for the practice of contemplation.

Doubts are rascals that make you fear that you aren't what you hoped you were or that something is going to go wrong in the future. Doubts keep you from raising your hand to answer the teacher's question even when you think you know the answer. Doubts hold you back from telling someone that you love them. Doubts keep you from pursuing your dreams. Doubts create fears, and fear often creates whatever is feared.

Be negative toward your negativity

Negative thoughts are like dark, heavy clouds that cover the sky of your soul. Your negative thoughts may be directed toward a particular person or experience, but guess what? Negative thoughts color everything else in your mind, too.

Negative thoughts are like viruses to your mental state of well being. Understanding the effects of negative thoughts should give you greater motivation to hold yourself back from jumping into the abyss of negativity.

If someone betrays you, insults you, or steals from you, and you go around thinking negative thoughts all day long, then you're likely to see more negative experiences pop up in your life. When you understand the effect that negative thoughts have on your spirit and the world manifesting around you (see Chapter 15), then you find it easier to replace your negative thoughts with positive ones.

Unmask false contentment

If you're spending a lot of energy covering up your sadness, anger, or pain so that you'll look happy to others, the apparent contentment you project may actually be keeping you from finding true peace and contentment.

Through contemplation, you can look at whatever is keeping you from true contentment. You can sort out how you really feel and what you really think, and find ways to create real contentment instead of presenting a facade of pseudo-contentment. Why spend so much energy trying to *look* happy when you can spend the same energy and actually *be* happy?

Give up greed

When you want more, more, and more, you create a state of constant discontent inside yourself. It's like the idea that if you clench your fists to avoid giving, your closed hands are also not able to receive anything. Do it right now. Open your hands wide and hold them in front of you, palms up. Now, live your life with that same state of openness.

There's no good reason to give in to greed during this short journey on earth. If you're greedy, no matter how many millions of dollars you have, you will always want more. No matter how big your TV, how new your car, or how nice your clothes, you'll always want something bigger and better. Greed is the enemy of contentment and satisfaction. Greed makes you tense and unhappy.

It's fine to have hopes and desires, but greed keeps you running on the hamster wheel of unending desires and can even convince you to take advantage of someone else to get more for yourself, which is a spiritual no-no! After all, with spiritual insight, you realize that ultimately there is no other.

Spirituality in Action

Contemplate to see whether you have areas in your life where you're feeling greedy. Look for ways to transform that greed into contentment, gratitude, and generosity. Don't accuse or judge yourself, but gently open your inner hands and trust that God will give you everything you truly deserve and need.

Contemplating daily events

Contemplation is one practice that you can truly practice anytime and anywhere. Suppose while you're driving to work tomorrow, a car brazenly weaves in and out of lanes and cuts right in front of you, causing you to have to brake quickly. You honk at the car, and life goes on. This situation is a great opportunity for you to contemplate your response to the situation. Obviously, your adrenals will have reacted to the imminent danger, but how quickly are you able to calm down? Within a moment? An hour? Does this one disturbing event color your whole day?

Also, think about why you honked. Did you honk from anger? Did you honk while shouting an obscenity to that idiot? Did you think an angry thought, wishing that the inconsiderate driver would be taught a lesson? Perhaps you would have been happy to hear some police sirens going after the rogue driver. Or did you honk out of kind concern, hoping that your commentary would remind the driver to practice safer driving skills? (Yeah, right.)

This contemplation isn't meant to create a judgment against yourself, but to use an outer event to stimulate greater self-awareness and self-control. At the same time, this situation is a good opportunity to remember that whatever you wish for others may come back to you in some way and form. If you create sirens with your mind, those sirens just may arrive when the other driver is long gone, and *you* are the one who is speeding!

Heal your hatred

Here's the thing about hatred: No matter who or what you hate, that hatred turns into self-hatred, because it lives inside of you. Even if you hate a very bad person, *you* will be the victim of your hatred, not the bad person. Here are three ways you can move beyond hatred:

- Have a deeper understanding of universal justice. Trust that everyone ultimately receives the results of their actions now or in the future, whether these results are visible to others or only experienced by the person performing the actions.
- Feel compassion for everyone who is bound by ignorance. Understand that everyone does the best they can with the resources they have, and that those who act badly are often misbehaving as an outer expression of their inner suffering.
- Increase love, which can turn hatred into fragrant flowers. Shining the light of spiritual love on any situation inherently removes the darkness of hatred, just as the rising sun dispels the darkness of night.

