

Heal Your Relationships Heal Your Life

By Dr. Rob

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Part one: The relationship with self

Chapter One: Reflection of self 8
Chapter Two: Healthy inner dialog..... 28
Chapter Three: Supporting self-love 48
Chapter Four: Eliminating stress & worry 68
Chapter Five: Connecting with your higher self 88

Part two: Relationships with others

Chapter Six: The family circle 109
Chapter Seven: Friends; our chosen family 129
Chapter Eight: Challenging relationships 148
Chapter Nine: Learning to let go 169
Chapter Ten: Attracting rewarding relationships 190

Part three: The world around us

Chapter Eleven: Your home and sacred space 210
Chapter Twelve: The community you live in 230
Chapter Thirteen: Elements of nature..... 249
Chapter Fourteen: Feeling connected to source 268
Chapter Fifteen: Sustainable living 289

Conclusion

Chapter Sixteen: Life in tune 309

Introduction

Humans have a vast array of emotions, experiences, and connections to each other and the world we live in. Our unique human consciousness is what separates us from other beings in the world. We form relationships, build communities together, we live, and we work and play. Our relationships with ourselves, each other and our environment are unique to us and different than any other species. We form bonds that last a lifetime and have the ability to nurture our fellow humans with words, compassion and touch. It is our relationships that make our human experience so unique. But sometimes our relationships require healing. Whether it is the relationship we have with our self, those around us, or the world in which we live. Relationships are the best when they are in alignment with who we are, and when we can be at peace in their experience. Positive relationships make us uplifted and courageous and negative ones can make us feel unhappy and defeated. Our emotions tell us everything we need to know about how we are doing in all areas of our life. We can use them as a barometer to gauge how successful we are in our relationships with each other, the environment, and with ourselves. The most important relationship is of course the one you have with yourself. Each and every day you walk around in your living, breathing body with thoughts and perceptions about who you are. Some of these thoughts and perceptions are based on ideas you have created yourself and others stem from what other people think and feel about you. When seeking to improve the relationship with ourselves we really have to love ourselves no matter what, independent of what happens to us. I remember going

through various painful experiences in my life such as a strained relationship with my wife and daughter, divorce, job dissatisfaction, and moving somewhere completely opposite from what I was used to. What I have come to appreciate is that human beings have to endure a certain amount of pain and hardship, because the painful moments are what give meaning to the happier times. Pain either propels us to change or causes us to wither and die. Normally it creates change but it's not always immediate. We suffer through our pain for a period of time, but eventually we come to the realization that it isn't helping us or moving us forward in a positive way. Being a victim, feeling hopeless and lost, and depressed all the time doesn't make our life experience any better or make us any stronger. We realize that no one is going to come into our lives with a magic wand and suddenly make everything better. It is up to us to make things better by choosing a better path, and it is very much about the choices we make. For a long time I felt the pain of my life and fell victim to that. I suffered and endured through stressful situations like loss, grief, and depression. I didn't really view my problems as a gift but more like a burden. After a great deal of shift in my life I began to see that I needed to strengthen the relationship I had with myself. And that is where I began my journey – with myself. At first it didn't come natural, it was work and conscious daily thought to be positive, thankful and loving to myself. I had to make the effort to remind myself each and every day that I am not my thoughts, and that I am a divine being created from source energy. How could I not love that? I had to train my brain to see the magic in each situation, to see the good in all things and people, instead of noticing the bad all the time. If 19 people pay you a compliment and one person criticizes you

focus on the 19 compliments and simply observe your criticisms with an open mind, rather than be hurt by it and carry it around. I always think about Jesus in difficult situations. The love and compassion he had in every situation. He always acted with love, forgiveness and compassion. That is my goal every day. If I must disagree with someone and share my opinion I will only do so in a loving non-judgmental way. I work every day to improve my relationship and make them stronger. Only dead people have no problems, so it is inevitable that we as human beings will face adversity, challenge, and pain in life. That is part of the process and what I have come to know as life's gifts. These challenges are provided to us for our own personal growth, creativity, and universal tests. We learn about ourselves and have faith in who we are when we come out on the other side of a problem. It renews our strength and resolve. The universe is in constant motion and nothing ever stays the same for very long. This is an idea we must get used to. Things can and will change often. So there is no use in fearing change. Instead, embrace it and treat every new experience as an opportunity for growth.

We must look internally for healing. We can be the healer in our own lives and it almost always begins within the mind; changing our outlook and perception of things. This isn't always easy; in fact it can be the hardest thing ever. But as soon as we acknowledge that we have the power to create change for ourselves by changing the way we think about things, anything can happen. This book is about creating change and healing our relationships in three important areas of life; the self, relationships with others, and how we relate to the community and world we live in. These three areas have the ability

to make us feel whole and connected to source energy when we live in the light of positivity and empowerment or create a great deal of pain when something is wrong. Often it is in one of these three areas that something is out of alignment; a relationship with a spouse is troubled, our very own reflection causes feelings of hatred, or we despise the place and community in which we live. These things have profound impact on the way we feel day to day. When our relationships are troubled we have a hard time feeling successful in other areas because the shadow of those problems hangs over us like a dark cloud. And when we dislike or despise ourselves we can never truly achieve success because we don't have any faith in ourselves. So we don't try, we don't strive to achieve anything or step outside of our comfort zone, and we just float in our own unhappiness feeling vulnerable and ashamed. The place in which we spend our time and live can make us feel safe, peaceful and nurtured but when that isn't in alignment we feel out of balance and anxious. We may begin noticing all of the things that are wrong and feel negative about our lives because we are not living somewhere that we feel connected to energetically. We can't always change everything in the way that we wish to or in the time that we want to, but we can always change our mind and our thoughts. We can choose to see the good instead of the bad and work towards our goals in the process. If we had exactly what we wanted out of life right now there would be nothing to strive towards and no satisfaction in accomplishing a goal. In life's work comes great satisfaction. Think about how your heart feels when you heal a relationship, start to love yourself and make a life change that makes you feel better than you have in years. There will be ups and there will be downs on the road of life but when you are in the

drivers seat it isn't as scary. Knowing that you can handle whatever life throws your way is an important part of appreciating the perfection of the universe. You aren't always going to be able to predict what happens to you and around you, but life wouldn't be as meaningful otherwise.

Life is a beautiful gift and every moment we have to enjoy it is special. We can always improve our lives in some small way, even when we are doing better than we ever had before or when we have climbed to the top of a mountain. Life's work never stops or slows down, there is always something we can do and something we can change.

Change is simply the nature of the universe; ever expanding, evolving and flowing. If there is any area of your life that is out of balance and is in need of some healing, I hope that you will take my hand and come on this journey with me so that you can bring about healing in your own life and start to fill your heart with more joy and love each and every day.

Namaste,

Dr. Rob

Chapter One

Reflection of Self

When you look in the mirror who do you see staring back at you? Can you see the wondrous amazing being that stands before you? Many of us are incredibly unaware of just how amazing we are. We are so much more than our jobs, our looks, our social status, or our lineage. We are individually unique beings who have the capacity to heal, love, share, build and rebuild. Because of the time in which we live, however, we tend to get wrapped up in the image of who we think we are and who we think we are supposed to be. This causes us a great deal of hardship and brings us further away from harmony. It is hard to step outside of the confines of societal structure and look at ourselves at a deeper more profound level. But it is at this level where we find peace, joy, and complete harmony with self. Nobody can tell you or I who we are, we know who we are on the inside on a cellular level. And when we live in this light, it is when we feel the greatest peace with ourselves. Even when we are not living according to our soul's desire but can at least recognize what that looks like, we are greatly empowered.

It takes a lot of introspection and quiet meditation to build a comfort level with the truth of who we are. Our modern lives don't always lend themselves well to carving out this type of time for ourselves, but it is one of the most important things we can do towards nurturing our inner being. When we reflect, answers come to us; truth can flood in to our experience without the distortion of over-thought or analysis. We are

peaceful and content when we stay in the moment of who we are and can see things for what they are without fear or regret.

Sometimes our own vision of self isn't quite the same as how others perceive us. It can get distorted over time with negative experiences, poor self-esteem or fear. When we think negatively about ourselves we can often hear voices or messages coming from our mind telling us that we aren't good enough, we can't do something, or warning us not to try because we will fail. These messages are false and need to be reprogrammed. They are coming from a place of Fear (or as I like to say, **False Events Appearing Real**) and are triggering a fight or flight response in our primitive brain. The problem that arises with operating from fear is that we never do anything to push outside of our comfort zone, and if our comfort zone is within fear, then how will we ever experience the joy of inner peace? We must allow ourselves to explore alternative mindsets in order to rise above fear. Often when it comes to self-esteem our fear stems from a simple need to be loved. Because we so desperately seek love and acceptance from others, we often fear rejection. This fear of rejection causes us to turn inwards instead of blossom out. It prevents us from talking to a new person, smiling at a stranger, inviting a neighbor over for dinner, or trying something new. We so desperately want to be loved by others that we can't handle the thought or idea of someone not liking us, so we instead retreat into ourselves and never give anyone a chance to make that decision.

By nature, human beings are community oriented. We are meant to love, support, and share with each other. This type of activity is what fuels us and makes us feel a great

degree of self-worth and provides us with meaningful experiences that shape our sense of self. When we cut ourselves off from the outside world or don't spend enough time sharing and being a part of a community, we risk alienating the very nature of who we are. We must trust that having others around us, working towards common goals and being part of a community will support our overall sense of self and wellbeing.

Feeling good inside

Sometimes despite our best efforts, we just can't seem to feel good inside about who we are. We look in the mirror and feel ashamed, pathetic, or like a failure. Some days we can barely stand to look in the mirror. This has happened to all of us at some time or another. The key is not to build a house and dwell here. It's okay if this happens once in a while, as long as you recognize that the feelings you are experiencing are not as a result of **who you are**, but merely external events that have happened to you. Who you are and what happens to you are two separate things. We cannot, and must not confuse the two. The next time you are feeling down about yourself or feeling depressed about something ask yourself these questions:

1. Am I feeling this way because something has just happened to me?
2. If "x" didn't happen to me, would I still feel this way?
3. What is the real reason I am feeling upset?

Chances are, when you are in a state of depression or self-loathing you are upset about something unrelated to who you are. Usually it is a missed opportunity, an external disappointment, or a relationship challenge. None of these things are related to who

you are on the inside. Always try to remind yourself that your external problems do not represent your inner being. Your inner being is peaceful, joyous, content, and operates from a place of light and love. Your inner being would never allow you to feel worthless about yourself because that in-itself is unloving and unsupportive.

An important practice to get into in order to bring separation from your external thoughts and your inner being - is meditation. This is something you can do every single day that will have a tremendous impact on the way you feel inside. Meditation provides the space and time to separate from your thoughts. During meditation you are able to sit in the truth of that which you are and allow your inner self to shine. We make the time to brush our teeth, wash our face, and eat breakfast every day. Integrating meditation to our daily lifestyle can be done with just a little bit of discipline. The benefits reach far beyond anything I could describe to you. It will become such a way of life that you will notice on the days that you don't meditate that you don't feel as good, and you will begin to notice all of the ways that your life has opened up since embracing meditation as part of your every day life. You can choose a time that works best for you and works best for your life and routine. Many people like to spend 15 –20 minutes in the morning meditating before they begin their day. Starting your day like this is empowering and wonderful. It sets the tone for your day and allows you to enjoy each moment as it arises. Another popular time is right before bed; this relaxes you and allows you to get a good nights sleep. Many times we can't relax before sleep because our minds are too busy thinking about things that have already happened, or worrying

about things that might happen. Meditating before sleep stops you from jumping into past and future thinking, and keeps you present with your deep breath and relaxation. This also benefits you greatly the next day.

Keeping positive

It can be a challenge to view everything from a positive mindset all the time, especially if you are not accustomed to thinking in this way. But once you begin to embrace this way of thinking, you will catch your destructive thoughts and discard them with the knowing that they do not support the essence of who you are. In order for us to have a positive outlook on things, it helps to begin within. This starts with self-criticism. We are often our own worst critics and are extremely harsh on ourselves when we make a mistake or a poor decision. We often (wrongly) believe that others share this harsh judgment of us, when most times they have moved on forgotten about it and forgiven the misstep. All mistakes are a part of the human experience. We must try things, make decisions, and use our free will to navigate through life. Sometimes this works out tremendously well, and other times not so well. Whatever the case, it is important that we continue to carry a smile both in our hearts and on our faces, for these experiences help to make us who we are and shape our existence here on earth. If we never made any mistakes we wouldn't learn valuable lessons, try new things, or see things from varying perspectives. Keeping positive during these times is essential to our wellbeing and allows us to carry that positive attitude to other parts of our life, where it can be of great benefit.

The next time you are angry with yourself, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Stop allowing your thoughts to think you. Your thoughts are not you and they can be changed. Smile as you breathe deeply. If something is bothering you, simply choose not to think about that thing. We can always choose something that feels better. We can choose thoughts or mental images that support our wellbeing and make us feel lighter and peaceful. Keeping positive in your mind is like tending to a garden. You can't prevent weeds (or negative thoughts) from cropping up from time to time, but you can pull them out when they do crop up and plant a seed of positivity in its place instead. Tend to your mind the same way you do a garden and it will be beautiful. You can train your mind to be more positive, and your overall outlook on life and self will be improved by doing so.

Positivity has a tremendous impact on our lives because it keeps our vibration high and invites further positive experiences into our lives. When we come from a place of positivity and have a lighter perspective on things we attract more of those experiences and subsequently tend to have a more enjoyable life. The universe tells us that like attracts like, this is the law of attraction. It is especially true with our thoughts. When we are disappointed in our body image, or ourselves we are putting forth the energy that we are not good enough the way we are. By noticing lack of health, beauty, intelligence, luck, relationships etcetera, we are essentially focused on the lack of something in our lives instead of thinking of all of the abundance. Shifting our energy and noticing the things we do have is a great way to change our energy and begin to manifest all of those changes we desire. If every day you wake up, stand on your scale

and feel worse about yourself – stop standing on the scale and choose something else to measure, like how many cups of water you can drink in a day. Start with something small and manageable. Larger changes are born from small ones, and small changes are often easier to make when we feel overwhelmed. If you want to improve your diet, start by cutting out something, just one thing. If you want to become more fit or start running take it one step at a time, start walking, then split your journey between running and walking until eventually you can build up the stamina to run the entire distance. If you can't identify an area of your life that you want to improve but simply want to change your thoughts to be more positive, start making a list. Write a list of everything that you appreciate about yourself and everything that you are good at. You can think about things that others have told you that you are good at, or things that you just know you are good at. We all have things that we do well and things that we have natural abilities with. You know at the core of who you are what these things are. Don't be shy, write them down. Keep this list somewhere visible; either on your computer or on your fridge and refer to it whenever you start floundering in the waters of negativity. Be relentless, don't let those negative thoughts invade your mindset. They have no place, and you do not want to attract negativity. Keep it positive so that you can continue to have positive experiences, meet positive people, and feel good about yourself. The better your experiences in the world, the better your attitude. A positive mindset is instrumental to your ability to manifest abundance and joy.

Another thing to remember is not to judge others. You have seen the effects it has had on your self-esteem when others have done so to you. Practice viewing things from the perspective of others. Instead of focusing on the impact that another's decision, mistake or comment has had on you; try imagining how they must be feeling inside, or where they are coming from. Many times you will notice that even those who are coming from a place of anger or distrust are really having issues within themselves, and that their actions or comments have little to do with you and everything to do with what they are battling. Once you begin expressing compassion towards others, even during the most difficult times, you will be able to give love freely to all those in need regardless of their motivations, intent, or decisions. You can always choose a loving comment over a harsh one, or a hug over a confrontation. Think about how you will feel inside when you are able to overcome your own ego by expressing love to another in need even during a time when they might not be the nicest person to be around. Everyone who comes into our lives is here for a reason. We sometimes don't understand those reasons, especially when dealing with difficulty or arrogance, but step outside of the energy of those interactions and ask yourself what you can learn from this person and your relationship with them. Perhaps your role is to teach them, and act as an example. Your ability to act with love and compassion instead of anger and judgment may be exactly the lesson they need. But besides what it does for the other person, acting in the light of love is really something that supports you on the inside. It allows you to keep your vibration high, continue to smile, and continue to manifest positivity and abundance into your life. You

will never regret offering assistance, support or love to another being in need, regardless of whether your offer is accepted or not.

Lighten up

Have you ever stopped to observe a child at play, jumping through the trees or playground with little regard for what people think? Their only concern is doing what makes them feel alive and joyous in that very moment. Children don't worry about the economy, personal wealth, weight or health. They are simply too busy playing, learning and growing. They don't stop to consider how they appear to others because it is not a thought that ever occurs to them. It doesn't matter how they appear to others, they are living in the light of who they are and they are fully present in the moment of life.

As adults, we lose our childlike joy somewhere along the lines and begin to take life very seriously. We forget about staying present in joy, playing and having fun and instead focus on our "future" and the future of our children. We think about things like financial stability, our career, and the size of our home. The whole time we are doing this, we are further away from where we need to be because we are not experiencing true child-like joy and happiness. We falsely believe that material wealth and "things" will make us happy, but we are sadly mistaken, for that is not what brings about true happiness. True happiness comes from within, from inner peace and joy that stems from staying present with that which we are and being completely happy at any given moment because we are not jumping into the future or sinking into the past with our thoughts. Happiness is

not taking life too seriously and allowing ourselves to have some fun without worrying about the repercussions of doing so. We have certainly become better at having fun over the years compared to our history and past, but we still cling to heavy thoughts of stress, fear and worry that prevent us from experiencing as much joy as we could be experiencing if we were to lighten up a little. Do you really believe that our lives are intended to be spent working, stressing about money and taxes, and feeling bad about ourselves? Absolutely not! Our lives are supposed to be filled with play, exploration and wonder. We are supposed to love and explore our emotions freely while enjoying this beautiful planet we live on. How can we experience the splendor and beauty of the planet if all we ever do is go from our house to our car to our place of work and back again?

If you've been feeling pressured by life and not enjoying it to its fullest capacity, consider some of these ideas to lighten up:

1. Ride your bike

Everyone and anyone can ride a bike. There are no limits and you can explore your city or town in new ways. Riding your bike with the wind in your hair and the sun on your face makes you feel alive and filled with joy. It gets you outside, connected to the elements of nature and mother earth herself. Many towns and cities have bike paths and routes that are scenic and wonderful. Bike riding is also a great way to spend quality time with friends and family.

2. Read a fiction book

Too often we read self-help books and books about personal development and career enhancement. And while these books are essential and often life changing, you should also read stories that take your imagination on a ride. Read a story about a different time with characters you can get attached to and creative twists you can look forward to. Fiction is wonderful for our imaginations.

3. Arts + Crafts

Everyone has at least some element of artistic ability in one area or another. Visit your local art store and look at all that they have to offer. Try a new craft or art project. There are so many things you can do, even if you don't feel confident with your artistic abilities. Many art stores also offer classes. Remember art can be anything from painting and drawing, to crafts for your home, furniture building,

4. Play with your children

Children are wonderful teachers when it comes to play. They have vivid imaginations and love to role-play and use their creativity. Take time to appreciate a child at play; even get down on the floor and play with them. Whether it is your own child, a friend's child, a niece or a nephew, or a grandchild; children can teach us valuable lessons about life. They are wise beyond their knowing. Build some Lego, do a craft, or play a game with a child and see how often you think about your financial woes during that time.

Having a lighter perspective on life is a huge asset to being connected to who we are on the inside and allowing our inner light to shine. Life is supposed to be fun and when we are stuck in our heads all the time we aren't able to have much fun. We can still be responsible while enjoying the lighter side of life.

The art of being grateful

When you want to truly feel connected to who you are and feel good inside think about how to increase your gratitude. We go about our lives in a perceived state of separateness, thinking and feeling as individuals. But we don't get to where we are and become who we are without the love, support, and assistance of others. We share a global consciousness and we are connected to all beings whether we choose to believe so or not. It is just the nature of our being. When was the last time you thanked someone for being in your life, helping you with something important, or for being there for you during a time of need? Sometimes we might say the words "thank you" but we never fully express what is in our heart for someone because we often feel vulnerable and exposed when we do so.

We've been brought up in a culture that fosters strength, power, and the illusion of perfection. Many of us were taught not to share our feelings and vulnerabilities with others because it will work against us. The good news is that there are mass changes sweeping across our beautiful planet and people have been waking up over the past several years. The instance of this increases day-by-day as more people realize that we are built from the spirit of love, connection, and sharing. We need each other and we

also thrive on that interconnectivity. So expressing your gratitude towards others is an essential piece to your ability to appreciate this truth.

