

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.