If you can turn hatred for even one person into love and compassion, you help to build a beautiful road to paradise right here on earth.

Eliminate your impatience

Impatience creates dissatisfaction. Impatience is a sign that you're not fully focused on the present moment. You may be trying to squeeze more into a 24-hour period than is possible and become frustrated when obstacles keep you from rushing forward. You want things to move faster and happen more quickly than they are. Even in youth, impatience makes you drive your parents crazy while they're driving the car by asking over and over, "Are we almost there?" Youthful impatience makes you pull out that loose tooth before it is ready to let go, making a big mess (one of my childhood specialties).

The truth is that time is an important element for the lessons you have to learn here in the physical world. Growth takes time, patience, and steady effort. When you plant seeds in your garden, you have to have enough patience to keep nurturing those seeds, seedlings, and plants until their fruits and vegetables are ripe and ready to eat. If you're impatient, you'll plant the seeds and check the next day to see whether you have enough vegetables for a nice salad. Then you'll either give up on watering your garden or destroy the plants by pulling them up to check their status. Can you tell how well I know this kind of clutter?

Consider

Patience is necessary on your spiritual journey, because your growth is not always outwardly obvious or tangible. Sometimes you may experience immediate positive effects from your spiritual efforts, and other times you'll have to keep your practices going for a while before you start to notice the benefits. Sometimes you may even seem to be going downward on the spiritual evolutionary scale, but don't let your impatience over apparent setbacks discourage you from continuing your efforts to evolve spiritually.

Spirituality in Action

One way to naturally heal the clutter of impatience is to focus on the present moment while remembering the eternal nature of the universe. This combination of remembering the present moment and the eternal nature simultaneously can help free your mind from the prison of time so that you can learn to enjoy each moment — from the hills of joy to the valleys of sorrow, and from exciting adventures to times of rest.

Another helpful way to heal impatience is to clean up your greediness. By clearing greed from your life, you also steer clear of the kind of impatience that comes from wanting to have what you want right now.

Jostle with jealousy

It's important to understand what jealousy is and isn't. Jealousy is *not* seeing what someone else has and wanting the same for yourself. Being inspired to improve your lot after admiring what someone else has achieved is fine, especially if what the person has achieved is something that would be beneficial to the world and your life and spiritual journey.

Jealousy, on the other hand, carries a level of destructiveness. You not only want what others have, but you also don't want *them* to have it. You may have a materialistic idea that there's only so much success to go around and that if someone else gets some, there will be less for you. Jealousy is a problem, because everything is made of the same, one, divine light, which reflects our thoughts like mirrors. Therefore, your wish of less for another comes back to haunt you and keep you from achieving your dreams.

Negative effects of jealousy can include being in an agitated state of mind, losing enthusiasm for your own journey, or getting what you thought you wanted but not finding peace and happiness there. Therefore, keep your attention focused on what you want for yourself and not on jealousy over what others have.

Calm your infatuations

Infatuation happens when a single desire or obsession wipes out all your other thoughts. On one hand, you can say that infatuation does bring your mind into a state of focus, which is considered to be a beneficial characteristic to have for spiritual contemplation. However, you have to consider whether what you're focusing so much attention on is uplifting or binding your spirit.

Infatuation is such a powerful intoxicant that it can make you give up what you know is right or best. For example, lustful thoughts often fall under the heading of infatuation. Lustful infatuations can even make you gamble your presidency just to satisfy them. (I'm not mentioning any names!)

Through contemplation, you can look at your infatuations more objectively and consider whether they're helpful or harmful for your overall goals. Separate your mind from the pull of the infatuation long enough to take back control of your thoughts. If you want to be infatuated, be infatuated with the greatness and glory of your divine, spiritual life!

Focus on the positive

When tragedies take place, people naturally try to balance out the negative experiences by keeping their minds on more positive, spiritual topics. For example, after the twin towers in New York City were brought down by terrorists in planes on September 11, 2001, the entire United States moved to focus on the positive, even while being horrified by the ongoing traumas of loss and destruction.