Think about the people you have in your life right now. Who are the people who have had tremendous impact on you and why? Have you ever truly told them how you feel about them? Perhaps you have a mentor or you look up to someone, but they don't aren't aware of the impact that they've had on you. What about your own family? When was the last time you said more than "I love you" and truly told your family members what they mean to you and what you appreciate about them? Something wonderful happens to your spirit when you are told how loving, helpful or supportive you've been. It makes you thrive on doing more of that important work. There is nothing greater than spending your time supporting, loving, and helping others. This is life's work and its greatest tapestry.

We tend to feel disconnected and down about ourselves when we do not spend enough time with others or have the opportunity to love, share and support those in our lives. Seek out these opportunities and your life will be rich with experience and your heart full of love. Even if you live far away from your family and childhood friends, or you just moved to a new town or city, there are plenty of ways you can get involved to begin feeling connected again. Consider these options:

1. Join a humanitarian cause group
2. Volunteer at a seniors home or local hospital
3. Participate in a run or walk for charity
4. Join a local book club

5. If you have a dog, frequently go to the dog park

Connection with others is so important to who we are. We can't get through life alone, and we don't feel our best when we live a solitary existence. We thrive and feel our best when we share our lives with others, and when we do, it's important to let them know what they mean to us. Expressing gratitude for those in our lives allows more of that energy to come flooding in, and fills our lives with more of the same experiences. So if you already have a rich life full of meaningful people and experiences, remember to take the time to appreciate them and tell them why they are appreciated. And if you feel that these connections are lacking in your life, seek them out and make time to foster these relationships, they are truly important to all humans.

Feeling good on the inside takes a little work on the outside and a lot of work on the inside. We tend to feel our best when our lives are going in the direction that we want, or when we feel wanted, needed and when we know that we make a difference. It's amazing how our inner voice and perception of self can change when we make some of these changes to our lives. This is a good place to start when our self-image needs an overhaul. It's not easy to just "snap out of it" when we are feeling bad about ourselves, but we can always choose to feel better, we can always choose to do something else, and we can seek out connection with others. These things provide us with some relief when we are stuck in a negative mindset and they impact our overall energy. This allows us to do the inner work that we need to do from a more positive place. When we are stuck in a mode of negativity, feeling lethargic and apathetic or just don't have the

energy within to work on changing our inner habits, then we must look outside ourselves to find that energy first. If you don't like what you are feeling, change it. How do you do that? Think about something else, or do something: anything that changes your state of mind. Doing things that make you happy and keeping positive are so important when you aren't feeling your best, and although it might sound like a contradiction to feel good when you're feeling bad, it's essential to switch your energy around. Even when we are in a negative mindset, the things that make us smile and make us feel good still apply. If you saw a baby smile at you with wide sparkling eyes when you felt bad, you wouldn't be able to help but smile back, even if it was a forced smile. Very few of us would frown at a smiling baby.

Controlling our thoughts

The biggest contributing factor to feeling bad about ourselves is our pesky thoughts. Our thoughts can cause a tremendous amount of disruption and pain. We build stories around fear, stress and worry and these stories are what fuel our thoughts. We repeat the stories in our heads until we are convinced that our thoughts are right. The problem with this is that most of those stories are rooted in fear and while intended to "protect" us, they in fact do the opposite of that. These fearful stories that we play in our minds over and over again make us feel disconnected, alienated and cut off from our community and the world at large. You can probably recall some of these stories appearing in your life at one time or another. Do any of these sound familiar? "Everyone thinks I am a failure", "I look awful. I will never lose weight", "I don't have the self-

discipline to succeed”, “I will always be alone, nobody wants me”, “I am incapable of making a good decision”. All of these are common examples of the messages that our stories are trying to have us believe. Every story we build in our head will support a message just like one of these. So if we think that we are a failure, for example, everything we do will resonate that energy. Every time we try something new, or start a project, we will have that underlying message vibrating from our being. This makes us more susceptible to failure. It is not the belief of us being a failure that causes us to fail, but merely our own expectation that we will fail. If we went into that same project with no expectations and without drawing upon past failures, we would have an entirely different experience. The recalling of past failures is what keeps us down; we must not live in the past or fear the future. It is detrimental to our wellbeing.

Most negative thought and poor feelings of self-worth come from past experiences. We drudge them up over and over again in our minds playing them like a cinematic feature. This keeps us from believing in ourselves and causes us to have little to no faith in ourselves. When we are thinking about the past, generally we are thinking about something that happened, or something we did that causes us regret. The past crops up to remind us “hey remember when you did _____. It didn’t work out so well. Be careful”. We falsely believe that these thoughts of the past are what is keeping us safe, serving as a reminder to not make the same mistakes again and to avoid the dangers of the past. When in fact, our recall of past mistakes, poor decisions, and negative experiences are what keep us in the energy of that vibration. The recall of past failures, makes future failures more possible and more likely just as the recall of negative experiences makes

future negative experiences more likely. We attract what we think about, so if we are going into something with a negative view from the past as our guiding light, then we are destined to experience more of what we are thinking about. Even when we think about what we don't want, our mere focus on it is what attracts it to us. The universe doesn't distinguish between negative and positive, we simply attract what we expend our energy focusing on.

Many of us like to recall events from our past with a victim-like mentality. We have all done this at one point in our lives. We retell stories of past hardship, pain, and misfortune (i.e. – “I was abused as a child”, “We were poor and had no money”, or “I lost everything in a fire”). The problem with hashing up these memories over and over again is that you are not giving yourself a chance to release yourself from that energy. Do you feel good recalling such painful memories? Of course not. So why do it? Most human beings have witnessed at one time in their life something awful, or have experienced something incredibly painful, or had something happen to them as a child that changed their life forever. This is true of all humans. However, it's what we do with that which makes us who we are. We can take that pain and decide not to go there again, or we can relive, retell, and let this pain shape and define us – forever living as a victim with no control over our own lives and thoughts. We must escape the victim mentality if we are to thrive and rise above our past experiences. We cannot allow negative experiences and thoughts from the past continue to resurface, as they wreak havoc in our minds and attract more negative experiences to our lives. Just say no to harmful past thinking!

Another thing we all love to do as humans is plan for our futures. We spend a great deal of our time planning and preparing for things that haven't happened yet. Often we fear future events and we think negatively about what might or could happen, foreshadowing failure and misfortune. Why would we do that? Our primitive brain doesn't like anything that it isn't familiar with, so when we are about to embark on something new, for example a new job, a trip, a relationship, or a move in location; our primitive brain tries to protect us by keeping us in familiar territory. If it were up to our primitive brains we would never step outside of our comfort zone, experience anything new or exciting, or embark on a journey. And while the primitive brain has its place in protecting us and keeping us safe, the percentage of time that we actually need this function is minute. Don't fall into the trap of fearing or worrying about future events. It is okay to do some planning for your future, as long as you aren't spending all of your time thinking about things that haven't happened yet.

When you spend all of your time regretting the past, or worrying about the future you are missing out on the most important aspect of life; right now. Stay present with your thoughts and you will always be okay. We never have to regret the present because we are living it and we never have to worry about our ability to handle the present because we are already handling it. Humans would have no stress in our lives if we were to just stay present with our thoughts and energy at each point throughout the day. Anger, stress, worry, fear; all those things would disappear if we stayed present. It is only through past and future thinking that these negative lower-vibration emotions come through. In the present there is nothing to fear because we see all that is, there is

nothing we have to regret because we have the ability to choose and decide in the very moment what we do. The present moment is that sweet spot of happiness, inner peace and strength that many of you have been searching for. It's always been here, waiting for you to discover it. Take it moment by moment, don't fear or worry about the next week, month or year. Why? It hasn't happened yet. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow isn't here yet so why concern yourself with anything other than right now?

All self-esteem, depression, and self-loathing reside in past or future thinking. So if you find yourself in a negative state of mind, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1.) Am I thinking about something that has already happened?
- 2.) Am I thinking about something that might or could happen?
- 3.) What am I doing right now?

The last question is aimed at bringing your attention to what you are doing. Try recalling as many things as you can about your surroundings, even if it sounds silly. You may say to yourself "I am drinking a tea on my porch, there are birds in the background, the sun is shining on me, and I feel a light breeze blowing through my hair". That is observing and staying present. If you want to get good at staying present, do more of this. Observe and notice your surroundings, say it out loud or write it down if it helps. You can keep a journal with you and practice doing this at random moments throughout the day. Even when things get busy and you are at work or have a million things to get done, you can still take it task by task and stay present with what you are doing. Do not allow yourself to think about the ten other things that you haven't managed to get to yet, simply focus upon that which you are doing in the moment. The other tasks can wait, they aren't

going anywhere, and your ability to complete them with a calm centered mind rests upon your ability to stay present. You can do it. We all can. Simply practice the art of staying in the moment by observing your surroundings, then catch your thoughts if they wander into the past or future. Tell yourself that your focus upon the past or future is harmful to your state of mind. Gently remind yourself of this truth each time your mind tries to wander into the past or future, and you will be successful.

Because we are so accustomed to thinking like this as a species, it will take some practice and conscious energy to stay present, but the pay off is a lovely sense of inner peace. You will find your stress levels will drop off completely and you will have a calm, cool confidence about you. All of those feelings of not being good enough, not liking yourself or feeling as if others are against you will disappear. Because they are not important, they are not part of your present being, and they have no place vibrating in your energy field.

Connect with others, share your feelings, do things that make you feel happy, don't let your thoughts control you or keep you in the past or future. These are the things that will bring a great sense of inner peace to your being. You don't have to feel bad about yourself, you are amazing in so many ways. Smile when you see yourself in the mirror and reward yourself for not allowing your thoughts to drift into the past or wander into the future. Remind yourself how good you'll feel by doing this.

Here is where you need to be, and now is where your human potential rests.

Chapter Two

Healthy Inner Dialog

Each day we go about our activities and responsibilities with a running dialog in our mind. Sometimes we make comments, think things through from various perspectives, or have a conversation with our inner self about an event or circumstance we are facing. This dialog is so much a part of who we are and so ingrained in our routine that many are not even aware that it is happening. If you actually stopped to observe yourself in conversation with your thoughts you would see that every thought, action, encounter, and circumstance prompts an inner voice to either encourage, distract, or discourage you. Sometimes our conversation with our inner being helps us to make sense of things that are going on in our lives and allows us to view things from varying perspectives. However, other times our inner dialog is harmful and destructive and reinforces negative beliefs we hold about ourselves.

The Voice of Encouragement

This is the best voice and often the quietest one. This is the voice that tells us everything will be okay, to calm down, to get a hold of ourselves, and provides us with messages of love and encouragement. The voice of encouragement is built upon our self-esteem and is rooted in the eternal knowledge of our inner being. Our inner being knows how fantastic and wonderful we are and doesn't need validation from external sources or other people to feel that way. The voice of encouragement always has our best interest

at heart and never steers us in a wrong direction, because the messages are always that of love, support, and gentle guidance. Have you ever had an internal pep talk with yourself before a meeting or a public speaking event? Often these conversations are coming from your voice of encouragement and pump you up and help you get on stage or stand in front of a crowd of people with your head held high. The voice of encouragement helps you achieve your goals, reminds you of your success and positive attributes, and instills a sense of inner peace and confidence in you as you navigate through life's events and experiences.

What the voice of encouragement sounds like:

"I can do this. Everyone is going to love me. This presentation is going to be superb. I studied, I know my stuff. This date is going to go really well I can feel it."

When the Voice of Encouragement most often appears:

- Before a public speaking event
- Before an important meeting or gathering
- During a competition or sporting event
- While trying to achieve a personal goal
- When hoping for a specific outcome

The Voice of Distraction

This is the voice of your every whim, the one that sends you off in different directions exploring whatever comes to mind. This isn't the voice the lifts you up or knocks you down, but rather, the one that keeps you present. It distracts you from past and future

thinking by having you notice things in your immediate surroundings, or by providing you with revelational thoughts that lead you to explore ideas. Perhaps you notice the aura of a tree or flower and begin to appreciate the sheer beauty in that, or you are cycling down a path and begin thinking about the expansion of the universe and how wondrous your surroundings are. On the flip side, however, the voice of distraction can also take you away from important things like work and responsibilities. The voice of distraction is always seeking adventure and exploration, forever questioning things and looking to expand and grow. In many ways the voice of distraction is pure consciousness and emotional intelligence, but it cannot always be counted on. It does get us distracted and off-task as well and can keep us focused on things that are trivial or unimportant during times when we need to be focused on the task at hand.

What the voice of distraction sounds like:

“I wonder where this pen was made and how much it costs. Maybe I should cut my hair off and go short. Look at that couple pawing at each other, they look so happy. I really need to get back into the gym.”

When the voice of distraction most often appears:

- During a meeting or speaking engagement that you are bored with
- While engaged in mundane tasks or activities
- When looking for an escape from something challenging
- During times of procrastination
- When checked out mentally of a conversation with someone

The voice of discouragement

This is the voice that keeps us down and prevents us from trying new things in our lives. This voice seeks to protect us from failure and hardship, when in fact it does the opposite and keeps us feeling bad about ourselves. The voice of discouragement tells us not to do something, not to expect too much of a situation, or ourselves and has a negative tone to the messages. The reason for the negative tone is that this voice is rooted in FEAR (False Events Appearing Real). The fear is what keeps the conversation negative. If we think too much of ourselves and can't accomplish something, the disappointment will be much greater than if we hadn't expected to succeed in the first place. The voice of discouragement is what holds most of us back in our lives when we cannot make progress or accomplish something we set out to achieve. It perpetuates a negative victimized dialog in our minds that lends itself very well to failure. The voice of discouragement is the most harmful of the three voices, and the one we must work the hardest at retraining if we want to attract success and abundance in our lives. Often the voice of discouragement has been with us so long that we don't even realize just how harmful or prevalent it is in our lives.

What the voice of discouragement sounds like:

"I am never going to lose this weight, I look awful. What's the point in dating, it never works out anyway. Everybody else gets promoted, and I am always overlooked. Why can't I ever get ahead financially?"

When the voice of discouragement most often appears:

- After a setback or personal disappointment of some kind
- When fearful of accomplishing a task or goal

- When intimidated by success of others
- After someone says something negative to/about us
- When feeling melancholy or victimized

It is helpful to recognize these three voices within your mental dialog. If we are unaware of how each voice affects us we run the risk of being tossed about by our thoughts. But when we learn to recognize our thoughts for what they are and identify them accordingly, we give ourselves the power of knowing that we are not our thoughts. We are so much more than that.

We are often our own worst critics. This is especially true when we think about our body image. We stand in front of the mirror day after day, sometimes avoiding eye contact or other times saying hurtful negative things to ourselves. Just because we don't say them out loud does not mean that they are not impacting our experience. Any message that we allow into our minds; spoken out loud or not is creating an energetic vibration that will attach itself to other vibrations similar in nature. So if you are looking at yourself each day and thinking awful things, those awful things will multiply and find other awful things to relate to. Before you know it, you won't be able to look at yourself without feeling depressed and bad about yourself. This is a ridiculous routine that many of us get into. Call it human nature to be critical and analytical, but when it comes to our bodies and selves, we have to be loving, supportive and gentle otherwise we end up doing ourselves a great disservice. It's okay to be dissatisfied with something about our physical appearance or body, after all, much of our society places a great emphasis on

aesthetics. If you are dissatisfied with something, however, let that be your fuel and your guide rather than your downfall. It is all in the way we look at things that dictate how we feel and how successful we will be. If we take a negative and turn it into a positive, we are more likely to succeed and feel better in the process. But if we take a negative and let it turn into five other negatives, we will feel stuck and unable to make positive changes in our lives. The messages we allow into our minds are so very important to our ability to manifest positive experience and lasting change. People who get stuck with things like weight loss, financial troubles, or relationship problems are likely allowing negative dialog to occur in their minds. Even those who do everything in their power on the outside to change will not realize lasting change until those inner messages are acknowledged and changed into positive, loving, and supportive messages. Sometimes we don't realize just how important our inner dialog is to our wellbeing. We blame our setbacks and challenges on external events or bad luck, when really we possess within us the power to change it all every day. We simply need to be diligent in tending to our thoughts.

How to bring awareness to thoughts

When you perpetuate a vibration through thought, emotion and action, the Law of Attraction will keep that vibration going and it will continue to get bigger and bigger and bigger until it is a major force in your life. The universe does not distinguish between negative and positive and only gives us what we think about and manifests our energy into our lives. It is for this reason that many people get frustrated because they think

that focusing on the desire to be wealthy or happy will bring about that success or happiness, when in fact the notice of its absence simply brings about more of that absence. When we are focused on what we don't have, don't want, or can't achieve we continue to perpetuate that energy of lack and need. The energy of desperation, want or need creates more of what we don't want in our lives. It is a hard concept to grasp for some, but once you begin to understand the way it works and test it out on your own life, you will see tremendous progress.

Most of us have a "thing" that is a continuing theme in our lives. Perhaps it is the desire to have a relationship, or the desire to lose weight and get healthy, or the hope that we will become financially stable. Whatever that "thing" is for you, it is important to take a look at it and ask yourself if your current thoughts and feelings are supporting the opportunity to welcome its energy into your life. If you are so busy thinking about what you don't have and spend all of your time thinking about the future and how much better your life will be when you have that "thing" or attain that success, you will have an incredibly difficult time bringing that into your life. And the reason why that is, is because the Law of Attraction simply holds up a mirror to us and manifests the energy of whatever we think about most into our life. So thinking about how happy we will be when we attain a certain level of wealth or success is really putting out the energy that what you have and who you are right now is not enough. Believing that you are not enough will continue to make you feel like you don't have enough, and push you into future-based stressful thinking.

The hard part about all of this is that many of us don't realize that we are doing this. We read the books, articles, and blog posts about this stuff on the Internet, and we think we are doing it – but we aren't really looking at the resonance of our thoughts. Our thoughts carry a unique vibration and the more alike the thoughts we experience, the greater the vibration of those thoughts, which is what creates attraction.

But how do we know which thoughts are helping us and which ones are not? Simple. How do you feel? Do your thoughts about what you want in your life leave you feeling empty and dissatisfied? If your hopes and dreams for the future keep you feeling that your life in its current state is not good enough, then chances are you are making it almost impossible to attract what you want into your life.

Our thoughts can be detrimental to our success if we are not careful, and it can feel as if our thoughts are thinking us instead of us (the being) experiencing thought. We have to be careful about what we allow ourselves to think and feel because each thought and emotion emits a vibration that could be working for us or against us, and if our thoughts are negative the vibration will not be something we want to attract into our lives. The simplest way to bring awareness to our thoughts is to check in with our emotions at various points throughout each day. Notice body language, posture, and emotions. Look in the mirror at yourself. Are you frowning? What are you thinking about? Sometimes we have run-away dialogs happening in our minds about future scenarios that haven't even happened yet and probably never will. If we allow fear to dominate our emotions, it will attempt to control us with thoughts about what could or might happen in the future, but the problem is that these things are never positive. Fear doesn't give us

warm happy thoughts, nor does it invite positive change and peace into our lives. Fear wreaks havoc in our lives and instills a sense of chaos, worry and stress into us by allowing us to think about things that aren't even real. They just feel real because we keep thinking them continually. It becomes our status quo.

The next time you are angry, upset, worried, or frustrated step back and take a few deep breaths in and breathe out slowly. Ask yourself what you are thinking that is causing you so much trouble. Analyze your emotions and how you are feeling by attempting to articulate why you feel the way you do. Perhaps you may choose to use a journal or a record this information on your computer. Some may just prefer to sort it out mentally on a case-by-case basis. Whichever you choose, be sure that you get to the root of how you are feeling by identifying your emotions. Acknowledge all emotions that you are feeling and call them out for what they are. Flush out your thinking so that you really understand why you are feeling a certain way. Once you have identified all of the feelings contributing to your negative state of mind, ask yourself how many of these thoughts are rooted in the present? Go through each one and identify whether the thought is in the past, the present or the future. You will likely find that none of these harmful thoughts are based in the present reality, which means that they do not matter. Past thinking is useless when it makes you feel unhappy. You have already experienced the events of the past and cannot get that time back again, so what purpose does rehashing memories serve except to make you feel worse about yourself. And what purpose does feeling bad about yourself serve except to keep you from getting what you want and attracting happiness into your life. Negative thinking about past events is

completely useless and is a waste of time and energy in your life. Additionally, thinking about future events with negative, fearful or stressful thoughts is also detrimental to your wellbeing and will take you further away from attracting success and happiness. Future events have not yet happened and may never happen. They are a complete fabrication of what we think or worry may happen, not what actually will. None of us can guarantee the future. We don't know what will happen, nor do we know if we will even be here. All there is and all we are guaranteed is right now. So take another look the next time you have negative thoughts and walk through them one by one assessing where these thoughts are based. Chances are, you will find that they are rooted in the past or future, which means they can be discarded. And you can instead feel the positive energy of the present moment, something you know you can handle because you are living it.

