

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.