For a time, television stations cancelled their usual violent fare. Scary movies were put on hold. People tried to be kinder to one another. Musicians came together to sing inspiring songs and generate funds to help those whose lives had been turned upside-down. The entire nation came together time and time again to sing “God bless America.”

As glorious as this uplifting response was, it didn’t last very long. Still, there is hope that if the media can recognize the harmful effects of negative fare during times of tragedy, then perhaps one day they’ll also realize that the same negative fare contributes to creating more times of tragedy.

Even if it takes society a while to understand the power of positive and negative images, you can apply this understanding to your own life right now. Don’t wait for tragedy to come before you bless yourself, your loved ones, or your country with uplifting thoughts and words. Fill your mind with good, positive, and healthy ingredients that this conscious universe can use to cook up wonderful life experiences.

Focusing your thoughts

Spiritual metaphysics teaches that you empower and ultimately become whatever you focus on the most. Understanding the power of your mind should inspire you to be more vigilant about how you spend your precious personal consciousness. Here are a few tips:

- **Be a focus miser.** Pay as much attention (or more!) to where you’re spending your attention as you do to where you’re spending your money.
- **Have discriminating tastes.** Feed your mind and heart with good quality thoughts by keeping the right company, both inside and out. Company doesn’t just mean the people you’re around, but also what you read, watch, and listen to.
- **Don’t think junk thoughts.** Just as you have to limit the number of junk food meals you eat to stay physically healthy, you should also limit junk thoughts that have no “nutritional” value and can create physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual diseases in your being.

Putting your desires in order

Spiritual Wisdom

If you only care enough for a result, you will almost certainly attain it. If you wish to be rich, you will be rich; if you wish to be learned, you will be learned; if you wish to be good, you will be good. Only you must, then, really wish these things, and wish them with exclusiveness, and not wish at the same time a hundred other incompatible things just as strongly.

— William James

Imagine a list of every desire you've had since the day you were born. Aren't you glad most of them never came true? When you have a lot of unclear, conflicting desires popping up all over the place, your personal and spiritual power becomes weakened and diffused. Think of how strong a laser light is — it can even cut through steel. Yet, the only difference between a laser light and a lamp bulb is that the laser light beams are all moving together — completely synchronized and focused on one goal. When you're clear and focused on what you really want to achieve in life, your thoughts and intentions become even more powerful, and you find it easier to let go of all the other less important, perhaps conflicting desires.

Contemplating Spiritual Teachings

Always read stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.

— P. J. O'Rourke

Words are the threads from which the cloth of your experience is woven. Therefore, it is worth your while to study words, meanings, and ideas that will add beautiful colors to the tapestry of your soul's dance.

Studying spiritual teachings can bring many personal benefits to your journey, including the following:

- Spiritual teachings act as guideposts along your way, helping you to choose what is best to do or not do.
- Spiritual teachings help you to recognize the signs of spiritual progress, giving you greater understanding and appreciation for your journey.
- Spiritual teachings give you new words to use and expanded concepts to consider as you increase your understanding of life.
- Spiritual teachings nurture and bring forth your own ever-fresh spring of spiritual wisdom.

- Spiritual teachings help you realize that you aren't all the things people in this world may think you are — rather, you're a spiritual soul who is finding your way back to wholeness, self-recognition, and remembrance of your true nature.

Even if you don't understand or agree with every spiritual idea that comes your way, the teachings of most spiritual teachers are generally good company for your mind. (Find more tips for studying spiritual teachings and avoiding possible pitfalls in Chapter 5.)

Spiritual teachings can significantly expand your world of possibilities. For example, if you've never even imagined that a particular goal is possible, how can you know that it is what you would really want? Reading the words of great spiritual beings who have reached beyond usual societal complacencies can spark all kinds of new interests, goals, and possibilities in your life.

Don't Forget

Just studying spiritual teachings isn't enough. The important thing about learning higher truths is to transform objective understandings into subjective experience. Unintegrated knowledge is nearly as useless as ignorance!