In the Western world, part of the reason why we are challenged by staying present with our thoughts is because our entire society is structured around attainment, wealth, and prosperity. Even self-help is rooted in the attainment of enlightenment or spiritual success. We are continually looking ahead from where we are to some other far away event or milestone that we can never guarantee. None of us know the outcome or future of any circumstance in our lives. We are always looking ahead instead of stopping to appreciate where we are right now and what we are doing right now. There is tremendous value in noticing and appreciating the now. When we are too focused on the future we cannot manifest things into our life as readily because our thoughts are rooted in desire, which means we are noticing what we don't have. When we notice

what we don't have we give off a resonance to the universe that says "I am not good enough yet. But when I have ____ I will be." This is a huge problem because when we are too busy focused on what we don't have we get more of that energy. For example, if we tell ourselves that we will be happy when we get a job that pays more, we suddenly become disenchanted with our current job and thus unhappy in the present. When this happens we invite the opportunity for many more of those types of thoughts to occur, so now we think our job isn't satisfying, the drive is too far, we don't like our boss, and the whole thing starts to snowball out of control until our thoughts have convinced us that we hate our job and have to go. If that initial thought about having more money had gone a different way, the outcome could have been positive instead of negative. Imagine changing that thought from "I will be happy when I have a job that pays more" to "I am happy now. I appreciate my job and my coworkers. I know that I will be rewarded for my success". That feels different doesn't it? And you didn't say anything that isn't true. By appreciating what you have right now and changing the conversation from dissatisfaction and negativity to appreciation and positivity, you actually open the door for the opportunity to attract the things that you want in life. Suddenly your boss comes to you and says "You know, you've been working really hard lately and we appreciate it. We'd like to give you a 5% raise." This happens when you change your energy and keep your thoughts from snowballing out of control in a negative direction. Like thoughts attract like thoughts, so make sure that you are creating the right type of thoughts so that you can attract the right type of outcome. Otherwise you will forever be chasing the unattainable and it will always be just within reach, but not quite.

The importance of meditation

Something I hear often is “I don’t have time to meditate”. This always puzzles me, because if we can make time for television, social networking, and to go out for dinner with friends, why then can we not find ten or fifteen minutes per day to devote to our very own wellbeing? Meditation can change your life in so many ways. When you begin making meditation a routine part of your life, you notice tremendous shifts. Your days become happier, lighter and easier. You deal better with negative emotion and worry. You attract meaningful interactions with others and create space to feel good in the present moment. So much of our time is spent focused on attainment and getting somewhere that is in the future, that even a small amount of time in the present is enough to shift us immensely into a completely different state of mind. If you can create profound change in your life simply by meditating for fifteen minutes per day, imagine what you could do with an hour of meditation per day. We simply do not spend the time that we need to focused on the present, so as a result we are collectively stressed, anxious and fearful. Look at children and how they play. Do you think they are worrying or even thinking about something that is going to happen next week? No way! They are too busy enjoying what they are doing as they are doing it. They don’t have to meditate because they are already so tuned into life that they are present all the time. It’s the natural way of a child, and in many ways children are more enlightened than adults because of this. They don’t have the pain of the past, the judgment of others, or the worry of the future knocking at the door of their emotional wellbeing. They just are. And they allow themselves to experience each moment as it comes to them.

Sometimes, as adults we need to take a lesson from children and allow ourselves the time and space to breathe, play and feel good. Of course we have bills, chores, and responsibilities and that won't change, but we can make the time and space in our lives to do things we enjoy. Meditation helps us on so many levels with this. It clears the space for us to feel good which will then in turn demonstrate the importance of staying present. How do we stay present? By focusing on what we are doing in the moment of doing it. Meditation helps us do this by turning our attention towards proper breath. The act of breathing in deeply and visualizing the energy of peace, harmony, and happiness and then breathing out anxiety, worry, and negativity is very powerful. We are able to stay present because we are thinking about our breathing. When our attention shifts and our thoughts attempt to run away from mindful breath, we gently steer them back by focusing again on inhaling positive and exhaling negative. This keeps us present and aware of the moment in which we are in.

Meditation has so many benefits and no known negative side effects or undesirable outcomes. So much can be gained through the practice of meditation. You become a calmer, more confident, happier version of yourself. You notice things that you didn't notice before and feel happy about the things you previously took for granted. Through meditation you come to appreciate people, nature, and unique circumstances in life. Meditation reminds us that now is all that exists and that it must not be stressful or unmanageable because right now we are feeling pretty good, and right now we are handling life and experiencing it and it is quite peaceful. When we become accustomed

to meditation and the act of staying present, we can then apply the same principle to other areas of our life by doing activities that keep us in the moment.

Meditation doesn't only have to be sitting in a quiet space with your eyes closed breathing in deeply. While that is certainly preferred by many, meditation can be any activity or task that is soothing and keeps you focused on what you are doing. For example, the act of preparing a hot tea and then sitting in your favorite place drinking it can be meditative and soothing. Bringing the warm mug to your lips as you feel the steam on your face feels good, and with each sip you take you relax and enjoy the experience and act of drinking that mug of tea, truly tasting and appreciating every single sip. Many people find painting, knitting, drawing and even cleaning to be therapeutic and relaxing. These are all examples of active meditation where you are focused on what you are doing and able to stay present in the moment of that activity.

Meditation impacts our inner dialog tremendously because when we are in the light of peace, joy and harmony with the universe, we are able to keep our thoughts positive. Experiencing positive thought is what drives our positive mental chatter. We are less likely to allow ourselves to follow a breadcrumb trail of negative thought when we are operating from a place of light and love. But when we are thinking and feeling negative by rehashing painful memories of the past or fearing future events that haven't yet occurred, we risk attracting the things we don't want in our lives by inviting negative inner dialog to occur.

Changing the Story

Often we stumble on past events that have already happened and that we cannot change or go back to do something different. We rehash these painful events in our minds creating a sense of stress and trauma. We all have things we wish we could change from the past, or things we wish weren't the way they were. The problem with this type of thinking is that it is harmful to our inner dialog. Rehashing old painful memories do not help us move forward and make positive changes or attract the type of life we want. Instead, they keep us in a state of negativity where we are incapable of accepting what is and operate from a place of fear about future events. This happens often with the death of a family member or friend, the end of a relationship, or mistakes from the past that we wish we hadn't made.

If you have a troubling story from your past that haunts you every now and then, instead of avoiding those thoughts out of fear, replaying them hurtfully, or torturing yourself about what you wish was different, change the story. You don't have to be dishonest to change the story. You can remember events as they occurred but change the language you associate with that event. Words are very powerful and the words that we choose also affect our inner language and thought process. If we have been choosing words that are harmful, negative, or painful – why not rethink the way we have been rethinking. Face the event head on by sitting down and allowing yourself to think about it. Get a pad of paper and a pen, as sometimes writing things down and making them real solidifies them in our mind and allows us to absorb them to a greater degree. Write down all of the events from the past that have been haunting you or troubling you.

Perhaps you only have one, or maybe you have several. Number each event and then approach them one by one. Write down the event, followed by the negative and troubling thoughts that you continue to have for each event. Now look at your thoughts and ask yourself if there is a better way to present those thoughts. For example, if you have feelings of guilt about not being there for a family member when they passed, make peace with that. Say out loud how you felt and why, and then write down a better way to think about that. For example you might write "I would have liked to be there, but know that things happened the way they had to. She knows how much I loved and cared for her and I will continue to speak to her through prayer and communication with spirit." That is just an example, but what this example says is that the past cannot be changed and instead of feeling guilty (which doesn't feel good) I will instead make peace with the fact that I simply cannot change the events of the past, but I can change the way I think about them moving forward. Prayer is a powerful tool when someone has passed. You can communicate to any loved on through the power of prayer. And while they may not appear before you in spirit form, you will feel better about doing so and will release your negative feelings about their death.

This technique works with almost anything. If you continually beat yourself up about being fired from a job or missing an important interview, instead of rehashing the thoughts of failure and self-defeat, instead tell yourself that there was a bigger reason why that happened. That wasn't the job for you, or you would be in it. The universe had grander plans and you may not be aware of them yet, but you will be. Have faith and trust in your ability to live out your destiny. Sometimes things look really good when

they are right in front of us, but after some time away we realize they were not ideal and perhaps not a great fit for us. The same is true with relationships. The pain of ending a relationship can be great when we are in the moment of mourning its loss, but after some self-reflection and inner healing, we often discover that the relationship wasn't the right one for us. It didn't support our inner being and would have ended eventually anyway.

If painful memories from the past keep haunting you and causing your inner dialog to be negative, face the memories head on and change the story that you tell yourself about those memories. Guaranteed there is room for improvement about the way you tell yourself the story. Always know that sometimes we don't understand why things happen the way they do or the plans that the universe has for our loved ones, and us but we cannot change what is. We can only make peace with it.

Surround yourself with Love

The best thing we can do for our lives and our inner being is to surround ourselves with love. We do this through loving acts of kindness towards others, self-love and loving thoughts, and being around positive supportive people. There is nothing that makes us feel better than being in the light of love. We bask in it, we glow and we reach new heights in our careers, relationships and lives when we have love on our side. Love doesn't only come from romantic sources; there are many kinds of love that are important to our development and wellbeing.

Take stock of your life. How are you doing in the love department? Are you seeing your family regularly and surrounding yourself with the people who love you unconditionally? Or are you isolated and busy with work and career? Sometimes we forget how important it is to just be with the people who love and support us and how nourishing that is for our spirit. We all get busy in our lives and have difficulty fitting everything in, relationships included, but don't wish that you had more time for this person or that person, make the time. If you are having thoughts about missing someone's presence in your life, that is your inner being's way of nudging you to see that person or reach out to them. Sometimes we will be busy at work or around the house with kids, and all of a sudden out of nowhere we will think of our sister or our friend who moved away. This is the time to reach out to that person. Instead of just thinking about that person and then experiencing guilt for not calling them or seeing them, take that opportunity to stop what you are doing and pick up the phone. The world will not stop because you took a few minutes out of your day to call someone that you love. Always remember this.

The people in our lives are very important to our quality of life. If we surround ourselves with people who love us and support us unconditionally, chances are we will thrive and feel good about how we live. We will feel that we can accomplish anything we set our minds to and be able to enjoy our lives more readily. By contrast, when we surround ourselves with negative people who see things from a cynical perspective, we are more likely to fall into the trap of experiencing lower-vibration emotions. Of course, we cannot eliminate all negative people from our lives. Sometimes those people are our

immediate family or our loved ones. But we can mitigate the affect they have on us by seeking out others who are positive and loving. The more love we surround ourselves with, the less of an impact those negative people can have on us. And something truly amazing could happen. Those negative people may just witness how wonderful your life is by embracing the positive, so much so that you may transform them into a person who learns to embrace hope and love instead of fear and worry.

If your life is filled with worriers, stress dwellers and depressive types, it is imperative that you seek out others to lift up your other side and support your wellbeing. You can do this by meeting new people, joining spiritual groups or clubs, or by reaching out to old friends who you haven't spent enough time with lately. There are many ways that you can invite positive people into your life. Then you will be in such a place of strength and personal power, that it won't matter how anyone else feels because you will continue to operate from a place of love and light. You will be the one that others seek out when they need to feel better or feel lifted up.

Never underestimate just how powerful your inner dialog can be. It is something that we far too often overlook and don't consider. When we are not mindful of our thoughts we risk them controlling us and allowing us to embrace fear and negativity. Our thoughts are often primitive and operate on the fight or flight model. This serves us when we are in great danger, but very unhelpful on a day-to-day basis, as most of us do not live in constant danger. The primitive brain simply wants to keep us safe and has the best intentions, but the manner in which it goes about those intentions keeps us in a state of anxiety. We would never leave the house if we always let our primitive brain

rule. We would be too fearful of meeting new people, too skeptical about others to invite them into our home, and terrified of trying new things if there was even the slightest risk of injury or death. The primitive brain wants us to be safe and that is its main goal. We have to know that any time we experience fear, anxiety, worry or stress that we are allowing our primitive brain to take over. We must take control of our thoughts and our inner dialog so that we can truly live and experience the wonders of life. Watch your thoughts and be mindful of why you are having them. Know that you are not the thinker, you are more than your thoughts and you must create separation from that which you are and that which you think.

Your thoughts and inner dialog hold the key to your ability to manifest everything you want in your life. There truly are no limits. Only the ones you set forth for yourself. Imagine how your life would change if you were to stay present with your thoughts and stop imposing limits and obstacles on yourself. Try it, and see what happens to your life. Your inner dialog can either support or sabotage you at any given time, but you have to be willing to take responsibility for your thoughts instead of letting your thoughts take control of you. Life can be anything you want it to be when supported by a healthy inner dialog and a positive disposition.

Chapter Three

Supporting Self-Love

In many ways our mission here on earth as human beings is to learn how to love and accept ourselves. None of us are immune from unexpected turns, hardships and challenges in life. No matter who you are and how much you have (spiritually or materially) you will face challenges in your life. It is easy when you are down and out to think that others don't face the challenges that you face in your life, but you must always remember that to be human is to face challenge. We overcome adversity, we learn, we grow and we make lots of mistakes along the way. If we were to just live without error, mistake, or challenge the value of our lives would not be as significant as they are. Overcoming adversity makes us strong and thankful for what we have and where we've come from. It makes us appreciate others more readily, and sometimes even allows us to love ourselves more deeply.

Looking in the mirror and telling the person staring back at you that you love them isn't as easy as it sounds for some. Some of us have gone decade after decade without even acknowledging or noticing the beautiful reflection staring back at us; believing that everything that happens is external and not a result of the internal light within. The very root of wellbeing is self-love. It is the fuel that drives your inspiration, propels you to new heights, and brings a calm sense of inner peace over you. When you love yourself you have nobody to fight with because it doesn't matter what other people do or say, you love yourself regardless and your love is unwavering. Your whole world and

everything around you opens up like a flower basking in the sunshine when you are in love with yourself. Loving yourself isn't vain, selfish, or arrogant. In fact it's the opposite, it is the best thing you can do and the most important relationship you will ever have. You have probably heard that statement "you cannot love another until you love yourself first" in regards to relationships. The reason why this statement is so profoundly true is that all of our relationships are modeled after how we treat ourselves, and the way we feel on the inside. For example, if we feel like we are not good enough, defeated, depressed and just generally down on ourselves, we will attract the type of relationship that reinforces these feelings. The relationship will be a reflection of our innermost feelings about our self. So our partner may not respect us, listen to us, or believe in us. The reason why is because we are putting forth that energy about our self, and the universe responds by helping us manifest into our life that which we think about most. The universe does not distinguish between negative and positive and simply makes it possible for manifestation to occur. For this reason we must be so careful about what we think, the words we speak, and the thoughts we allow ourselves to have on a daily basis.

Have you ever thought something negative about yourself and then experienced the very thing that you feared or worried about actually happening? This is not uncommon when self-love is absent. Say for example, you have a fear of losing your job. Each and every day you go into your office carrying that fear. You respond out of fear, you project fear, and you walk around almost expecting to lose your job at any given moment. You see other people lose their jobs, which increases the degree of fear within you. You can

sense when your superiors are unhappy with your work or feel that you are not adding enough value. And eventually, exactly what you spent so much time thinking and worrying about happens, and you lose your job. This is an example of how not loving yourself can cause negative things to manifest into your life. A person who loved themselves would not have that attitude or walk around with that degree of fear. Instead the messages would be along the lines of “I really love my job here. I want to be noticed and add value. I am happy here. I will work hard to demonstrate that I can do this job and do it well. I know I am meant to be here.” See how different that is. There may still be a twinge of thought about the possibility of losing the job, but the energy and internal messaging is completely different. And that is what makes all of the difference.

Some people aren't even fully aware of whether they love themselves or not. They are so detached from thinking and feeling anything for themselves, that they are even unable to ascertain whether they have self-love or not. I can assure you that all of us have self-love within us. Some of us may have stuffed it deep down and repressed it or beaten it down with criticism, but it is there, just waiting to be discovered and brought to the surface. There is a limiting belief that must be dealt with first, and this is the belief that loving oneself is in some way narcissistic or selfish. If you have thought that or currently think that I want you to crumple that thought into a ball of paper in your mind and visualize yourself throwing that thought into a wastebasket. Now visualize yourself writing on a piece of paper “The best thing I can do for myself and those around me is to love myself”. Repeat this saying out loud, in your mind, or simply visualize the

words. Notice how this feels to think. You feel lighter don't you? Loving yourself is the foundation to a happy, successful, peaceful and joyous life. Do you deserve that? Of course you do. And so do all of us. We are all entitled to free will and freedom of thought in our lives, but be very careful what you choose to do and say, as these things either support self-love or sabotage it.

Words are very important to our practice of self-love. Not only the words we speak out loud, but the words we speak in our minds and think with our thoughts. The vibration of those words is what matters most, as the vibration is what will create our reality. Think about the words that you speak about yourself either out loud or not. What type of vibration are those words putting forth? Perhaps you beat yourself up over a couple of things in particular, your body weight and your fear of trying anything new. These two limiting beliefs form the basis for all of the negative things you say and do to yourself. You believe that you can't do anything because you are too afraid and that you will never lose weight because you are not disciplined enough and too afraid to get yourself out there into the real world and do something. So you eat and continue to feel bad about yourself while you keep within the imprisonment of your own mental limitations. You never join a gym because you worry about what people will think when they see you, you don't try a new eating regime because you just tell yourself you will fail anyway so what's the point. You never try to do anything differently than you have been doing, which means that you are stuck reliving what isn't working day after day. Does this sound crazy? This is what most of us do when we are trapped in self-defeating attitudes

and are not supporting ourselves with love and respect. A little bit of tweaking to our internal thought patterns is usually all that is required.

I am a big fan of journaling. I think that journaling can shed light on things that we would otherwise not see or be aware of. It taps us into our deepest desires, thoughts, and beliefs and it comes effortlessly to all of us. The hardest thing about journaling is actually starting to do it. Many people feel that they aren't a writer and therefore shouldn't journal, or that life is too busy to take time to write, or that they will only do it for a short amount of time and then they will forget about their journal and move on to something else. All of these things are true... If you let them be true. They don't have to be. We all have the capacity to think about our lives and reflect on what is important. Journaling helps us make peace with things in our lives that we struggle with, understand the things that confuse us, and change the things that we must change to move forward with.

If you are not accustomed to journaling or even writing down your thoughts, there are a few things that you will want to do to ensure that you will be successful and continue to do it on a regular basis:

1. Buy or find a special blank notebook with lined paper in it. Make sure that this notebook is for your journaling and your journaling alone. Don't let it be a random notebook that has people's phone numbers written in it, shopping lists, and to do items. Otherwise it won't feel special. Set the intention that this journal is sacred before you begin and let the blank pages give you hope and inspiration for the transformation that will occur once you begin using it.

2. Think about your schedule and what would work best time-wise in terms of writing in your journal each day. Select a time that works for you and that won't be interrupted by other people or activities. The best time to write is in the morning because you haven't yet been affected by the stress of the day and it is easier to stay focused. Our dreams also provide great inspiration for the things we write in our journal. Choose a time that you can stick to, and commit to giving yourself ten or fifteen minutes per day to write. Most of us can find ten or fifteen minutes, no matter how busy we are.

3. Create a space for writing that will inspire you to write each day. Perhaps this place is from your bedroom or a meditation room. Maybe it's in your kitchen with a cup of tea. Whatever the inspiration, make sure that your space puts you in the mood to write, and that you are surrounded by inspiration, tranquility and comfort. If you tried to journal while your child is running around watching cartoons, you probably wouldn't be successful. Just like if you tried to journal from the office. Choose a place that is yours for those ten or fifteen minutes. Perhaps it is before your children wake up from your bedroom, or before your work day begins in the kitchen with a tea, or maybe it's the middle of the afternoon on your lunch break. Make sure that the space you choose is yours alone and that it will be free from interruption.

4. Set realistic goals and don't be too hard on yourself. Obviously the goal is to write every day but if you can't one day, don't beat yourself up or think you've failed, just resume your writing the following day. When you first begin tell yourself that you are going to do it every day for a week. At the end of the week start looking ahead and set a goal for writing in your journal for one whole month. After one month of consistent writing reward yourself and do something special for yourself. Maybe you'll give yourself a massage, or buy yourself something that supports your wellbeing. Each time you reach a goal, set a new one.

5. When you reach specific goals and milestones review your journal entries. Go through them one by one and read what you wrote. Use a highlighter or circle things that come to you while you are reviewing your work. You will begin to see patterns emerge, epiphanies arise, and answers will stare back at you from the page. Journaling will bring you a great deal of joy and will support who you are on the inside in more ways than you can imagine.

Remember that journaling is something personal that is for you and you alone. Don't write to impress, worry about spelling or how you say things. Just let your consciousness stream through your pen. Don't write as if someone is going to read it. Write what you feel and think and don't be afraid to say what you're really feeling. If you are worried about someone finding your journal, hide it somewhere that only you will be able to find

it or lock it in a keepsake box. The point of your journal is in connecting you with your deep inner voice, a voice that has always lived within you and is waiting for you to discover it.

Understanding our emotions and being able to articulate them is very helpful in practicing self-love. It teaches us that we are going to feel things, sometimes very deeply, but that we can also choose to let them go unless they serve us. Negative emotions like guilt, anger and resent do not help us love ourselves and do nothing for our self-esteem and confidence. They keep us frowning, they keep us in a state of negativity, and they keep us from experiencing joy and inner peace. Most of the negative emotions we experience are a reflection of us not loving ourselves enough and operating from a place of fear. When we can't love ourselves fully or accept ourselves wholly we are unable to make the best decisions, and we are unable to trust others with ease because we constantly fear being hurt, taken advantage of, or compromised in some way. When you operate from a place of self-love, you trust others until they give you a reason not to, you accept the things that happen and do not let them affect your deep sense of love for yourself, and you are more optimistic about the things that happen in life because you know that you can handle whatever life has to throw your way. Self-esteem and self-love go hand in hand. You really can't have one without the other. When you feel good inside it shows.

Living the life you've always wanted

Often we have dreams about the way we would like our lives to be if we had this or that. We fantasize about being a chef, or running a marathon, or helping children in Africa. But we never evolve these things beyond a dream. We think of them as if they are unattainable, when in fact, nothing could be further from the truth. It is very important that you embody the person you are on the inside and outside. If you have a dream to do something, there is at least one small step you can take towards that thing. If having young children or not enough money is a barrier to this, then think about ways that you can still work towards that goal in a smaller capacity. For example, if you want to volunteer in a homeless shelter but your schedule doesn't allow it, maybe you could find an hour out of one day to help with a local charity. Or maybe you could spend an afternoon on the phone calling around a few non-profits and asking them what they need. Or if one of your dreams is to run a marathon, why not start walking each day, then add some light jogging periodically, then build up to jogging the whole way. You can always do something to support living the life that you've always wanted, and doing this is incredibly important to loving yourself. Think about who you are on the inside, what really makes you who you are? What things do you do currently to support that wondrous being? If your answer is nothing then it is time to start paying attention to yourself and getting to the heart of the matter.

Make a list of all of the things you've ever wanted to do, no matter how silly or ridiculous. They can be small things that relate to your home, or they can be large things

that relate to your life as a whole. Write down as many as you can think of. When you have finished, go through the list and circle the ones that are most realistic. That is, there is nothing stopping you from doing them now except for the fact that you just haven't focused upon doing them. Once you have selected at least one thing from your list (but better yet many) begin taking small strides towards achieving those things. Remember that many of those things on your list are based on a specific outcome or final destination, but there is nothing stopping you from setting off on the journey towards the destination.

Focusing upon your goals and making strides towards them helps you because it reinforces the message that your goals are important, and that following your dreams is an act of love. Often when we don't have high self-esteem, doing things just because we want to do them or because we want to feel good seems selfish or awkward. With low self-esteem we become detached from doing anything nice for ourselves. We focus upon every one else's ambitions and dreams and push our own to the backburner because it is more comfortable that way and takes the pressure off. People with low self-esteem generally don't like the pressure of having to live up to anything because they don't want to put themselves in a position to fail, so they often won't even try. If you fall into the category of people pleasing and doing things for everyone else but never doing anything for yourself, it is imperative that you recognize that you must change this. Your inner being needs to be nurtured just as much as those around you, whom you put so much time and effort into making happy. Think of your inner self as a

child, pure of energy, free from society's judgment and pain, and unconditionally loving.

The inner you just waits for you patiently to nurture and connect with yourself.

Bringing your intention back towards self and focusing on the inner you feels uncomfortable when your self-esteem is low. Even if this is the case, and you feel profoundly uncomfortable, proceed with what you are doing. It will get easier, feel better and give you a tremendous amount of strength. Start small. You can begin by doing small things for yourself if you are not ready to tackle your list yet. Go for a guilt-free massage, take a weekend to yourself at a retreat and do some writing, or begin the act of daily meditation. All of these things support the inner you and will make you feel better about yourself.

Surround yourself with love

Many of us don't give much thought to how the people around us affect us and impact our energy, but they absolutely do and can leave us feeling great or exhausted. Ever notice how you feel when you spend a day or a weekend with positive uplifting people? Now contrast that with negative and cynical people. It feels different inside doesn't it? Think about the people you spend the most time with and how their energy might be affecting you. Perhaps you have been trying to be more positive but your husband or wife is a very negative person, or maybe it's your boss, or your best friend. How do you deal with the negative people in your life that you can't avoid? The good news is that there are many things you can do to minimize the impact of their toxicity on your good attitude.

The first thing might be obvious, but don't join them in their negative state. If they are criticizing something, venting, or being negative, don't add further negativity to the conversation. Instead be supportive and helpful by saying things like "is there anything I can do to help you with this?" or "That must have been very difficult for you. I am sorry that happened to you." These are positive and loving statements that acknowledge and validate the negative persons feelings but make it hard for them to continue with their negativity because they are being supported and loved. Often negative people feel uncomfortable with this, they are not used to it. These however, are the people who need it most. Keep your statements of support and love brief and don't get too emotionally vested, but show that you want them to feel better.

Another good tactic for managing negative people is to minimize the amount of time you spend with them when they are in a cynical mindset. This one is more subtle, but eventually the person will notice that whenever they are being negative and critical you suddenly have to go, but when they are being friendly and warm, you stay longer. This is important especially if you are left feeling bad after spending time with the negative person. You don't want them to ruin your good energy and leave you feeling emotionally exhausted because they have just spent hours dumping all of their negative stuff on you. Demonstrate that you will love them and support them by offering words of love and encouragement, but that you will not risk your own happiness and wellbeing by continuing to be around them when they are in that state of mind.

Of course another option is to dump them from your life altogether. This isn't always possible depending on who the person is, but it may be necessary in some cases. If

someone is creating more negative moments with you than positive and you leave their presence feeling burdened, exhausted, and negative yourself – then perhaps it is time to evaluate whether this person should be in your life or not anymore. As much as we may try to offer warmth, love and support to our negative friends, there may be times when we simply cannot do anything to change or influence who they are. Never jeopardize your own wellbeing trying to save someone who doesn't want to be saved.

Seek out the people in your life who push you to be a better person, who love you unconditionally, who support everything that is good in your life, and who smile. These are the people who will help you achieve your dreams and goals and be there to cheer you on. Perhaps you feel that you need to focus on being more positive yourself. These people will be your biggest cheerleaders and will support you along every step of the way. If you don't have any people like this in your life, seek them out. Join local meet up groups on law of attraction and positive thinking. There is no shortage of organized groups talking about these very subjects. Start going to group meditations, yoga classes, and oneness blessings. Seek out the activities and group environments that loving, positive and uplifting people are most likely to be at. Having positive people in your life that you can lean on when you are in need of support is a Godsend.

Trust in yourself

Another big piece to the supporting self-love puzzle is learning to trust in yourself. Many of us don't even use the greatest gift we have within our possession, our intuition. Nothing has our best interests and inner desires at heart more than our very own

intuition. If we were to follow our intuition and do what our inner self guides us to do on a daily basis, we would pretty much be successful at everything we did. But why is it so hard to trust our intuition? There are many reasons that we have a hard time trusting ourselves and often it is because we operate from a place of fear instead of a place of love. Our intuition only has pure love for us and wants us to do the right things in our life so that we can be fulfilled and happy. But when our intuition tells us to do something that makes us uncomfortable, we immediately begin to question ourselves. But often months later we discover that our initial intuition was correct, and that if we would have acted on it when it alerted us, we would be in a much better position. The main reason we have difficulty following our intuition is because often it wants us to change something about the way we live or the way we think, in order to achieve a happier life. Change is scary for a lot of us and many times we choose the comfort of familiarity and sameness in order to avoid the discomfort of something different or unknown. We know what will happen if we stay the same. Things will stay the same. And we know we can handle that, because we already are handling it in our current lives. But change is something different. Change requires us to do something differently than we have been, to think in a new way, or to make a decision that will put us in a completely new situation. Many of us pray for change in our lives, and then when our intuition gently guides us and tells us how to get that change, we resist it. We resist the very thing that we want. Why? Because we fear it.

Never be afraid of what your intuition is telling you. It only wants to protect you, keep you safe, happy and living life a life that supports your inner being. Your intuition would

never guide you in a way that would bring harm to you or cause you to be in a position of distress. If you want to learn to trust your intuition, start small and comfortable. Your intuition sends you messages all day every day. Listen to the small messages and follow through. Perhaps your intuition tells you to take a different route home from work, or to go back into the house to check to see if the iron was unplugged, or maybe it is telling you to cancel a lunch meeting. Listen to the small messages and follow through on those ones before you tackle the big life-altering ones that make your heart jump out of your chest. Following the smaller intuitive insights you have on a day-to-day basis will build a comfort level with your intuition and allow you to feel at ease listening to your inner guidance. The trust will become greater and greater until you fully understand and comprehend how following your intuition will never lead you astray, but only enrich your life in all sorts of ways.

Stop seeking approval

Sometimes we become very unhappy and dissatisfied with our lives when we try to please too many people. Everyone in our life who is close to us will have opinions about what they think we should be doing but ultimately we must do what we feel will best resonate with who we are on the inside. Our parents, spouses, children, friends and loved ones may have very different ideas about what we should be doing with our lives, they may want things for us that we don't want for ourselves. It is an important part of loving yourself to speak out against these demands that are placed on us and communicate our wishes. Trying to please too many people can be very exhausting and

stressful. We try to make one person happy, but then another is not, we try to do what one person wants us to do at another's expense. We simply cannot operate in this manner and must stop and do what we know to be right in our heart. It isn't always easy, especially when faced with opposing views. But the right thing is what we believe in our heart.

You will know if this is a problem in your life because you will notice that you are indecisive, look to others for their opinions and advice, and because you change your mind frequently at the suggestion of others. Are you the type of person who doesn't act until you get the approval from someone close to you? Stop being that person. Do what you must do and act confidently with your decisions. You are in the driver's seat of your own life, nobody else. Nobody can tell you how you feel inside, or what your heart wants. You are the only one who knows this and the only one who can direct your life accordingly. Advice is helpful at times and it is healing to talk through your challenges with friends and loved ones, as long as you don't place validation and approval in the hands of those people and you know that you are the one that knows best where to direct your own life.

Be happy and grateful for what you have

Human beings, while all connected, are also as unique as snowflakes when it comes to personality and character. There are many things that make us "human" but there are an equal number of things that make us different. We cannot expect others to think and act like us, and we cannot think and act like others. We must live in accordance to what we know to be true and right for us. Comparing what other people have or how far

along they are materially or socially doesn't help us in any manner. Comparisons like that usually leave us feeling empty inside and hit our self-esteem by making it obvious that we aren't where we want to be. It isn't bad to be inspired by another person, so long as that inspiration isn't jealous envy. You are a magnificent and wondrous creature. There is nobody like you and nobody who is as good at being you as you are. You wouldn't want to be somebody else, because then you wouldn't be you anymore. Keeping up with the Jones' is a nasty habit to get into. There will always be other people around us who have more money, better health, nicer cars, greater status, and more influence. But those people have always been there and will continue to be there. By noticing what everyone else has, you run the risk of feeling dissatisfied with your own life. It doesn't feel good to compare because then we notice what we don't have and keep ourselves in a negative vibration of feeling bad, instead of feeling happy and grateful for what we do have. And when we resonate that vibration of negativity and dissatisfaction, we attract more of what we don't want and make it almost impossible to manifest the things in our life that we want to attract. If we want to attract money, success, power, wealth, and status - then noticing that we don't have those things in our life already isn't the way to get them. Noticing what we don't have makes us ungrateful for the things that we do have. We miss out on the magic of what we have right in front of us. If we are busy comparing our spouse or our children to someone else's spouse or children, we don't fully appreciate our own, which is unfair to them and us. Before you start looking around at what everyone else has, look inside yourself and look at what you have first. Are you happy? Are you in love? Do you have things in your life that make

you feel alive and on top of the world? Do you have inspiring people around you? Do you get to do the things in your life that you want to do? If you still find that you are comparing yourself to your friends, colleagues and neighbors then start practicing daily gratitude. Create a gratitude journal where you write about what you are thankful for every single day will help you see the things that are already present in your life. Being grateful keeps you in a positive vibration rather than a negative one. Positive vibrations are of higher frequency than negative ones, and they actually help you manifest things into your life that you want. So instead of noticing what other people have, turn the mirror on yourself and look at all of the things you have in your life. Be thankful and grateful for what you have every single day, and then you will find that those people you envied are really no different from you.

Remember, supporting self-love is all about the way you treat yourself. You may think that you are acting selfless and wonderful by doing things for other people and putting them first, but you will never truly be happy until you learn to love yourself first. You will never appreciate other people to the fullest degree either. Self-love is not about vanity, selfishness or narcissism. It is about knowing who you are and feeling secure with that person. It is about having the courage and confidence to follow through with your actions and know that you are acting in the best interest of your own life. Self-love enhances your relationship with others, never compromises. Your relationships will be richer and more powerful when you first love yourself. Think about your spouse or romantic partner. How would your partner feel about you if you stood up tall, knew where you were headed, and made decisions with ease. Your partner would feel at ease

around you and would feel secure knowing that you are okay. It frees up the space to focus on enjoying each other's company, rather than on worrying about the other. You don't want to pity the person you are with and worry needlessly about his or her ability to make a decision, nor do you want someone doing that for you. When you project confidence and self-love, others know that you are okay and will enjoy being around you. Your energy will shift and become lighter and more attractive. Nobody will feel sorry for you, they will want some of what you have. Self-love is a quiet, cool confidence that strides with you throughout each day. Other people notice it and it attracts positive people and circumstances to your life.

Another important factor in practicing self-love is to remember to stay present. It is hard to love yourself when you keep on rehashing something in your mind that happened five years ago. Move on and let it go. Forgive yourself. If you have made mistakes, that is okay. You are human and we all make mistakes. Acknowledge your mistake and then give yourself permission to move on by forgiving yourself. You will never be able to move forward with your life until you learn to forgive yourself for the mistakes you've made up until this point. You must let them go and accept that they have already happened and you cannot go back and change what is.

Accepting what is can be a wonderful and freeing experience. Not only do you get to enjoy the present moment without being haunted by the ghosts of the past, but you also begin to appreciate and notice things more. Your gratitude grows as you accept what is and stay present. What if's, should have's and could have's don't work. They waste time and do not keep us in the light of positivity. They create fear and stress

inside of us and cause us to think about things that are futile. The present moment is never a horrifying place because we are living that moment right now. Of course we all experience disappointments, setbacks, challenges, and embarrassments in life, but keeping present helps us minimize the impact that they have on us. Staying present helps us in all areas of our life. It keeps us on task when we are doing something at work, it allows us to enjoy the company of the people we are with, and provides us with the ability to focus and experience everything we do in the moment that we do it, without jumping into the past or thrusting ourselves into the future.

Don't be so hard on yourself. Life is not always easy, but it is often magical. It isn't always fun, but it is often miraculous. The most important relationship you have in this world is the one you have with yourself. Every single person you attract into your life will be a manifestation and mirror of the relationship you have with yourself. For this reason it is imperative that you take the time to nurture and develop self-love. Keep your thoughts and words positive, don't criticize yourself, don't judge others or compare yourself, make time for hobbies and meditation, work towards your personal goals and ambitions in life, and remember to stay present with everything you do. Your life will open up in so many ways once you begin to treat yourself with the respect you deserve to be treated with and accept the love that is already inside of you waiting to be received. Nothing is more important than the love you have for yourself. Don't ever feel guilty about nurturing your inner being in order to change your life in positive ways.

Chapter Four

Eliminating Stress & Worry

The root cause of all stress and worry is our thoughts. Our thoughts create fear, which manifests itself emotionally, spiritually and physically. Stress can be very damaging and should be monitored carefully. We can often tell when we are experiencing stress because there are tell tale signs and physical indicators that help us identify this uncomfortable state of being. These signs are different for everyone but in general can be anything from clenching the jaw, frowning, heavy breathing, pacing, jumping from task-to-task, biting nails, fidgeting, or even tears. And those are just a few of the signs. You may have unique indicators or habits that you engage in when you are stressed out and they may be different than what others experience. The good thing about these indicators is that they can serve as a warning sign for us to change our thoughts. All stress is based on past or future thinking. The present moment is never stressful because we don't have to fear what we are experiencing right this very second. We know we can handle it because we are living and breathing through it right now. Stressful thoughts most often occur because we are regretting or obsessing over something that has already happened, wishing we could change it or we are fretting and worrying about something that hasn't happened yet, catastrophizing what might happen. Stress is almost always irrational. When you think about it, there is really no point in torturing yourself over things that you cannot change, nor is there any point to

fearing things that haven't happened yet or trying to predict what might happen. When you stay present with your thoughts life is far less stressful.

Of course there will be times when stress will get the better of you, as it does for even the most grounded individual at times. But the way that you deal with stressful thoughts when they occur is what will make a lasting difference in your life. You don't have to give way to stress and worry simply because your thoughts want to lead you in that direction. Recognizing the state that you are in is the first step to stopping the snowball from rolling down the mountain to create an avalanche.

When you feel pangs of stress coming on, take the following steps to identify and change the thoughts:

1. Identify the cause of your stress

You have started breathing heavily, you are biting your nails and you feel absolute terror inside of you. Why? Of course you will likely know the answer in a general sense, like "because I have to pay my mortgage next week and don't have the money". But really dig into the "why". Ask yourself what you fear and what is the worst thing that could happen. There may also be steps you can take right now that will help create less stress, such as calling the mortgage company to arrange an alternate payment plan, as in the above stated example. The reason that you are feeling stressed in this example is actually not because you don't have the money to pay the mortgage, and more likely a deeper issue such

as the fear of losing your home and disappointing your family. Those things don't happen after simply missing a mortgage payment, but when we are in a state of stress we don't think rationally and instead start thinking about missing more than one payment, and start fearing the worst-case scenario, which is losing our home. This is just one example, the same principle applies to almost every stressful scenario. The tasks or events themselves are not what cause the stress, but the emotion and fear that we tie to those events. Therefore you must ask yourself why you are stressed and get to the root of your fear. When you can identify your fear and its root emotion, you can then take steps to make your situation more manageable.

2. Ask yourself what you can do

Being stressed out is a waste of emotion if there is nothing you can do. When you are feeling stressed out and worried, ask yourself what you can do about it. For example, if people at your company are being laid off and you are fearful of it happening to you, ask yourself what you can really do about it. While you may not be able to control the outcome of what will ultimately happen, there are things you can do to feel better immediately. Consider writing down how you feel and journaling about your feelings towards your career and coworkers. You can also try meditating and asking the universe to guide you through the experience. Another great thing to do is to change your thoughts all together. Instead of thinking and worrying about getting laid off, do something that you

enjoy doing. Go for a run, bake some cupcakes, or call a friend. If you are at work take a walk outside or take a break to write in your journal. Snap yourself out of the energy of stress and into one of joy. While completing your tasks on the job, ensure that you focus on each task at hand one by one. Do not allow your thoughts to drift and wander into the future and practice mindfulness. Remember, unless there is something you can do right this minute, there is no reason for you to be stressed out.

3. The art of mindfulness

You know that the reason you feel stress and worry is due to your thoughts, and by now you probably understand that the key to eliminating stress and worry is to stay in the present moment. But how do you do that? Well, like anything it requires practice – like the muscle that needs working out to become strong. Mindfulness is simply maintaining awareness in the moment in which you are in, rather than letting your thoughts run away from you creating stress and lower vibrational thoughts. When our thoughts take us into the past or future, they create unnecessary stress that we could all together avoid if we were to just keep present with our thoughts and emotions.