Here are four steps to expand and incorporate your knowledge of spiritual truths through the stages of study, reflection, application, and integration:

1. **Study by hearing or reading good spiritual teachings.**
2. **Repeatedly reflect on and contemplate the deeper meanings behind the words.**
3. **Apply the teachings to circumstances in your life.**
4. **Awaken to a deeper, more personal understanding of spiritual truth.**

Spiritual teachings are like maps

Spiritual teachings are like maps. They can help guide you on which direction to go, but you still have to travel the way yourself. A map can tell you some of the terrain ahead — that after this river there is a mountain to avoid and then a forest. A map can also help spark your interest in going to visit a certain place. In the same way, spiritual teachings can spark your commitment to personal awakening and help guide you through the paths and obstacles of your spiritual journey.

Nevertheless, when studying spiritual teachings, remember that the map is not the territory!

Unlocking the scripture of your own life

You may read the title “unlocking the scripture of your own life” and wonder how *your* life could possibly be a holy scripture. After all, you’re living a more or less ordinary life, and there are so many other people in the world — you’re just one more. People live and die every day, so how could your life be special?

According to spirituality, each person is more than special. Each person is a flame of this divine creation. Spirit is in everything, and divinity is everywhere. Therefore, if you’re looking to discover and explore this great spirit that exists everywhere, why not start your explorations right at home?

Spiritual Wisdom

Every man’s life is a fairy tale, written by God’s fingers.

— Hans Christian Andersen

After all, you can know nothing as intimately as your own experiences: your mind, your body, the dreams you have, the deep urges and emotions that sweep through your being, the joys and sorrows you feel, the hopes you carry in your heart, the goodness hidden behind your highest intentions, the confusions you struggle with, and the insights you catch.

Yet, even with all these experiences to draw from, you may still miss many of the subtle and profound aspects of events while you’re right in the middle of moving through them.

By taking time to contemplate with an overall view the wealth of lessons that is being offered to you in each moment of your life, you discover and gain more respect for the amazing depths of who you are and all that you think, feel, and believe.

Tapping into the power of contemplative writing

One useful tool for exploring your thoughts and experiences is the practice of contemplative writing – taking time on a regular basis to contemplate and solidify your thoughts in writing. Many seekers find that keeping a spiritual journal inspires and requires them to clarify their thoughts and experiences.

You may choose to write about your past experiences, your present epiphanies, or your hopes and dreams for the future. You may want to contemplate spiritual teachings through writing or to record the visions and intuitions that come when you meditate or pray. Just the action of sitting down to write makes a statement to your wise soul that you are listening.

Consider

Taking notes on your experiences and understandings also gives you a written record that may come in handy during future phases of your journey.

Some days you may write beautiful poetry; other times, sad thoughts, joyful celebrations, petty grumblings, or profound revelations. Contemplative writing can help you to:

- Witness the magnificent and diverse play of your mind
- Get to know all the different aspects that make up you — from your wise soul to perhaps a frustrated inner child.
- Look at life from the artistic perspective of a writer, and come to see your personal dramas as a colorful and divine dance.
- Increase your sense of self-acceptance and self-respect.

Contemplative writing can help you to see your life as a divine and amazing play. Then, whether good or bad events come your way, you can see the events with friendly eyes and say to them, “Thanks for the story.”

Ultimately, it doesn’t matter whether you plan to publish your writings, although opening yourself to sharing personal thoughts with others can be a powerful experience. Your revelations and breakthroughs may also help readers find greater healing and wisdom in their own lives. Even if it’s not your calling to make what you write available to others, it is still in your best interest to take advantage of the power of writing to explore, uplift, and heal your mind and spirit.

Consider

Some people prefer to set strict disciplined schedules for their writing, such as writing a certain number of pages every morning or evening, while others prefer to write only when they feel a need for expression. As with every practice, you have to explore your own nature and decide what style of writing best suits you.

Meditating: Silent Mind, Holy Mind

Spiritual Wisdom

Only when the mind is settled can it become quiet. Only when the mind is quiet can it become still. Only when the mind is still can it see. And only when the mind can see can it reach the mystery of mysteries. This is the process that anyone who practices has to go through. How long it takes is up to the individual.

— Yen-ch’eng

Meditation is the practice of stilling the thought waves of your mind. This practice helps you to:

- Experience yourself as the witness of your own mental processes.
- Turn down the outside noise and inner chattering so that you can hear the voice of God and receive the guidance of your wise soul.
- Understand that you're not your mind — you are the one who is thinking through your mind!