The best way to maintain mindfulness is to first focus on our breath. This very act of focusing on our breath keeps us breathing deeply and concentrates our mind on the act of breathing, rather than on thinking about things that cause us stress. Another great thing to do to keep present is to observe what is around

you right now. How do things look, sound, and smell. Use the senses to keep your focus in the now. What do you notice, think and feel about what is around you? Be careful not to let your mind wander into memories or future thoughts about things. Even observing your surroundings can trigger your thoughts to thrust into the past or future, by allowing contemplation of memories or desires to come into play.

Meditation is the most common practice for mindfulness. Regular practice of meditation can help eliminate a great deal of stress and bring greater joy and peace to our lives. First time meditators often worry whether they are “doing it right”. There is no right or wrong in meditation, just as there is no good or bad, and no positive or negative. Meditation is pure consciousness. There is no distinction or judgment of anything, and thoughts are gently pushed away to make way for “being”. Sitting in the being of who you are is one of the most powerful things you can do. Answers, revelations, visions or images may come to you during meditation. Usually this happens when you have reached a high point in your meditation practice. In the beginning it is hard to push those pesky thoughts out of your brain and you may feel powerless against them, but as you practice more and more your thoughts have less control over you and you are able to make way for the bliss of being that comes with meditation.

As human beings on the planet earth, we must all face stress and worry from time-to-time. It is unfortunately part of being human. But we can certainly choose how we want to deal with stress and worry, as well as how long and how deeply we will allow it to

affect us. A spiritual person who meditates regularly and leads a peaceful life will be less affected by stress than a person who leads a stressful life, doesn't have any spiritual outlet and pays no attention to their feelings. Thinking about what has gone wrong in the past, or what may go wrong in the future will create stress. The more you practice being present with your thoughts and avoiding past or future thinking, the greater your sense of inner peace will be.

Take stock of your life

Think about your life right now. Are there any areas for you to improve your stress levels by making changes? Sometimes we simply need to take stock of our lives and identify areas that create the most stress and worry so that we know what needs to change. For example, if you never seem to have time to clean your home and that is a huge source of stress, why not considering bringing in a maid service twice per month? Or if you find that you come home from work feeling awful about yourself, angry and irritated – perhaps it is time to change your job. Most times we are so busy reacting to life that we never take the time to proactively sit down and think about it to assess what needs changing.

The following exercise will help you determine what needs changing in your life:

Start by getting a pen and a notepad.

1. Write down things that cause you stress

Really think about this one. Think about a typical week for you. What are some of the common themes that continue to occur in your life? Write down as many as you can

think of, as long as they are things that you struggle with on a pretty regular basis. Do not concern yourself with occasional stressors. Really focus on the ones that happen routinely in your life (i.e. – financial, strained relationships, kids).

2. What can you remove?

This question may sound crazy if the things on your list are mostly to do with relationships and money, but sometimes things cause us stress that we can eliminate from our lives all together. Toxic people can be removed from our lives, or at least limited to spending small increments of time with us. Sometimes we take on too much responsibility in our lives and do everything for other people, which doesn't leave much time for ourselves. If you are one of those people who takes on too much and overextends themselves, then perhaps you can remove some of your responsibilities. We feel stressed when we overextend ourselves. And while we may have the best intentions, and just want to help others, we end up doing ourselves a great disservice by creating stress, worry, and anxiety in our own lives. When we don't have our own life figured out, we are of little service to others. Look at your list carefully and put a line through anything you can remove. There may be nothing that you can remove, but chances are, you will find something.

3. What can you change?

If removing stressors from your life seems unlikely, then you are going to have to change the way you interact or the impact that they have on you. You may not be able

to change the stressor itself, but you can certainly change your attitude towards it, the impact it has on you, or the amount of time you put towards it. If there is a strained relationship in your life with a family member, consider the way you feel about the relationship. If you are stressed by the fact that you cannot change that person, why not accept that they are who they are and you are who you are. Do not allow the person's inability to see things from your perspective make you angry. What others think and believe is of no concern to you, and if they would like to pass judgment on you that is their prerogative and nothing to do with you. Take a more Zen approach when dealing with difficult relationships and you will find that everything will change. Ultimately all stress comes from the way we feel about something, so if we change the way we feel, we invite the opportunity for peace into our experience.

Sometimes we simply take on too much in life and need to cut back on the amount of things we do in a day. Assess what you can change about your schedule. Do you have room to shuffle things around to create some downtime? If you are full steam ahead with too many things on the go you will burn out and feel irritated about the things in your life. Make sure that you create time and space for yourself. Change what you can, especially your attitude towards the things that you have no control over.

Stress and worry can make us physically sick and affect everything about our quality of life. Many illnesses and diseases can be made worse or fatal simply due to the way we view the illness itself and how we manage it. You often hear stories about "miraculous recoveries" from people who have grave diagnoses. The thing that many of those

recovered people have in common is attitude. They don't accept that they have no control over their health; they don't accept that they are going to die, and they don't accept that they have to act like someone who is sick. So instead, they continue on living, treating themselves and their bodies with respect. They often embrace exercise and healthy eating as an additional defense against their illness. Attitude counts way more than you might think it does and can affect us on a cellular level.

Eliminating stress and worry from our lives really is as easy as changing our thoughts, but of course if that were as easy as it sounds we would all be enlightened masters by now. We will always have a certain amount of stress to deal with but we can change the way we think about stress.

Is the glass half full or half empty?

Consider the type of person you are. Do you routinely see the glass as half-empty or are you the type of person who sees it as half-full? Your attitude towards life can affect the way you manage and handle stress. People who are more optimistic are typically happier and handle stress better than those who tend to be more negative about life.

Being an optimist doesn't mean being naïve or ignorant to life's challenges, it just means viewing them in a different light. Even optimistic people struggle, face challenges and deal with stress. The impact is just lessened when you have optimism on your side.

When you view life's challenges as opportunities to learn and grow and as temporary setbacks rather than incredible misfortunes that ruin our lives. You can still recognize life's challenges and be realistic about facing your problems without seeming flighty.

Many people that knock optimism or think optimists are naïve, don't really understand that you can still maintain a clear head and engage in problem-solving when you view things in a positive light. Let's say your car breaks down on the highway and you are alone with no charge on your mobile phone. Instead of sitting in your drivers seat smiling expecting that someone will stop because you are thinking positively, you would get out and flag someone down. You wouldn't be smiling happily and obliviously in that scenario and anyone, even an optimist would feel frustrated by that. But instead of letting the experience send you into a panic-stricken mode of stress, you deal with the reality of the situation by trying to get someone to stop so you can use their phone to call a tow. Optimism isn't about being oblivious to life's challenges or being unwilling to recognize hardship, it is about changing the impact that life's stress has on us.

If you tend to think the worst when things happen, you are not a lost cause. You do not have to subscribe to such a stressful way of life. You can change the way you view things and experience more peace in your life. I know, because I have done it myself. Getting stressed out, angry, frustrated and upset does nothing to change your situation for the better. In fact, it does the opposite and makes a problem bigger and more stressful.

When you keep calm and think things through, approaching a problem from a logical step-by-step mindset – you tend to get through it unscathed.

Majority of the time when we allow negative thinking to overtake us, especially in relation to one of life's challenges, we tend to lump everything together and think of multiple problems, negative outcomes, and attach events to make them even more stressful. By contrast, when we view things from an optimistic mindset we can separate

and isolate the events and deal with problems as they arise. We know that taking things as they come and solving one problem at a time without getting overwhelmed is the way for us to move forward with success.

There are a lot of things you can do to feel better and become more optimistic. Even hanging around positive people can have an affect on you and cause you to be more optimistic, just as hanging around negative people will make you more negative. Think about the people you have in your life, are they negative or positive? Are there positive people that you could devote more time to? Are there negative people who you could spend less time with? Our environment impacts the way we feel and others have a noticeable influence on our state of mind. If you have to deal with a parent or sibling who is negative all the time, try gently persuading them to see the brighter side of life. Sometimes negative loved ones challenge us to become more devoted to our own positive outlook by testing our strength of mind. Seeing our loved ones embrace worst-case thinking reminds us to not be that way and instead find the good in every situation. Maybe that is the purpose that some negative people will serve in your life, or perhaps they are just stuck and need your help.

The 24-Hour Cycle

Each and every day we are gifted with the opportunity to make better choices, keep a positive mindset, and do something different than we did the day before. We don't have to do things the way we've always done them, especially if those things aren't serving us. The problem with humans is that we tend to be creatures of habit, so change isn't

always the easiest thing for us to embrace on a personal level, but it is often the thing we need most. We live our lives on 24-hour cycles. We wake up approach the day, complete our tasks and engage in our daily routine, then wind down and fall asleep so we can do it all over again the next day. Life becomes mundane when we repeat the same cycles each day and make the same mistakes and feel the same way. We become accustomed to our way of life and get stuck in unhealthy modes of thinking because it is what we know and what we are familiar with. Familiarity is not necessarily a good thing. Sure it is comforting and makes us feel calm at times, but more often than not it makes us resistant to change. The one thing we can always count on in this life is that things will change, so for us to be unreceptive to change ourselves is to be out of sync with the natural ebb and flow of the universe.

When we treat every day like a brand new day without looking back to what we have done historically we give ourselves a better chance for success. We don't have to be restrained by feelings of worthlessness or failure. If something didn't work in the past we don't need to think about it, reference it, or allow ourselves to live in the fear of that memory. Our memories are good when they are positive and help us think about things in a joyous light, they are destructive, however, when they bring about lower vibrational emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, remorse, or depression. Ask yourself how your recurring memories are serving you, if they are not helping to support your emotional wellbeing, release them and let them go. Additionally, future-based thinking can also create similar negative effects. We can bring about a great deal of stress and anxiety when we worry unnecessarily about events that are in the future that haven't happened

yet. Future-based thinking can trigger the same lower vibrational emotions as embracing harmful memories from the past. It is okay to set goals for ourselves and to have dreams that we want to aspire to, it is even okay to want to plan for the future and take steps accordingly, provided that we are not completely taking the power away from today. This day that you are living right now is the most important, most powerful, and most energetically connected day that there is. All of your power exists in the moment in which you live. Right now is all that matters because it is all that is guaranteed. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow isn't here yet so what is more perfect than today? If you are spending too much of today thinking about tomorrow you are wasting energy and time. You can still plan for tomorrow by taking steps today. For example, if you are moving to a new city in two months time, I am not suggesting that you cannot think about your move or plan for it. Today you can choose to pack a box or call your credit card companies to give them your new address. What you don't need to do, however, is sit and worry about whether you are going to have nice neighbors, meet new friends, and like the new city. Worry and stressing about things that you don't have an answer to just creates stress. So the more practical way to handle that stress is by being organized and ready for your move. Take steps today that will help you tomorrow. Just don't let fear, worry, and anxiety stop you from enjoying today.

We all have things in life that we are here to work on. Perhaps you take things too personally, or have too much anger, or can't say no. Whatever it is, you have the opportunity to take small steps each day to improve. When you wake up and face a new day you can choose to act and think differently that day. If you know that what you are

doing doesn't work, why keep doing the same thing over again, expecting different results? Doesn't make much sense does it? If you are not getting results or are experiencing stress and anxiety in one area of your life, try something different. Do something that you wouldn't normally do.

Many of us struggle with weight and body image issues. Both men and women face this issue on a daily basis. They continue to do the same things day after day. They wake up, eat the same things, say the same negative things to themselves in the mirror and then get angry that they aren't seeing any miraculous change in their bodies. Your body will not just magically appear in the pristine form that you wish it to take. You have to take steps to get your body to be in the condition that you want it to be in. So if your routine is to wake up, eat bacon and eggs, drive to work and drink ten cups of coffee at work – try changing it up. Wake up and have cereal or fruit, have one cup of coffee and nine glasses of water and ride your bike to work. Do something that you don't normally do. Ask yourself every day what you can do differently. What can you do to change your bad habits, what can you do to introduce new healthier habits, what can you do to feel better. Some of us need to feel better before we can take on new routines. This is not uncommon. It's a catch 22. You are depressed and don't like the way you look, yet you are too depressed to feel motivated enough to do anything. But your lack of motivation is perpetuating your depression, which is perpetuating your sedentary lifestyle and causing you to look the way you do. See the problem here? If this is the situation you are in then your first priority must be on figuring out what makes you feel good. Think about what activities make you feel good. They don't have to be health-related,

provided that they are not unhealthy. If you feel good when you play your guitar, do that more. If you feel good when you paint or make pottery, do that. If you feel good when you are around family, go and be with them. Write down as many things as you can think of and use these as your go-to activities to give you the push that you need to feel better. You feeling better will help you approach change in a more positive light. You will want to change because you will ultimately know that you have to in order to feel good and move forward in life.

Each day when you wake up in the morning, smile and know that you have a brand new day to approach any way you'd like. You get to decide how you treat this day, how you treat yourself, and what you do today. Don't be held back by your missteps of yesterday or your fears for tomorrow. Today is what matters most and today you have the choice and ability to choose how you want the day to go. You can deal with tomorrow when it comes, for now you have today. What are you going to do with it?

Dealing with negative people

Even despite our best efforts, at times we cannot get away from negative people. We may have a negative spouse, parent, child or friend who is a permanent fixture in our life. The important thing is not to judge that person for being the way they are and to support them the best you can without compromising your own sense of wellbeing. It is possible to be around negative people and not take in the energy of their negativity, but we must work hard and go deeper into our own inner peace in order to do so. The first thing that you must remember is that people operate on free will and that they are

going to think and feel the way they want to think and feel. Never try to control another persons thoughts, behaviors or emotions. You are responsible for your own life and your own actions, you cannot set out to control the world. Not only will it perpetuate negative energy in the relationship, but it will make the negative person feel worse about themselves and attract more of what you don't want. The best way to deal with a negative person is to lead by example. You can do this by being loving and supporting. Very rarely does a negative person lash out at you when you offer them a hug or a sympathetic ear. Often they just want to be heard and crave what we all crave, love and acceptance. You can lead by example by acting in the light of love. No matter how difficult it may be and how often you may wish to argue or defend yourself against the negative loved ones in your life, act with love instead. Many times people get angry when they crave closeness, connection or understanding. So they lash out in anger and push people away because they perceive that no one wants to be around them anyway or they want to save themselves from rejection. It is a fear-based response. Try to think about how they must feel inside and change the way you view the negative people in your life. Instead of viewing them as angry, bitter, horrible people that you loathe being around, try to imagine why they feel that way. After all, even negative people are human and we are all prone to a bit of negative thinking from time to time. Try to be understanding even if their behavior is unwarranted and irrational. A hug is sometimes all that's needed to soften a person up. Or you can try acknowledging how they feel by saying things like "that must have been awful for you. How did it make you feel?" Just the simple act of acknowledgement can make a person less-negative because they feel

respected and listened to rather than ignored or shunned. Negative people have feelings just like everyone else, and often they feel things the deepest. Negativity provides a barrier and an artificial wall to prevent people from getting too close. Many negative people are afraid to get hurt or afraid of rejection so instead they act tough, angry, or sarcastic because they think it is protecting them. Show them that they don't need to protect themselves around you, because you will honor and respect them.

Another important thing to remember when dealing with negative people is not to get into an argument with them. Avoid any hot-button issues and change the topic if you notice them getting increasingly more agitated. Arguing is what they are used to and what they are best at, so arguing with a negative person will simply be cyclical and never go anywhere productive. It will leave you feeling energetically drained and will only ruin your positive mindset. It best if you do not engage in any sort of argument with a negative personality. Instead try to understand where they are coming from, even if it is different from what you believe, and empathize with them.

When you are engaging in conversation with a negative person remember that being positive is very hard for them and is something that doesn't come natural. You can help by showing your support. When they say anything that is positive as appose to their usual negative statements, praise them and acknowledge their wisdom for viewing things in such a positive light. Look for opportunities to do this and you will notice that it not only lifts you up, but them too.

It isn't easy to be around negative people and if we aren't careful it can make us negative, stressed out, worried, and angry. For this reason it is very important that we

stay centered and grounded. Do not let fear-based emotions rule and do not allow the worries of the other person find their way into your thoughts. You can only help by being loving and supporting. Taking on the fears, worries and anxieties of another person does nothing to help the situation and only brings about more of the same negative atmosphere. You must at all costs, resist the urge to engage in any negativity and keep a positive mindset, even when you are challenged. Act with love always, and ask yourself before you speak “is what I am about to say coming from a place of love or kindness?” If the answer is no, just don’t say it.

Nobody other than you is responsible for your wellbeing and state of mind. Not your spouse, your children, your parents, or friends. Only you can choose how you feel each day and how you handle stress. Letting stress and anxiety rule you only perpetuates more of the same and makes it harder for you to accomplish the tasks, goals, and dreams that you set out to achieve. When you slow down, take things one at a time and keep a positive head on your shoulders you will amaze yourself. Your life will flourish in ways beyond what you ever imagined. Thinking positively doesn’t always come naturally, especially if you come from a family that operates from fear and guilt. But you have the choice every day to change the way you view the world around you. Nothing will ever change for the better unless you decide within yourself that it is worth changing. You cannot expect the outside world to shift and change before your feet in exactly the way that you want or need, you have to be the change. You are the epicenter of your own universe and you are the hope, resistance, and opportunity in

your life. Stress and worry does nothing to improve the quality of your life, and in fact does a great deal to detract from it. People who are optimistic get sick less often, have healthier relationships, enjoy more success, and feel better about life than their negative counterparts. You are free to think and feel however you'd like, but if you are looking for change and want to embrace lasting success, you must be willing to look within yourself to discover which negative beliefs you need to release.

Sometimes we are naïve to our own negativity and don't even realize the ways in which our negative beliefs are shaping us. If you have long-standing beliefs about yourself that you have suppressed or can't seem to put your finger on, seek out some help. There are plenty of qualified life coaches, therapists, spiritual mentors, and friends who can help you work through some of the issues you have. Sometimes this means facing things you haven't thought about for a long time and re-thinking the way you view them, or changing the story associated with a past event. We get stuck sometimes energetically in the time of a past trauma, and even when we think we have moved past something, we may still be acting and behaving like someone who is deeply wounded. As a human being on planet earth you are not immune to stress or pain, but you can change the way you view the things that have already happened to you, as well as the things that will continue to happen. It is all a part of the experience. Without pain would we ever really know true joy? Probably not. Sometimes hardship serves as a contrast to help us appreciate life more when the pendulum swings in our favor. The trick is not to continuously live in remembrance of darker times. It is okay to think about things once in a while, especially if there is some sort of lesson that you have taken from the

experience, but you need not dwell on things that make you feel awful. You are who you are for a reason and you are here in this body for a reason. Everything you have experienced in your life has helped you get to where you are today, even if you can't see or understand how. You have been preparing all of your life to further your sense of wellbeing and spirituality. All negative experiences are karmic tests and each day you have a chance to change the way you view your life. You can choose to do what you always do and feel the way you always do, or you can say "you know what, today I am going to try something different" and see what happens.

You have nothing to lose when giving up on stress and worry, and everything to gain. While you may not be able to avoid stress completely, you can certainly change the impact it has on your life and the way you view stressful events and circumstances. Accept things for what they are in the moment that they occur and once they have passed, move on and let them go. Do not fear tomorrow, for it is not here yet and today you are alive and well and capable. You can choose to feel better today. You can choose to stay present with your thoughts and to feel better right now. You can choose to think about things differently than you have in the past and to love yourself more deeply.

Chapter Five

Connecting with your higher self

The root cause of all stress and worry is thought. Our thoughts create fear, which manifests itself emotionally, spiritually and physically. Stress can be very damaging and should be monitored carefully. We can often tell when we are experiencing stress because they have physical indicators. Some people pace, others sweat, bite fingernails, breathe heavily, look flush, get ill, or become very irritated. There are so many varying degrees of stress and the body chooses how it reacts based on the severity of the stress. When we connect with our higher self, we eliminate stressful fear-based thoughts and access the pure consciousness of who we really are. We are able to sit in the moment of our being and experience peace, joy, and clarity that is often otherwise clouded by past and future based thinking.

Who is your higher self?

Your higher self, put simply is you, but it is the you that is unaffected by past experiences, future fears, or the physicality of your life. Your higher self is pure consciousness and knows you better than anyone. You had a plan before you incarnated here on earth, a contract if you will. Your higher self is here to make sure that you fulfill the contract and carry out the things that you are here to learn. Your higher self always has your best interest at heart and tries to guide you gently in the direction of your predestined life path. Of course we all veer off course every now and then because we

are human and we have free will. But our higher self tries to send us subtle messages, signs and indicators that help us remember who we are and where we're headed. Think about a time when your intuition kicked in and helped you to make a decision that you otherwise would not have made, and in the end it worked out beautifully. That is the result of your higher self guiding you. Some people like to refer to the higher self as the soul or spirit. These are acceptable descriptors too. You cannot see the higher self in physical form, as it is a spirit that lives inside of each one of us and shapes who we are and how we live our lives. Your higher self is here to do nothing more than assist you during your time here on earth to ensure that you fulfill your destiny.