The basic gist of meditation is to plug up your senses by sitting quietly and focusing your attention inside yourself instead of on outer stimulations or mental concerns. Meditation builds a bridge above the choppy waters of your conscious mind, upon which you can reach the higher intelligence within your soul. As this bridge becomes stronger through continuing your practice of meditation, you are guided more clearly by inner wisdom in all areas of your life.

The practice of meditation brings a long list of benefits, from the mundane to the divine (including the attainment of knowing that even mundane things are divine). Meditation helps lower your stress and find greater peace inside yourself. Meditation helps you focus your mind and can make you a better teacher, dancer, artist, singer, engineer, lawyer, mother, father, husband, wife, student, lover, and worker. Meditation helps you to relax, get along better with people, be more creative, make clearer decisions, experience God's presence, and attain supreme enlightenment, liberation, salvation, and nirvana!

And all this can be yours for only \$19.95! Just kidding, these benefits are free and available to you just for taking time to sit quietly and focus your attention on the peaceful center of your being.

As you follow a steady practice of sitting for meditation, you'll find that shifting your mind into the state of meditation becomes easier to do. Eventually, you are able to experience the state of meditation even when you're in a crowd and doing whatever usual work or other activities you do. As you continue to meditate, the beneficial state of meditation becomes naturally integrated into your daily awareness.

Meditation: A natural part of life

Most people think of meditation as sitting cross-legged with eyes closed, which is a great way to experience the state of meditation. However, you can also experience the state of meditation through any activity that requires a great deal of focus or peaceful, repetitive actions.

Natural sources of meditation were once built into daily life, before society became as busy and technologically complex as it is today. For centuries, people paid much more attention to nature's magnificent and subtle displays — watching, enjoying, and meditating on her ever-changing beauty and drama.

Bells and whistles: Spiritual experiences along the way

Some meditators experience various visual, auditory, or other internal visions, sounds, sensations, and understandings when they sit for meditation. These inner experiences may delight your spirit and entice your mind, and can be a great incentive for you to continue your meditation practices. Some meditation traditions suggest that you meditate on these inner experiences, while others tell you to ignore them and rest in emptiness.

Most meditation masters suggest that even if you do enjoy your meditation experiences, you shouldn't get too attached to these inner visions, sounds, and revelations. Being too attached to these enchantments can become a distraction from your greater spiritual quest, as can any attachment to sensory pleasures. Yet, these amazing inner experiences can also fill your heart with inspiration and bring about great spurts of spiritual growth. Brahmananda, one of the great poet sages of India, opens the secret gates to some of these meditation experiences in this poetic description:

No one is playing this delightful song you hear, o dear one. The music within your heart is so sweet, but no one is playing it.

Sit down in a meditation posture and close your ears off from outer sounds. You will hear a soft sound within. Concentrate, and soon you will hear the vibration of a unique kind of music.

In the beginning, you may hear a kind of orchestra, and then each instrument will be heard separately: the bell, conch, flute, veena, and drums.

As days go by, the sound gets louder and the body starts trembling. A drop of nectar will fall into your palate and fill you with great bliss.

Body consciousness disappears and a light dances both within and without. Only a rare saint can confirm what I am saying.

A peaceful, meditative focus was also present in our ancestors' lives through all the daily tasks that have since been replaced by modern technology and convenience, such as churning butter, milking cows, plowing fields, and chopping wood. These naturally meditative actions offered regular times of peaceful repose, steady movements, and communion with nature.

Modern life brings fewer occasions for routine meditative actions. Many people today are rushing from one responsibility to another, having complex interactions with other people, dwelling on fears of job security, preparing for meetings, going through e-mail requests, maintaining their houses, cars, dogs, children, and financial situations, all while thinking about vacation plans, eating schedules, desires for recognition, concerns about weight and hair styles, and so on. Personal energies are pouring out through countless spigots of worldly life, leaving many people feeling depleted and distracted. However, it doesn't have to be this way for you.

Take the floodlights of energy that are going out into your daily life and turn them around, redirecting these energy flows back into yourself through meditation.

Sit quietly and reap the benefits from having all this extra energy in your body, mind, and spirit. Allow the spiritual energy of meditation to carry you into more meaningful explorations of your inner world and soul. Let your mind become so calm that it reveals the peaceful sky of spiritual awareness. Invite the great universal sun of divine grace to shine through everything you think, say, and do.

Spirituality in Action

Here's an example of how to meditate on a spiritual concept. Sit quietly, close your eyes, focus your mind, and dive into the essence of these words: *This moment right now is eternal. Every moment is eternal.* Allow your mind to move beyond the limitations of time and expand into the eternal presence. If you'd like, you can mentally say these lines with your inhalations and exhalations. As you breathe in, think, "This moment is eternal," and as you breathe out, think, "Every moment is eternal."

Relaxing into meditation

The basic practice of meditation involves sitting quietly and turning the energy that usually pours out through your senses back into yourself. You close your eyes and focus your mind inward. From there, you may want to pay attention to the flow of your breath. Its natural rhythm will help keep your mind focused and quiet. If thoughts come up, the best thing to do is to just let them float by and keep your mind focused on your breath.

Spirituality in Action

Here are three steps you can use to meditate:

- 1. Watch your breath.**
- 2. Let your mind become quiet.**
- 3. Become the witness of your mind.** See whether you can watch your thoughts pass by without identifying with them. Remember that you aren't your thoughts; rather, you're the one who is thinking them!

Starting a meditation practice

You may want to start by meditating for 15 minutes or so in the morning. You can start with a shorter meditation and gradually extend the time until you've reached a comfortable but substantial time, such as one hour of meditation each day, or every few days, or once a week.

Don't Forget

Some meditation is better than no meditation. As with every spiritual practice, I suggest that you try different methods and schedules to see which ones work best for you.

Here are a few more suggestions for beginning your practice of meditation:

Consider meditating in the early morning because:

- Your mind is usually quieter when you first awaken from sleep. You've just had a long rest and have also gone through deep inner states of consciousness, such as the dream state and what spiritual scriptures call the *deep sleep state*, where your mind is completely quiet and still.
- The world is most quiet early in the morning. Because your personal energy is connected with the energies around you, meditating in a quiet city or town can help ease you into a more peaceful state.
- The sun represents brightness and activity and affects your brain and internal rhythms. While the world is still dark or when the sun is just beginning to dawn, your mind is biologically programmed to be still.

Consider

Whether in the morning or any other time, it is beneficial to meditate at the same time of day if possible, especially when you're first learning to meditate. Keeping a steady meditation schedule prepares your mind, body, and spirit to be in a meditative state during that time. Just as lunchtime brings inspiration to eat, so meditation time can bring the inspiration to meditate. Your mind is a creature of habit, so you may as well use that tendency for your benefit!

- **You may want to use a special set of clothes just for meditation, as well as a special meditation cushion or cloth to sit on.** Meditating in and on the same fabrics can help your meditation practice because when you meditate, the energy in and around your body becomes more spiritualized, concentrated, and powerful. Although this spiritual energy is invisible and not fully detectable by technological devices, you will likely be able to feel it moving in and around your body. This energy also permeates the clothes you wear and the seat you are using, giving them a special bath in your meditation energy. The peaceful spiritual energy of meditation that gathers in your clothes and seat helps you to glide more smoothly into meditation the next time.
- **If you have the means and space, you may want to set aside a special room or corner of a room where only meditation takes place.** Create your own holy space, either in a room or in the corner of a room. Your spiritual energy accumulates in that area and makes it easier for you to meditate. Meditating repeatedly in the same place is like putting your meditation energy in the bank — except in this case, your balance keeps growing the more you use it.

- **Meditate regularly.** If you wash your hands carefully with antibacterial soap and then go outside and touch unclean things, you can't say, "Well, I cleaned my hands extra carefully this morning, so they don't need more cleaning now." If you eat a big delicious meal and feel completely full, you can't just say, "Well, I'm full now, so I should never need to eat again." If you exercise regularly for a year and then stop exercising for ten years, your muscles will eventually lose their strength. In the same way, even though one meditation session can be greatly beneficial to your spiritual journey, you benefit most from meditation when you practice it regularly.
- **Consider meditating with a group of other meditators.** A room full of concentrated, quiet minds can help you keep your mind still for several reasons:
 - Meditating in a group inspires you to sit still, because you won't want to disturb anyone else's meditation by getting up or moving around.
 - A powerful energy permeates the atmosphere in a place where people are meditating. If you have a group of meditators sitting together — each creating and adding to this energy — the whole room fills with their spiritual energy, making it easier to absorb your mind into meditation.
 - Expert meditators have even more of this powerful meditation energy, and it's contagious. Therefore, meditating in the presence of expert meditators is a good idea.