The truth of the matter is that we are always connected to our higher self, even when we are unaware that we have formed such a connection. The goal is not to connect, so much as it is to consciously connect. Whenever we fulfill our purpose, achieve a goal that has been a lifelong dream, or take action in our life that feels right we are doing so with the gentle guidance of our higher self. We just don't necessarily know that. The difference when we consciously connect to our higher self is that we are able to make our lives work for us in such a way that we obtain considerable power and can manifest easily the things in which we desire.

Obtaining Conscious Connection

The higher self is always just a gentle whisper away, subtle yet always just beneath the surface. If we aren't careful we can miss the knowledge and wisdom that is offered to us

on a daily basis. Think of your higher self as an angel whispering in your ear, that's what it can feel like. You may even choose to think of your higher self in physical form and assign him or her a gender. You may feel that assigning your higher self a gender the same as yours is what works best for you, or perhaps you just like to depict the higher self as an angel. There are no set rules for this and it can be depicted in whichever manner and light you are most comfortable with. It helps to assign a physical look to something non physical, especially when attempting to visualize or connect via meditation. Some people have a hard time visualizing pure energy and instead like to use the imagination to form it into something they can identify with. You may even choose to visualize your higher self as a brilliant White light surrounding your body. There are so many options for how you choose to view your higher self and the good news is that there is no wrong answer. Visualizing your higher self will greatly help you in your pursuit of conscious connection.

Whenever you are working to access inner knowledge, intuition, or messages from your higher self, you are indeed attempting to consciously connect. Even if we do not call our higher self by that name or even reference an energy larger than our physical being, most of us on this planet feel that we have within us more knowledge than we use on a daily basis. Sometimes we just know things and we don't fully understand how or why, but we are unwavering in our belief. Where does this come from, this all knowing? We know that it doesn't come from the brain because we aren't able to rationalize it and

discover its origin, so it must come from a place deep within us and be prompted at certain times to deliver us wisdom and knowledge.

How do we access that information though when we often can't control its presence in our lives. We are amazed and bewildered when we "know things" and act on divine knowledge, yet we follow the bread crumb trail and discover that it has lead us to the right place, exactly where we need to be. The higher self is never about a destination, it is about a journey of which we learn and experience lessons that can only be taught to us through our unique lives.

Because our higher self is unaffected by circumstance, past memories, or future fears it truly has our best interests at heart and is capable of guiding us towards our life purpose, to a life that is filled with joy and meaning. The biggest part of consciously connecting is learning to slow down the mind so that we can allow those subtle moments of brilliance to enter our consciousness. There is so much divine knowledge just beneath the surface but it isn't as loud and obnoxious as our thoughts, nor is it as distracting. Our higher self is focused, intentional, and unwavering in its commitment to our overall health and wellbeing. The problem is that the noise of our thoughts often gets in the way of our ability to hear the wisdom that is being provided to us as we navigate through each day.

Quieting the mind can mean a variety of things to a variety of people. It depends on what works for you individually and what you respond best to. Many people (myself included) find that meditation is the best way to combat this. Meditation is the act of sitting quietly in a comfortable and peaceful place and allowing our thoughts to drift away from us as we focus on our breath. The act of taking intentional breaths takes energy away from distracting thoughts and physical stressors. When we are sitting quietly with our eyes closed breathing deeply we aren't thinking about the proposal we have to write, the ten people we have to respond to, or the bills that are due – we are finally giving ourselves a break and saying “you know what, it's okay for me to not think right now”. How many times do we actually give ourselves permission to stop thinking? Many people never give themselves that gift. But if you were running on a treadmill for hours each day, you would eventually need a break. The mind is no different. Your thoughts are constant and are with you all day every day in your waking lives. Some of these thoughts are helpful, logical or even visionary, but many are distracting and harmful, especially when they are future-based. Give yourself a break and allow yourself the time and space to breathe and only focus on your breath. This time away from thought and stress is a tremendous relief to the body, mind and soul and is an invitation to your higher self to send messages. The times when you receive the most clarity, vision, and knowledge from the higher self are when your mind is the quietest. You would be astounded if you saw how many messages come through your dreams, but sadly by the time we wake up and jump out of bed, many of those messages are lost and just beyond our grasp. Meditating provides us with the opportunity in our conscious

lives to receive those messages in a way that we do remember and can then act on them. If we never take the time to slow down, breathe, and rest our minds we are at risk of feeling disconnected and separate from all that is.

There is something about introducing meditation to your daily life that is incredibly liberating. You feel suddenly that you are a part of something larger than yourself. Your job, busy life, and family problems all seem to dissipate as you sit in the truth of who you are surrounded by incredible energy and your own divinity. It's no wonder that these are the times that are best to receive messages from your higher self. I am a big fan and advocate of morning meditations. I have a very busy life myself, but meditation is one area that I refuse to compromise. It has helped me in so many ways and has kept me grounded, inspired, and following my life's path. There is absolutely nothing negative or disadvantageous to introducing a meditation routine into your life. You only have everything to gain, including some wonderful conversations with your higher self. If meditation isn't exactly for you or you feel uncomfortable with it, there are other things you can do that are still in the same realm. Simply slowing down and eliminating clutter, noise and stress from your life has similar advantages. Stop trying to multitask and do ten things at once, take each task as it comes and focus on one thing at a time. Everything you do is comprised of steps, don't try to jump from one footprint to another and then back again, or you will be exhausted. Stick with one thing and slowly and purposefully take each step as it comes. Your life will be so much less stressful if you slow down, breathe and take things as they come. In this age of information overload,

multitasking, and no time – we often run ourselves rampant with responsibilities. We take on way too much, overextend ourselves and end up feeling really awful. What is the point of being successful if you aren't there to enjoy it? If you are not present in your day-to-day and only think about what else you have to do, you will never appreciate or enjoy any moment that you live because you will be too focused on the next. Observe a child at play, watch how they stay in the moment of that game or role. They aren't thinking about dinner, school tomorrow, who they will play with later or how they will fit the next three playdates into their schedule. They are so connected to who they are that they are capable of enjoying each moment that they live, which is why time doesn't seem to go by as quickly for a child. A summer feels like a year, and a week like a month. Then we get older, get busier and say "whoa what happened to time?" Nothing happened to time, it happened to you. You became disengaged to your own divinity. You became obsessed with tomorrows instead of todays. It is one of the tragic pitfalls of adulthood and something we have to work very hard at correcting. So take it where you can because reality will perpetually try to snap you back into the role of a forward-thinking, plan oriented, multitasking adult. When the truth is, none of that is helpful. All you need is right now, and to obtain now you must stop all of that tomorrow thinking and let yourself breathe and appreciate this very moment.

Where can you modify?

Think about the amount of responsibilities, tasks and projects in your life right now.

How many of those things are truly supporting who you are mind, body and soul. Ask

yourself which areas of your life need modifying. My bet is that your higher self has already tried communicating this to you by way of subtle hints and doubts. When things don't work out or you say to yourself "maybe I shouldn't be doing this" listen to the wisdom of those words. They aren't coming out of nowhere. Your higher self wants nothing more than for you to live the life that you deserve to live. It is the brain and the nature of our modern lifestyle that keeps you from obtaining everything that you want to achieve. Agree to cut some things out of your life to make room for some slow down time. Life doesn't go by you as quickly when you allow yourself the time to slow down and appreciate each moment. Most of us have more responsibilities, tasks and projects than we can handle. If you have a problem saying no to people and overextend yourself to the point of having no time, then why not start saying yes to your higher self. Your higher self is crying out for your help to slow down and listen. Say yes to you. Start embracing silence, if even only for a few moments each day. Breathe in deeply without thinking about your responsibilities. I am a big fan of sitting and enjoying a warm mug of tea, it in itself is like a meditation. Carving out time for you to enjoy life's simple pleasures is all that is needed to consciously connect with your higher self. Nothing is more important than your quality of life. We are each here to fulfill a purpose and to be the best person that we can be, and there isn't one single one of us who wouldn't benefit from slowing down and embracing the present moment.

The wonderful thing about life is that we get to choose. We get to choose how we think about things, how we go about our activities, and where we make room. Consider

making room in your life for things that slow down time, instead of speeding it up. Go for nature walks, sit in your backyard on a sunny day, and enjoy reading a book. Books by their very nature keep you present in what you are doing and prompt you to enjoy the moment of reading. Then as you begin to slow down and create peace in your daily life, you will notice that each day the voice of your higher self seems to get louder and clearer. Before you know it you will just know what to do at any given moment and you will be lead on a wonderful scavenger hunt of self identity, uncovering pieces of yourself along the way and living a life that was truly intended for you.

Journaling

I always tell people that we can all write, especially when it comes to documenting our lives. We each have a unique and important perspective to offer on the things we see, do, and experience each day. Journaling is one of the best ways to nurture and capture that perspective. Our thoughts, feelings, inner desires and emotions come out when we journal, and we are able to process things through the act of writing them that we otherwise wouldn't know how to deal with. When we repress painful or emotional events in our lives, they will eventually come back to the surface. Often this happens when journaling, and this is how healing occurs. You can bring about tremendous healing in your life simply by writing down what you think and feel.

If you are not used to journaling or you are new to it, at first it may feel forced or unnatural. You may feel like a teenager writing a less-exciting diary, but stick with it and

continue to devote time to it. Many spiritual advisors and personal development coaches are strong advocates of journaling daily. The morning is a great time to write because you haven't yet been affected by the days stress and responsibilities. When you wake up, you are still relatively relaxed and have the clarity to think and feel freely without being distracted or disrupted by your pesky thoughts. At first you may find that you only write a page or two each morning. It is up to you what you choose to write and how much you write, but the act of daily writing will connect you in ways you won't believe. I have been writing my daily intentions on Mind Body Smile for years now and it has changed me in so many wonderful ways. I decided when I started that I simply wanted to be grateful for each day and set a positive intention for the day. I also love poetry so I decided to incorporate that into my daily writing and have that be a large part of my daily intentions. The act of writing an intention for each day not only keeps me writing daily but also creates a deeper connection between the Dr. Rob who is out there in the real world and my higher self who lives here quietly within me. I have discovered that I have become happier, more loving giving, and more connected to the universe as a result of my daily intentions. The act of writing keeps me present and slows me down, and then choosing an intention for each day allows me to focus my energy on a positive goal for the day.

What you write, how you write, and what your goals are can be as varied as the words in the English language. Only you know what resonates best with you. Maybe it will take some trial to discover what feels best. Start writing each morning and see what comes

out. You may find that you embrace a theme and format like I did, or you may discover that you simply write an account of what is going on in your life. There is no right and wrong. The point of journaling is that it slows you down, allows you to have realizations and epiphanies – and that it connects you to your higher self. You cannot predict or plan what you will write in your journal and you will even surprise yourself at times by what comes out. Sometimes the exact opposite of what you think you are going to write about is what ends up on the page, or you start writing and then begin tackling a problem that you have been carrying around with you. You will discover through regular writing that you will become better at solving the problems and challenges you have in your daily life, you will also be able to answer questions that were perhaps previously unanswered. Your intuition and confidence will open up and allow you to explore your life in ways that resonate with who you are on the inside, instead of what is expected of you on the outside. Each day our minds are filled with conversations, messages and thoughts about the way we live our lives and the choices we make. We ponder and worry about our relationships, children, aging parents, job security, financial status, health, body image, mental state and so much more. If we aren't capturing these thoughts and emotions they often remain repressed or crop up at inopportune times and all at once, causing us a great deal of stress. When we write about the way we feel every day, we become more balanced as a human being and can better handle our emotions when they arise. We develop the necessary skills to process and identify emotions that relate to challenges and opportunities in our lives. The act of writing prompts an intimate conversation to occur between us and our higher self. Aside from

the obvious benefit of tackling challenging problems and identifying emotions that may lay just beneath the surface, journaling makes you feel fantastic. Each morning after finishing your writing you will notice that you feel at peace and ready to face the day. Journaling helps to encourage a great degree of confidence in self and keeps you present for a longer period time. The act of spending a few moments each day writing is similar to spending that time meditating, because you are present with your words and the page. Your mind is not focused on anything other than what you are writing about. Each pen stroke (or key stroke) represents another moment in the present and another chance for you to be connected to source energy.

The important thing to remember to be successful at journaling is to do what works for you. There is no right and wrong answer and any technique that helps you write regularly is a positive thing. Many people struggle with the thought of having nothing to write about or nothing to say, or they fear the act of writing something insignificant in their journal and then feeling ashamed. Make sure that your journal is your own and nobody else's. You should place it somewhere private and ensure that the only person who has access to it is you. This way you don't have to worry about what you write, who you write about, or what secrets you may divulge. The wonderful thing about your journal is that it is a place for you to confess; your worries, your anger, your reservations and anything else that you'd like to address. If you have to worry about someone finding your journal you will be less likely to use it to its fullest potential and less likely to truly allow yourself to release your emotional energy onto the page.

Here are some helpful tips if you struggle with what to write about:

1. Lists

Everyone loves to make lists. Most people think of lists when they think about to do lists or grocery lists, but lists can also be beneficial in journaling. You can use lists as a form of motivating yourself each day. If long-form writing isn't your style, start small and write yourself a list of everything you want to accomplish that day. You may also find lists helpful to tackle other things like a list of things that stop you from accomplishing your goals, or a list of things that you can do to move past a traumatic event that still haunts you. Use lists like you would take instruction from a self-help book. What do you want to accomplish? What do you need to do in order to feel happy? What can you do to work towards your larger life goals? Ask yourself questions and answer them in the form of creating lists for yourself. You may find that it is a format that you love, or you may become more comfortable with your writing over time and begin to expand into longer journal entries.

2. Stream of Consciousness

This is a fun exercise that will surprise you, make you laugh, and even amaze you at times. Stream of Consciousness writing is simply writing whatever comes to you without thought or analysis. When we do this we aren't giving our logical mind time to fear, doubt, worry or assess our life circumstances and emotions, we simply write freely and what comes out is a pure stream of consciousness. This type of writing can help us identify hidden problems or bring things to the

forefront that are floating around in our subconscious. Our higher self finds it easy to communicate with us through this manner because we aren't being suppressed by the logical mind. At first it may seem silly or uncomfortable, because your logical mind wants you to believe that you must think about things first and have a plan. But you will quickly overcome these feelings by just allowing yourself to write. It may take some calibration at first, you noticing things around you, mentioning things about the way you look, or what you have to do today. But as you become accustomed to the stream of consciousness your writing will flow in ways that are extremely beneficial to you. Give it a try and see what you find, just make sure that you give it at least a few days before you decide that it's not for you. It may take a couple of days before anything substantial comes out.

3. Ask Questions

Looking to your journal to ask questions that you have about your own life or things happening around you is a great way to tap into your higher powers of observation and see things for what they truly are. Our minds often attempt to use logic and reason to explain things that are often irrational. Emotions come from a place that is very different from logic, so trying to use logic to understand emotion often fails and vice versa. Asking yourself questions in your journal gives you the opportunity to answer them using your higher self. Often all that's required is to ask - and the answer comes simply. You can ask questions about anything in your life that you would like an answer for. You can solve problems,

and figure out the best course of action for challenges and obstacles, or you can advise your higher self to ensure that you are making the best decision for your highest good. Asking questions is powerful and so are the answers that come.

Like the stream of consciousness writing, it may take a couple of days before you start to notice that you are getting anywhere. Have faith, this is a departure from what most of us think and do to solve problems in our lives, so our brain will try to stifle us at first by overriding the activity with logic. Just remember the simple phrase “ask and you shall receive”.

Our higher self is always there waiting to be listened to, waiting for us to slow down long enough to acknowledge its presence in our lives. It’s amazing to observe what happens when you believe in your higher self and begin to shape your life around listening and following through. Often listening to your inner desires is all that we must do to move our lives into the direction that our higher self wants to see us go.

Remember, whatever urges you receive from your higher self are always for your highest good and always have your wellbeing at heart, so there is never harm in following your intuition and listening to your inner desires. We often feel fearful of doing this, as we may not be hearing the answers that we want to hear, or we are afraid of what our lives will be like if we do listen. Fear is really just **Fantasized Events Appearing Real**, always remember that. There is nothing to fear except fear itself. If you receive a message from your intuition that leads you to make a life change, meditate on it, or start thinking about it from a positive perspective. Change is part of life and is necessary for our evolution and advancement as a species. You would never become

better, stronger or happier if you didn't embrace change. You would become stagnant and unhappy by not changing. Don't fear the messages that you receive from your higher self, even if they prompt you to make changes in your life. The way you go about those changes is up to you. You can take small steps every day towards them, or you can leap right in and go for it. There are no hard and fast rules to embracing change.

Listen to your inner desires

Our inner desires whisper to us softly in the form of intuition. Each day as we navigate through life we are exposed to a variety of thoughts, ideas, visions, and possibilities. Our intuition provides us with the divine knowledge that something would be very good for us on a spiritual level if we were to take action. The tricky thing with intuition is that we have to listen so carefully, our higher self is there to aid and support us but can only do so when we slow down, embrace silence and listen. One of the ways that we can support the higher self is by following through on our intuition. Let's say that you have been working at the same place for the last ten years and have been getting a bit bored with your job. One day you meet a lovely woman in a coffee shop who runs an animal shelter and tells you that they are in desperate need of hiring people. For a split second, you think about how wonderful and rewarding it would be to work in a shelter with animals. You are and have always been an animal lover. Now if you were to listen to your logical mind, you would probably say "no, that's ridiculous. I couldn't do that. I wouldn't get paid the same and I can't leave my job security." But if you were to listen to your intuition, you would at least explore the option further. Perhaps you say to the

woman “really, I would love to know more about the roles you have available. I am a huge animal lover”. That is the beginning of listening to your inner desires. It doesn’t mean that you will always have the courage or desire to follow them, but you can at least take steps and start to listen.

Our inner desires speak to us on a daily basis about what we would really like, what resonates with us, and what would be beneficial to our mind, body and spirit. Our inner desires are childlike in that they are unaffected by current circumstance, logic or reason and simply say “ooh I would like that”. As adults, we are trained to resist that type of thinking and write it off as juvenile, when in fact that type of thinking is extremely enlightened and connected to source energy. Our inner desires are like a map to a wonderful treasure hunt on a mysterious island. Sometimes they will lead us in new directions, have us face our fears, or present us with unique challenges previously unheard of, but they will always encourage us to do more, be more, and love ourselves more readily. Our inner desires are the clues that help us stay connected to our higher self all the time. When we follow the clues we are being lead by our higher self and are living a life that is more true to who we really are on the inside. Doesn’t that sound magnificent?

Raise your vibration

Connecting to our higher self requires us to raise our vibration. There are so many ways we can do this, many of which have already been discussed in this chapter. Each day you live, you should ask yourself “is this raising my vibration?” before you do or say

something. Our actions, thoughts, behaviors and activities all put out a unique frequency or vibration to the universe attracting vibrations of a similar frequency back to us. We get back what we put out and like energy attracts like energy. When we think about raising our vibration we can start by thinking about our emotions. Lower vibration emotions carry a lot of negativity and anger. They often keep us down and prevent us from living an inspired and wonderful life. The lower vibrations of negativity tell us that we are justified in our anger, that we aren't good enough, that we should feel shame and guilty, and that we are ruled by stress. Lower vibration emotions are what cause conflict in our personal lives with others. They keep us from acting with love and instead have us act with ego, which doesn't help us when handling emotional problems. We can raise our emotional vibration by simply being aware of where we are on the scale at each given point in time. Our emotions serve as a barometer and tell us how well we are doing. You can feel things in your body begin to change when you shift from a positive higher vibration emotion to a negative lower vibration emotion. Watch for physical cues such as grinding teeth, clenching fists or jaw, increased heart rate, headaches, frowning brows, and sad eyes. These are all indicators that you are allowing your negative thoughts to control your reality and being lead into a state of FEAR (fantasized events appearing real). The physical indicators can help you snap back out of lower vibration and into positive. Being aware gives you the opportunity to change it. If you notice that you are beginning to feel emotions that are in the realm of lower vibration, quickly do something that makes you feel good. You may find that calling a friend, going for a walk, or playing with your dog is all that you need to pull you back. The point is that you catch

it before it gets out of hand. Remember, like energy attracts like energy – so the more that you embrace lower vibrations in the emotional realm, the more of that energy that you will attract into your life. Nobody likes feeling hopeless, angry or sad all the time. Raise your vibration by changing what you are doing. If you can't stop thinking about something that is causing you anguish, change what you are doing so that you will be forced to think about something else, something better and happier.