Be Careful

Even though meditation energies are contagious, don't get caught up in thinking about how much energy you're going to get from others. I know some who have gotten greedy for this meditation energy — and, of course, greed is not a quality you want to cultivate on your spiritual journey!

What is flapping?

Four monks were meditating in a monastery. Suddenly, the prayer flag on the roof started flapping. The youngest monk came out of his meditation and said: "The flag is flapping."

A more experienced monk said: "The wind is flapping."

A third monk who had been there for more than 20 years said: "The mind is flapping."

The fourth monk, who was the eldest, said, visibly annoyed: "Mouths are flapping!"

Sitting correctly when you meditate

Sit still, either on a straight-backed chair with your feet on the floor, or with your legs crossed. Yogis usually suggest sitting in a cross-legged position for meditation. Cross-legged configurations help circulate the energy within your subtle system, making your body like a closed circuit. A lot of meditation energy leaves your body through your feet and hands, so crossing your legs helps to keep the energy from your feet moving back up into your body instead of moving out through the soles of your feet to dissipate into the air.

Personally, I prefer to sit in a posture called *half-lotus*, in which my legs are crossed, with one leg resting on top of the other, and one foot resting on top of the other thigh. Some limber folks are able to sit in what is called *full-lotus* posture, with their legs crossed and both feet on top.

If these fancy positions aren't your cup of tea, you can just sit in a regular cross-legged posture or perhaps kneel with your calves folded under you and your derriere resting either directly on your feet or on a pillow tucked between your seat and your feet. If sitting on the floor is difficult for you, you can also sit comfortably upright in a chair with both of your feet flat on the floor.

Consider

If needed, you can sit on or support the small of your back with a pillow. You can even meditate while lying down in bed, although habit may bring you into a state of sleep instead of meditation.

When sitting for meditation, you want to keep your spine as straight as possible while staying relaxed and comfortable. The spiritual energy is said to move up through your spine, so a steady, straight, and relaxed posture can help create a good space for that energy to flow through your spine.

You may also want to touch your thumb of each hand to the first finger, which allows some of the energy that would normally flow out of your hands to circulate back inward, bathing your body in more of your own meditation energy and spiritual life force.

Spirituality in Action

Try bringing the tips of your thumbs and first fingers together. See whether you can feel the increased energy flowing from your thumb into your first finger and vice-versa. Or you can bring the palms of your hands together in a prayer pose and feel the energy connect there.

If you want to quiet your mind during the day, you can meditate outside in nature or even on a bus, train, or at work (during a break! Signed, your boss). Adding short moments of peaceful pause to your day can help you integrate the benefits of meditation into your daily life.

One of the closest experiences many people have to meditation is when they take a short nap. You know how it feels to just settle down and relax your mind into that peaceful sea of your own inner consciousness during an afternoon nap?

If you're lucky, during a short nap, you'll experience that one moment of shift where your mind is reset and filled with new, vibrant energy. This shift is similar to an experience you can also have in meditation — where you may sit quietly for a whole hour just to experience that one precious moment of divine shift of spiritual rejuvenation.

Be Careful

As with everything else, the key is moderation. You don't want to be extreme by meditating too much or your mind may become a little spacey. Let your practice develop gradually and naturally.

Spirituality in Action

A global awareness meditation

Sit quietly and contemplate all the things that are going on around the earth right now.

You may want to sit outside for this exercise so that you can hear the sounds of nature and feel the gentle rumble of the earth under your seat. Let your thoughts calm into a deep awareness of all that is happening on this planet.

Become gently aware of a world filled with people laughing, crying, yelling, loving, sleeping, dreaming, giving, and taking, with dogs barking, and wild animals killing, being killed, and loving and protecting their young. Remember all the insects, fish, animals, plants, and people that are working, sleeping, eating and starving, living and dying — all on this very earth upon which you sit quietly. Offer a prayer of blessings to the whole world from within your powerful state of meditation.