The food that we eat also affects our vibration. Have you ever noticed how wonderful you feel inside when you eat healthy organic food from the earth? It isn't just because this food is healthy that it feels so good. When we eat packaged food that is filled with chemicals, sugar and manmade ingredients we are ingesting the energy of that food and taking in things that are unnatural and disrespectful to our bodies. Our bodies were never intended to ingest the chemicals and dyes found in many of our convenience foods today. Our bodies weren't designed to eat the quantities of sugar and carbohydrates that we eat either. Listen to what your body tells you about what you put into it, your higher self always attempts to communicate with you through what you put into your body. Foods grown naturally without chemical resonate with us on a spiritual level because they are not doing harm to us and are grown ethically without the intervention of lower vibration emotions and motives. You have to consider the motives, emotions, and energy behind the makers of your food in addition to the food itself. For this reason, farmers markets, organic food producers and local butchers are your best bet. These are people who face the people that they feed and have an interest in doing the highest good for the planet. They place more emphasis on health than on

profit. You can and should expect that of the producers of your food if you want to embrace high vibration energy in food and ingest the things that are for your highest good.

Healing the past

We cannot live our lives and move forward tethered to the mistakes, misfortunes and regrets of the past. Often the energy of past events keeps us in a lower vibrational frequency emotionally, because we cannot put them behind us. It is important to remember that whenever this happens, we are not giving ourselves the gift and light of the present moment. We are robbing ourselves of the opportunity to enjoy our lives in a deeper and more profound way. The past has already happened and we cannot go back and make changes, therefore we must embrace the present moment and heal ourselves now so that we may move forward with hope and faith in our future.

If you feel that you are being held back by painful events from your past, try facing your past head on and dealing with the emotions that you have surrounding those events.

You can do this through journaling, therapy, or meditation. Sometimes our past effects us in ways that we don't even realize because the emotions and events are so repressed and have never been dealt with. Analyze your current life and assess whether you are being held back by anything, if you keep making the same mistakes over and over again and can't seem to move forward, it is possible that you are struggling with a painful event from your past. You may read this and know exactly what I am talking about and immediately know what "thing" I am referring to within you, or you may simply be prompted to explore the idea further. Whatever the case, if your intuition tells you that

there is even a remote possibility of this, then you owe it to yourself to at least explore it further. Invite some healing into your life and change the story around your past painful events. Change the way that you view the things that have happened to you, your mistakes, or your regrets. They don't have to be regrets, mistakes, or misfortunes. They can instead be learning opportunities that have afforded you the chance to grow into the wonderful person that you are today. Consider how your past may be preventing you from moving forward in your life and begin to do some healing work around it in whatever way is most comfortable for you. There are a variety of healing modalities available to us today and most cities have embraced healers in every form. You may find relief in EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique), meditation, hypnosis, journaling, or just spending time talking about it to a life coach or a therapist – especially if you've kept your past repressed and have never spoken to anyone. Face the things in your life that you have never wanted to face before, especially if there is fear and shame there. You have to change the energy around those events and make the story a better story. Spend a few minutes each day asking your higher self how you can best move forward from these events from your past or view them in a new light. Your higher self is there to serve and guide you to make your life better. You deserve to live the best life possible. You deserve to be healed. Embrace the power of the present moment and don't allow the lower vibration frequencies of past traumas to haunt you in your daily life. You are so much more than you ever thought possible, and your higher self wants to show you that. Ask and you shall receive.

Chapter Six

The Family Circle

Family members are the people who we are tied to us through blood and marriage. We do not choose our family members (with the exception of our spouses) like we choose our friends, we are born and there they are. And while we can't choose them, we did at one time, before we came forth into this physical form. We selected each and every family member for a reason, and all of them have a place in our lives and valuable life lessons to impart on us. Family teaches us the most about ourselves and what we need to work on in our lives. The most challenging family relationships we have are often the most valuable karmic lessons and are the relationships that we should pay the most attention to. Our reaction to our family when we feel angry or hurt by one of them is different than our reaction to our friends or colleagues. Our spirit is intertwined and entangled with our family members, so conflict can hurt far more and cause us to react with a greater degree of intensity. Our family members often hold up a mirror to us and remind us of who we really are. They are often the ones to snap us back to reality when we try to escape our identity or be someone we're not, or the ones who push us to be

better and stronger versions of ourselves when we get down on ourselves. But they can also be the ones who squash our dreams or say hurtful things to us that can stay with us for a long time. Family comes in all varieties, dynamics and personalities. We have parents, and siblings, and often stepparents and stepsiblings, and then there's aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and of course our own children. Depending on the nature of your family and how you were raised, some of these relationships will be stronger than others. Some people are distant with their parents and very close with their siblings, while others are distant with their siblings and close to their parents. Some have been brought up by their grandparents or lived with cousins. The thing that family teaches us most often is that there is really no such thing as "normal". Each family is unique in its challenges, dynamic, and degree of commitment to each other, and no family is without conflict entirely. Whenever you place a group of people together who are of different ages and personalities, you are bound to clash and have disagreements, especially because love is present. We fight with our families sometimes because we don't agree with their choices or they don't agree with ours, but what this really comes down to is love. We love our family and our family loves us, so with that love comes passion and resolve. We want to help, protect, guide, and assist our loved ones in their personal development and on their paths in life.

Have you ever noticed that you hold beliefs that have always just been there? You may not even be aware of where they came from or why you believe them, but you just do. Perhaps you hear yourself repeating something that your mother or father used to say

to you as a kid. We grow up hearing our parents unique viewpoints and perspectives on things in our lives and as we develop into adulthood we often take on their views. Each generation passes down their own belief set and viewpoints to their children, who either reject or adopt them as their own. You may work hard at differentiating yourself from the way your parents are in some areas, but then embrace other qualities that you admired about them. This is quite common and normal as we adapt and adjust ourselves accordingly to the time in which we live. Our family represents our roots and identity. Our family knows us on the inside and out. They've seen us laugh, cry, succeed, fail, and grow throughout the years. Our family relationships are important to our connection with self too.

Family Challenges

Due to the nature of our current society, family challenges are increasingly more common for a variety of reasons. Family challenges are often the source for depression, stress, anxiety, and at its worst even suicide. For this reason it is important to address family challenges as they arise and deal with problems before they get out of hand or go on too long. Sometimes when two parties can't come to an agreement on something they just ignore each other and try to get on with their lives. The problem with this is that we have an invisible connection with our family members, so even when we think they are out of our lives and that they don't matter – their energy can still be felt. We still exchange energy with our family members, even when we are feuding. So the fact that nothing is being said to each other or that there is no face-to-face meetings doesn't

matter. The universe still ingests the energy of that relationship and thoughts continue to transmit further energy into the situation at hand. Feuding with family always creates negativity, which is not only bad for the relationship, but bad for the family as a whole and bad for you personally. Negative energy (be it thought, words, or action) creates more negative energy and attracts more of what you don't want to your life. If you believe that you are being unfairly judged and mistreated by a family member but continue to speak those words, be angry and resentful and avoid them in haste – you are continuing to attract that energy. So not only could your feud become worse, but you may be stuck in a negative cycle of feeling angry and resentful because your family member is doing the same. This cycle will just continue to swirl around and around picking up speed and getting stronger until someone does something different. Positive energy and frequency always overrules negative. So if one of the family members decides to reach out and extend an olive branch to the other, the negativity weakens and the situation improves. If one family member suggests a civil discussion or writes a letter to the other to apologize or forgive, again the energy improves and the cycle may finally be put to rest. Only when you do something different than what is being done currently, can you change your situation. If you are experiencing a family feud in your family and wonder why it isn't getting better, why not be the champion of the situation and try to have an open dialogue without judgment.

It is important to notice the warning signs before a family feud occurs. This way you can work to prevent it from getting out of hand and possibly prevent it all together. You may notice these signs within yourself, or within another family member.

Signs of Trouble in a Family Relationship

1. Withdrawal

Withdrawal is when either yourself or another family member becomes disengaged and uninterested in the activities or lives of the family or a particular family member.

Withdrawal from family activities, communication and avoidance from activities that are normally a part of the routine is a definite warning sign. Often withdrawal means isolation and the family member who chooses to withdraw will cut themselves off from all sorts of other things in their lives, especially events, places or activities that may include the person(s) they are avoiding. Withdrawal can be dangerous because it can lead to loneliness and depression. Withdrawal can happen for a variety of reasons including anger, guilt, frustration and blame. When one of our family members becomes withdrawn from family life, or even life in general, it is our duty to help pull them up again and make them feel loved and special. If it is you who is withdrawing, ask yourself what you are really gaining from cutting yourself out of the situation. Do you really feel better? Or is it just a way for you to hide from the responsibility of having to apologize or forgive? Be honest with yourself.

2. Substance abuse or dependence

You often hear people jokingly talk about how they have to drink just in order to deal with their family members. While this may be funny to hear your friend talk this way about her mother in law, some people really do depend on drugs or alcohol to help them handle family communications and relationships. This is usually an indicator of an unaddressed family problem that was ignored or never communicated. Let's create an

example. John moves to another State to move in with his girlfriend Stephanie, but his siblings, mother and father all resent his decision. He feels uncomfortable at family functions with Stephanie because he can feel the energy of their resentment and wants to protect Stephanie from feeling the way he does. John tries to avoid family functions (and is able to often because he lives in another state) but when he does have to see his family he drinks heavily, because it makes him feel more relaxed and confident. The problem with this scenario is that neither the family or John is voicing how they really feel. The family is likely only upset because they love John and they miss him dearly, so they want to see him more often. And John is upset because he feels that his family is being unreasonable, mean and unsupportive. This atmosphere creates a great deal of tension and makes the family feel that John doesn't care about them or love them, and makes John feel that he is all alone with no support except Stephanie. The drinking doesn't do anything to help the situation and adds further issue.

If you notice yourself or another family member drinking heavily at family functions, try to get to the heart of the matter. Is there something that the family needs to discuss? Offer your ear or shoulder and be supportive. Alcohol and drug dependence is almost always masking an unresolved emotional issue.

3. Angry & short tempered

We often have less patience with our families than anyone else in our lives, because they are always there and we assume that it will always be the case. Often though, when ourselves or another family member becomes short tempered with someone in the family – it is because of an underlying problem. Much like withdrawal and alcohol or

drug dependence, being angry and short tempered is also a warning sign of an unresolved emotional problem. If you have a family member who acts calm and reasonable around others but then turns frustrated and angry when speaking to one particular person, it is safe to assume that there is some healing required there. Anger rears its head when negative energy surrounds the relationship. The problem with anger is that it can escalate, cause depression or anxiety, affect others, or create alcohol or drug dependency. Anger is a negative state and creates negative energy within a situation. There isn't a lot of positive that can be born from negativity.

Love & Marriage

Perhaps one of the most challenging and rewarding relationships to maintain is that of a spouse. Marriage forces us to look deep within ourselves and ask ourselves some difficult questions. Our spouse is the one person who sees us every day and can point out things to us that we may not see ourselves. Having a spouse can be like holding up a mirror and looking at our reflection. Everything we say, do and think is reflected in the relationship. Our spouse's happiness is intertwined with how well we treat him or her. It is easy when we are going about our lives to forget that our spouse is on our side, loves us and wants nothing more than for us to succeed and be happy. Some couples forget that and take their loved one for granted. Your marriage can only be as successful as you allow it to be. Living a life independent of your spouse without sharing, communicating or being affectionate is asking for trouble. The divorce rate is extremely high, but your relationship doesn't have to become a statistic. Think of marriage the same way you think about the Law of Attraction. You attract what you think about most, and you get

out what you put in. Relationships are perfect examples of the Law of Attraction at work. Even when we silently resent our partner, or suspect something is going on behind our back, we invite the opportunity for the relationship to manifest our thoughts. Instead, talking to our partner about our feelings, expressing our fears and emotions and looking to our spouse for support and comfort is a better approach. We become detached from our feelings toward our spouse when we fail to communicate how we feel and begin to internalize things. The relationship has the opportunity to grow and flourish when we share our feelings and spend time honoring and respecting each other. Facing challenges together is crucial for a successful marriage and ultimately brings us closer together when we come out at the other end.

The 5 most important areas of any couple's relationship are:

1. Intimacy

No marriage can survive without the presence of intimacy, and I am not only referring to sex. Of course having sex is a wonderful part of every couple's relationship and should be honored in the marriage as well, but intimacy goes beyond sex. Intimacy is about connecting with your partner in an intimate way; making eye contact, touching, hugging, listening, and being a shoulder to cry on when they need you. Intimacy is about being the one person who your partner can confide in and feel safe around. Life gets busy when kids are in the picture, we have busy careers, and active social lives. But don't forget the person you crawl into bed with every night. Don't forget to make time for that person and to connect on an intimate level as often as you can. For some couples this means scheduling a regular date night and going out once a week, for others it is

about making love, for others it is about kissing and touching, and for others it is about warm heartfelt conversation. All of these things represent intimacy and should not be overlooked. You can always feel the pangs of distance when intimacy is lacking in a relationship, it feels colder and we don't enjoy it as much as when we are loving and close. Perhaps you feel guilty or in-need of intimacy in your own relationship. Rather than let feelings fester and resentment build, approach your partner and tell him or her that you want to invite more intimacy into your relationship. After all, you love each other enough to be around each other every day. You will likely find that your partner is feeling exactly the same and wants what you want. We just get stuck sometimes when it comes to communicating those desires. Never forget to be intimate with your spouse, and if it's missing now, go get it back. There is nothing negative about intimacy in a relationship, it simply strengthens and solidifies what you already have. Make sure when your partner speaks that you listen instead of just formulating your next sentence. Listen to how they feel and offer your support, you will get back what you give and possibly much more. Don't be afraid to touch your partner, to kiss and hug and hold hands. These are all important parts of intimacy.

2. Communication

This is the single most important part of any relationship. In order to have a successful, happy relationship we simply must communicate with each other. When we come together to form a relationship we are merging two sets of beliefs, values and personal preferences. There's bound to be some hiccups and some disagreements. Even the

couples that are seemingly perfect together have their battles. Ideally you want to discuss the big things before you get married or move in together. Ask each other questions and find out where you each stand on topics like marriage, children, birth control, and religion. We are often so smitten with our newfound love that we don't actually take the time to plan out how our relationship will work and what we each want. We assume (incorrectly) that our lives will be a happily ever after fairy tale. Then we discover that our partner had a different idea of how we would move forward and we get stuck. Talk these things out, whether you are just entering a new relationship or have been in one for a long time. There are always big topics that need to be discussed. Parenting, moving, finances, aging parents, and household responsibilities are just a few of these things. Don't let things left unsaid become the cancer in your relationship. Having an argument about something and then moving on is far less troublesome than leaving things unsaid. When we don't voice our concern, preferences, and questions we face the prospect of feeling resentful towards our partner for them not having chosen the things that we ourselves would choose. This is extremely unfair of us to put on our spouse though, especially when we haven't communicated in the first place. We can't just expect our partner to tap into our brain and know what we are thinking, and to know the right way to move forward in a situation. We are all unique human beings interconnected with each other, but we must share ourselves in order to make the most out of our relationships.

Try setting some time aside each day to check-in with your partner to see how things are going. Some days you might not have much to talk about other than the weather or

your kids, but other days there will be plenty to talk about. Try to anticipate your partner's needs by guessing when he or she really needs you. When you notice your partner struggling, reach out with intimacy. A warm embrace can be so healing and powerful and makes it easy to open the lines of communication. Our moods are always an indicator of how we are feeling inside. Be observant with your partner and notice when he or she is down and in need of support. Having daily check-ins is a good way to keep the communication lines open so that when something big does come up, it won't be as difficult to face and talking about it will seem easy and natural. This also helps in areas like finance, where couples don't always feel comfortable talking about plans and responsibilities. Finance discussions can easily become heated and get out of control, so many couples avoid this all together. Instead, try staying on top of your finances by discussing them regularly with your spouse and knowing day-to-day what your plans are as a couple. Things will seem far less intimidating when you each know what the action plan and where you stand.

Remember, nothing can be resolved or move forward without communication. Starting is always the hardest part. Think about your relationship, what is being left unsaid? Get the cards out on the table and have the conversations with your partner that you've already been having in your mind.

3. Respect

Everybody wants and deserves to be respected, and that is true especially when it comes to love and marriage. Merging two lives together isn't always as easy as falling in

love and living happily ever after. There is a lot that happens in between. A lot of work, compromise, and at times sacrifice. There will be differences of opinion, challenges, and disagreements. But how you deal with those obstacles will determine how successful your relationship is. Always consider the feelings of your partner whenever a challenging situation comes up. You may have your viewpoint and feel strongly, but try to put yourselves into the shoes of your partner for just a moment and think about how they feel. Try to see things from the other perspective, as well as your own, without taking things personally or involving the ego. When we listen without judgment, and without waiting for our chance to counter with a defensive argument, we can actually get somewhere. Try it. I challenge you to listen to your partner and be supportive without trying to sell your own point of view, control the direction of the conversation, or argue against them. You don't need to have the exact same opinion or belief in order to support your partner. You can still be who you are. This is respect in a relationship; the ability to maintain who you are, but still love and support your partner for who they are. Respect means listening to your partner when they need your ear, compromising and coming to agreements on matters that you may not feel the same about.

Part of respecting your partner means respecting their choices, lifestyle, and interests outside of you. If your partner has a hobby that you have absolutely no interest in, it doesn't mean that you can't be supportive or that your partner shouldn't engage in that hobby anymore. It simply means that you don't share that interest. Give your spouse the room to be who he/she is without your judgment. You should always encourage your partner to do things that he or she loves to do in life, this makes for a happier

partnership and creates more joy in both of your lives. Other important areas that are important are career and family. Do your best to treat your partner's family with respect by being polite and helpful. Even if they get on your nerves or you don't see eye-to-eye you can still choose to be kind and loving. You can support your partner by asking for what he or she needs from you. Some couples fight about careers, often when one partner doesn't agree with the chosen career path of the other. Be respectful about your spouses choices in life as well as the people in your spouses life. Respect is a two way street and it must be given in order to be received.

4. Trust

If you are like most, you've had relationship ups and downs and may have even been hurt a few times. When others hurt us in a relationship, the best we can do is learn from that hurt and allow it to make us more aware next time. We should never bring past hurts into current relationships and make our spouses feel responsible for those hurts. Our past is our past and we cannot go back and change what has happened. We must trust the person we are with implicitly and wipe the slate clean of any past abuses in trust. If you are married you made a vow to your spouse to love, trust, and honor the relationship. Unless you have good reason not to trust your partner, always assume the best. If you've been cheated on in the past, don't assume that your partner will do just that. Instead, assume that you lucked out and found somebody who would never do that to you. Remember, the energy that you put forth in your relationship could actually make things worse if you don't trust your spouse.

Trust crosses into a wide variety of topics when it comes to a relationship. When your partner says they are going to do something, do you trust him or her? If you are with someone that keeps putting things off or never does what they say they are going to do, it can stifle your confidence in them and create a lack of trust. Instead of letting the resentment build within you, try talking to your partner openly about it, letting them know how you feel. It may be that your partner is lacking in self-esteem, is experiencing depression or has commitment problems. Try working through it with your partner together as a couple, instead of judging them. Another area that comes up is in decision-making. Do you trust your partner to make good decisions, do they trust you? If you lack trust in your partners ability to make decisions for the family, then that is something that needs to be addressed as a couple, because it will lead to resentment, a lack of trust, lack of respect and a breakdown in communication. Trust should be automatic until you have a reason not to trust. Your marriage was a demonstration of trust, so were your children if you have them, as is every joint venture you engage in together as a couple. Each life decision you make together is a commitment to the relationship and an investment in each other. If there is a violation of trust in your relationship, have no fear. Trust can be rebuilt once it is lost. It takes time, but it can be done. The only thing standing in between you and a trusting relationship with your spouse, is your choice to trust.

5. Forgiveness

When your partner does something to upset you do you carry a grudge around for days or stop speaking to each other? Or do you forgive and move on even when an apology is not present? Having a short memory in a relationship is quite advantageous. You don't want to be reminded daily about everything you've ever done to upset or anger your partner, and similarly your partner doesn't want to be reminded about everything he or she has ever done to upset or anger you. Saying that you will forgive means actually following through and putting the situation behind you and moving on. The reality of being a human being on planet earth is that you will make mistakes and so will others. Life is full of lessons and they come in many forms, it's how we as humans learn and grow. Having a partner to work through life lessons with is truly a gift. You learn faster and are less likely to repeat the mistakes of the past when you have a partner there to show you the impact of those decisions. A relationship is like a mirror; what you do and say to your partner is reflected back at you causing you to see things for what they really are. When you forgive you free yourself from all of that negative energy swirling around in your subconscious. Negative energy is strong and powerful and can attract undesirable outcomes into your life and relationship. When you don't forgive, there is nowhere for that energy to go. It is not released, and although you may not discuss the issue at hand with your partner or act like you are putting it behind you – if you haven't, you are doing yourself and your relationship a great disservice. The power to forgive is liberating and will have positive effects on your life as a whole because you will no longer be held hostage by your anger, resentment, or sadness. The feelings that come about when you are hurt by your partner are normally associated with anger and

sadness, which impact your self-esteem, confidence, relationship, and sense of trust with others. There aren't many relationships, however, in which a partner actually desires or goes out of their way to hurt the other. More often than not one partner makes a bad decision in which the other partner is negatively impacted and becomes upset, angry or resentful. Mistakes happen in life, and they certainly happen in relationships. Your partner may insult your looks one day, or make your career feel insignificant, say something negative about your family, or violate your trust. Or perhaps it will be you who does one of these things to your partner. Instead of focusing on who did what, learn to forgive and move on. You will be happier and healthier because of it and your relationship more successful.

Strengthening the Family Bond

The family dynamic in our society has changed so much in the past several decades. We have more divorce and remarriage, larger families that include stepchildren and half-siblings, and the merging of old lives and new ones. Our children often have to adjust to separation and remarriage, along with all of our other family members. Never before has maintaining a strong family bond been more important than now. We are surrounded by distraction, technology and have busier lives. It is easy to take your family for granted and forget to connect with them and have meaningful discussions. We have become a society that is so focused on the importance of knowing the self and fulfilling our own destinies that we often forget that there is a whole group of people who depend on us. You may not think that they depend on us or feel that they need

you, but they do. They need us to lend them an ear when they are feeling down about themselves, they need us to motivate them, challenge them, and be in their corner. We forget how important these things are because we are so intently focused on living our own lives that we expect our family members to do the same. When we connect and bond with our family, we feel grounded and connected to the universe. We feel love extending out from our bodies and into the atmosphere. The energy of the family bond is different than anything you can experience on your own.

If you have a family that has been fragmented by divorce, disagreements, or just separated by distance – there are still things you can do to bring your family closer together. Even if your family is close, but you think you could do more together and be even closer, consider the following ways to get closer:

Don't wait for the holidays

Many families only have large get-togethers during the holidays. They don't see each other at any other time, except during the holidays. The problem with this is that there is so much going on, that it is hard to focus on the connection with each other. You may not feel as close to a family member you only see once a year at Christmas. Consider hosting a dinner party twice a year, or have a surprise birthday party or anniversary party for a parent, grandparent or sibling. Celebrate the elders in your group and have them teach you their recipes and traditions. There are so many opportunities to get your family together and enjoy each others company. In the summer, many families like

to have outdoor BBQs or picnics. Take advantage of the weather and seasons to structure activities around the time of year. Your family get-togethers should be enjoyable and make you feel connected to your roots. Don't take your family for granted by only seeing them once a year at Christmas. It's never too late to start bringing the family closer together.

Have meaningful conversations

Many people have surface relationships with their family members, meaning that they don't ever really engage in any deep conversation or discuss feelings. A lot of us were brought up in a family environment that taught us to suppress our feelings and sweep things under the rug. Even if you were brought up this way, doesn't mean you have to be this way. You can break free from that mold and be an example to the rest of your family. Start talking to your family members about how they feel about things. Offer them support, guidance, and love. If you have a family that normally suppresses their emotions and doesn't talk about things that upset them, you could be helping them in more ways than you know. Helping our family members to talk about their experiences and connect in deeper ways is healing and can make us closer as a family. When we only talk about the weather, the dinner we ate, or how the kids are doing in school – we are missing out on opportunities to discover our roots and origins. Start with the elders in your family, ask them questions about what life was like when they were growing up. Were they close with their parents? What about your own parents? What was life like for them? Ask questions and encourage them to speak about their own family experiences. Getting your family members to open up about their past will make it

easier for them to connect with you if something happens in the present, such as sickness, death of a loved one, or any other type of hardship they experience. Just because your family may be tight-lipped about their emotions, doesn't mean they necessarily want to be that way. Perhaps they just don't know how to open up, you can help to guide them by offering up your own feelings and emotions. Talk about what's going on in your life. Let them in, and allow them to learn how you feel. Watching you share yourself with them and readily show your vulnerability will teach them that maybe it's okay to be emotional. Encouraging your family to share their feelings and talk open with each other will create a stronger family bond and bring about a great deal of healing.

Play together

You've heard the saying "the family that plays together stays together" and the same has been said about couples. The reason why this is true is that connecting through experience is one of the best ways to keep your family close to you. It allows us the opportunity to lighten up, share ourselves, communicate easier, and feel happier. Your family as a whole will be happier and more content if you allow some playtime together. Perhaps it is a family game night, or a badminton tournament in the backyard. Maybe it is a family bike ride or a canoe trip. Whatever your chosen family activity, make it something that the whole family will enjoy. The memories that will be created in these moments are essential to building positive family interactions that will continue on for years. It is easy to become distracted by technology, chores, and our individual lives –

especially in a home with older children. But the more distance that is created between family members, the harder it is to come out of. Take a look at your family and think about things you can do together to stay active, have fun, and just enjoy each others company. Have everyone in the family brainstorm some ideas and come up with a weekly or monthly family fun day. The important thing is that you spend time enjoying each others company and are each given the opportunity to step outside of your roles in the family to just enjoy life and have some fun.

No two families are alike, but we all have a need to connect with our families and feel that we are part of something. Having positive experiences with our family and being able to communicate with them helps us grow personally and provides us with a support system that is important to our sense of self and our confidence levels. You may not be able to repair every family situation, but you can certainly make it better by being the one to try something different. It is never too late to try, no matter how old you are, or how long your family has been distant. If you see something in your family that needs repairing, take the lead and be the one to reach out and try to make something happen. You will change the entire energy of the family and will be thankful that you took the initiative. Our family should be cherished, always.

Chapter Seven

Friends; Our Chosen Family

Nothing is random in this world, no matter how seemingly random you think something might be. We often cannot see the reasons why things happen from our limited perspective, but this doesn't mean that those reasons aren't there. This includes the circumstances we find ourselves in, the places we inhabit, and of course the people we connect with. Every person who comes into our lives is here for a reason, even though that reason may not always be evident to us. Our friends are a good example of this. They come into our lives at various times and for various reasons, some of them have been with us since childhood or early adulthood and others are new friends whom we may not have known for very long. We have different types of friendships and a variety of friends who fill our emotional needs in various ways that we need and thrive on. Friends teach us to be more compassionate, to communicate better, and to enjoy the lighter side of life. Sometimes friends stay with us throughout our lives and watch us grow up, get married and have families of our own. Other times friends are in our lives

for short periods of time and teach us things about ourselves or important lessons and then they move on.

Our relationships with friends are different than our family relationships. Somehow we can be more open, honest, and more ourselves without fear of saying something that we might not say to our family members. Our friends can listen objectively and offer an ear, a shoulder or some sound advice. We can't always talk about the challenges we are having with our family with the members of our family, so our friends are often the ones we turn to when we need to confide in someone. Friends keep us grounded and make us feel good about life. We feel calm, centered and at one with the universe when we hang out with our closest friends and enjoy their company.

Early Childhood

We learn about friends from a very young age. When we hit the playground in Kindergarten we quickly learn that we will gravitate towards certain people and be repelled by others. We learn that some people are going to like us and want to be around us because they feel a connection, while others may be mean to us for no apparent reason and not want to be friends with us. As a child this is a hard lesson to learn, but a necessary one. We learn that no matter what we do, some people just aren't going to like us. But that's okay, because for every one of those there are three others who do like us and who do want to spend time with us. Friendships are important to us as children because they teach us how to share ourselves with others. Up until we go to school, our mothers and families have the role of our primary care and

have been able to shelter us from having to fend for ourselves. When we hit the playground as kids, it's every kid for themselves. We learn how to survive the social hierarchy of the playground. And we do this simply by analyzing how others react and respond to us. Our earliest friendships are special because they are the ones that shape us most as children. We learn how to be a best friend, what that means, and how to share ourselves in a way that it is reflected back to us. We share our lunch, we share secrets and inside jokes, and we pledge our loyalty to our friends. We also learn how to problem solve at this young age. Problems arise on the playground, often between two people that we know and we experience the stress of being caught in the middle and having to create peace. The playground teaches us valuable lessons about figuring out how to create harmony among friends, to make things fair, and to take turns. These lessons stay with us as we grow. We also learn about collaboration and sharing in early childhood, whether it is in the classroom when we form into groups or on the playground when we create our own groups. We learn that we can accomplish more together and that we are stronger in a group than just one alone.

Our childhood friends have a tremendous impact on us and are responsible for shaping who we are in those early years. We listen more to the advice and guidance of our friends than our own parents, in fact this is how we learn. We learn from what we see from other children. So as much as we want to believe that what we are teaching our children in the home is having a profound impact, the biggest impact is from the friends who our children hang out with. They learn by seeing and doing what their friends do. For this reason it is important to monitor who they are spending time with and what

type of impact they are having. If your children routinely hang out with other children who are mischievous and defiant, it shouldn't be a surprise when your child brings that behavior into the home. Never underestimate the power and impact that friendship has on your children – they are the most important relationships they have outside of the home and they are indeed the most impactful. Children have simple needs and they are met by spending time with others who have those same needs. They identify with each other through likes and dislikes, through similarities, and through social hierarchy. Children are also very in the moment and much can be learned from the way they play. They don't hold grudges against their friends. One day they may be inseparable with their best friend until something happens on the playground and they all of a sudden do not want to be friends with that person anymore. But surely enough, the following day all has been forgotten and they are back to hanging upside down on the monkey bars with that friend, having put the incident behind them. What a wonderful way to be. Children don't hold their friends to impossible standards. They know that they will have fall outs with their friends, but also that they will forgive and move on. They learn to forgive and forget and they understand the nature of people by observing their friends. Somewhere along the lines as adults, we forget this, and we become stubborn and we keep grudges against friends for long periods of time. We would benefit from being more like children – observing how they play, how in the moment they are, and how loving and forgiving they are with their friends. Children don't have long memories when it comes to the injustices of friendships, they simply want to be in the moment of

joy with their friends and that's it. No ulterior motives, no need to be right, and no need for justice. They just want to have fun and enjoy being in the moment of life.

Many children create imaginary friends or personify their toys and have conversations with them. This is very normal and happens in an estimated 65% of children.

Imaginative play is a sign of creativity and also furthers the child's understanding of relationships and friendship specifically. Children who do engage in imaginative play with an invisible friend or a toy who's been personified tend to be more advanced with their communication skills than those who do not engage in that type of play. Some parents become concerned when their child reports that they have an imaginary friend, but it really is nothing to be concerned about. Quite the opposite in fact. Be happy that your child has the wisdom and creativity to believe in their imagination.

Our friends influence us

Whether you are 5 or 55, it's no secret that our friends have a tremendous impact on the things we like, dislike and even what we do. We learn and become influenced by our friends and tend to be more inclined to enjoy the same things. If our closest friends are active and enjoy hiking, mountain biking, and being outdoors - this will influence us, and we will be more inclined to participate in those activities ourselves. Just like if we have friends who are heavy drinkers and poor eaters, the time that we spend with those friends will likely be spent on unhealthy pursuits rather than on being healthy and active. For this reason we must choose our friends very carefully.

Think about the activities that you enjoy and the direction that you want your life to take, and surround yourself with people who are of the same mindset. It's okay if you have friends from the past who are starkly different than you and who do not have the same interests. You can still maintain friendships with others who are different from you, those friendships are important too because they allow you to accept people for who they are and embrace their differences. As long as we surround ourselves with more people who are like us, than those who are not, we will be successful and enjoy our friendships and experiences in life. Friends should motivate us, propel us, and excite us about life. They should be in our corner rooting for us and helping us to take the next step towards our dreams and goals in life. They should also inspire us by being an example in their own lives. When we see our friends doing wonderful things and accomplishing their goals and dreams, it impacts us by making us look at our own life. We become inspired and more likely to embark on the journey of accomplishing one of our own personal goals, because seeing a friend accomplish something, helps to remind us that we can do it too. This is evident with things like weight loss. Often a friend will start out on a weight loss program like Weightwatchers. They may not say a lot about it at first and may just begin the program on their own. But after a few months other friends begin to notice that they are looking pretty great. This inspires others to want to start the program too, and before you know it a group of friends have all lost weight on the same program because they were inspired by each other. Weight loss isn't the only area that this happens. You see it with learning to run, meditation, cooking, travel, going back to school, reading books, and much more. Our friends influence us by doing. We

watch them embark on their personal journeys of discovery and it makes us want to embark on one of our own.

Think about how you influence your friends. What are some of the things that you do in your life that your friends look up to? What do your friends do that you envy or want to do in your life? If there are friends who are doing great things, why aren't you doing those things too? What is stopping you? Think about how you and your friends impact each other in negative and positive ways. Are there any influences that you would like more of in your life, or perhaps less of? Meditate on this and think about how it applies to your life and where you are today. If you are a positive influence on your friends and have inspired them to be more, congratulations on being a great friend!

Friendships are important to our lives from the time we are young until we leave this world in spirit form. They influence the decisions we make, the hobbies and activities we engage in, our beliefs and values, and even our personality. Friendships are also important to our marriages. A crucial part of every successful marriage is the ability to befriend and socialize with other couples that are our friends. Doing things together with other couples helps us to feel connected to each other, and to enjoy life more. Often you will see friends at a backyard barbecue; the men gathered by the grill with their beer talking about sports, cars and meat and the women seated at the table with their wine talking about relationships, children, and beauty. This dynamic is common among couple friends and is something that we all need to engage in from time to time to feel that we are a part of a community. Our friends give us an instant community,

especially as we get older and have children. Our friends' children become friends with our children and we build a community that is based on the foundation of friendship. This sense of community is important to our health and wellbeing and is what makes us feel happy and connected to the universe. You probably haven't ever thought about how profound the impact of friendship can be on your health, but it is one of the biggest influencers in your life – both as an adult and as a child. Friends are our medicine, they lift us up when we are down, propel us to do great things, and support us when we most need supporting. They impact our health by releasing anxiety and stress from our lives. The more engaged we are with our friendships, the less likely we are to be affected by stress and anxiety. Friends have a special way of reaching into our hearts and filling us with love and support when we most need it. They provide us with advice, guidance, and support. This is why the community of friendship is so important to our wellbeing as we navigate through life.

Sometimes when we merge our lives with another, we find that our partner has friends who we don't get along with or we don't like the influence they have upon our partner. In these instances it is important to allow your partner the freedom to be friends with anyone whom he or she was friends with prior to the relationship. You wouldn't like someone coming into your life telling you who you can and cannot be friends with. It is perfectly okay to point out things to your partner though if they are hanging out with friends who routinely drag them down, get them into trouble, or create stress and anxiety. Come from a place of love and simply point out that you notice the impact that the friendship(s) have upon your partner. Resist the urge to judge or to suggest that he

or she doesn't hang out with that person anymore. Remember relationships have three entities; you, your partner, and what you are together. Your partner isn't you and you aren't your partner so the friends that each of you choose are an independent and unique decision. Most of us, however, when we are married or partnered will choose not to surround ourselves with friends who clash with our loved ones, or who create upheaval and stress in our lives. But sometimes, these friendships are unavoidable and they simply must be managed carefully. Don't judge your partner for having friends like this if this is the case, be open and understanding and support your partner. Be friendly and supportive to the friend as well, you may notice a shift in the dynamic of the relationship if you do this. Friends are a fragile topic when it comes to marriage and relationships. They can be sources of great joy and happiness, or they can be a source of contention between couples. The way that you manage your friendships will determine the impact that they have on your relationship.

Friendship assessment

Have you ever really sat back and thought about what your friends do for you? Of course our friends are not their to serve us or give us some sort of reward or tangible benefit for being their friends, but they do serve our emotional needs in a variety of areas whether this is consciously or subconsciously. Think about the friends that you are the closest to. How did you become friends? What is the basis and foundation of your friendship? Many friendships early in life are based on childhood, geography, and school. Later in life we start befriending people in different ways. We become friends

with people at work, we befriend neighbors and parents of our children's friends, and we befriend our spouse or partners friends. As we become adults, making friends gets harder and harder and we may even have a third less friends by the time we are married with children. This is pretty normal and happens because we get busy with our careers, our married lives and in the raising of our children. For this reason, we must ensure that the friendships in our lives are serving us well, meaning that they provide us with positive nourishment and make us feel happy and supported. Sometimes we have friendships that are toxic, and in those instances, we must weigh our options carefully and think about whether we really need that person in our life or whether we can afford to minimize the impact they have on us. A friend should never make us feel bad about ourselves, cause us a great degree of anxiety and stress, or place unfair demands on us. If you have friends in your life that do this to you, you may want to reconsider how much time you spend with them.

To assess your friendships is easy, simply write (or think in your head) about each friend one by one and think about all of the positive things they do for you and make you feel. Perhaps they motivate you to try harder in life, or maybe they inspire you by doing amazing things, or maybe they make you belly laugh with their free-spirited and funny outlook on life. Our friends serve many purposes and each of them is unique in their own way. A friendship assessment allows us the time to appreciate what each of our friends does for us on an emotional and spiritual level and to be in the moment of feeling thankful about that. After a friend assessment, you may feel the need to reach out to your friends and let them know how you feel or thank them for adding such light

to your life. We often take our friends for granted and forget to appreciate the impact they have upon our lives. A friendship assessment reminds us of the reasons why we are friends with the people in our lives and makes us appreciate them even more. By contrast we may also discover some negative things about some of our friends, which is okay too because it will identify areas that we need to work on with that person. For example if we have a friend who criticizes us a lot and makes us feel less of ourselves, perhaps it is a good time to talk to that friend about how we feel. Being open and honest about our friendships and what they bring to our life can be a wonderfully liberating experience and help us to appreciate what we have in our lives. Always be thankful for your friends and don't forget to appreciate the things they do for you and remind them of the joy that they bring to your life.

When friendship ends

Just as relationships can cause us to grow apart from loved ones and move in a different direction, friendships too can cause us to grow apart and become estranged. Sometimes this happens gradually over a number of years due to life circumstances, geography and careers or other times it happens abruptly when a situation arises in which one friend hurts the other. It is never easy dealing with the loss of a friendship; in fact it can sometimes be more painful than the end of a relationship. Friends are there throughout our lives to root us on and be our advocates and support systems, and when that comes to an end it can leave us feeling lost, hurt, and uncertain of our future. This is especially so when we lose a friend whom we've had for most of our lives.

If you have a friendship that suddenly comes to an end, ask yourself if there is something that can be done to save it. Do you want to save it? Or is it best that you both move on with your lives in different directions? Even though the last thing you will want to do is think about it, it is the best thing you can do. It is important to sort through your feelings about that friend by removing the incident or the events leading up to the breakup of the friendship. Forget about why your friendship ended, and instead think about your friendship as a whole. How has it gone the past few years? How have you supported each other and been there for each other? Is your friendship sustainable? Is it built upon a solid foundation of mutual respect? Dig deep within yourself and ask yourself questions about your friend. Perhaps you might want to take the opportunity to journal about it. Write down fond memories you have with your friend, and any other memories that you may have, ask questions in your journal and make observations. Keep writing about your friend for a few days while you sort through the feelings you have. After a few days when you are feeling better, go back and read what you wrote about your friend and your relationship with that friend. You will notice that you now have definite feelings about whether the breakup was a good thing or a bad thing. You may be feeling guilty and want to reach out to your friend and apologize or suggest that you meet for coffee, or you may want to simply put the whole thing behind you and move on with your life in a new direction. Whichever you choose be sure that you have thought it through and that you feel good about your decision.

Healing friendships

If you have a friendship that you want to heal or revive, it can be challenging but also very rewarding. Often when we have disputes with our friends we go through periods of non-communication. These radio silence moments between us and our friends can create a great deal of tension, sadness, and distance. So coming together again after a period of separation can present its challenges. Being away from a close friend for a couple of months can feel like a couple of years. If we have been uninvolved in their life we can suddenly feel as if they have just gone on without us and that we don't know them anymore. Rarely is this ever the case, but it can feel like that. It is important when healing a friendship that you tread carefully. Meet on mutual ground and start with a coffee at a coffee shop or a simple phone call. You can choose to call to say happy birthday or to congratulate them for something, or just to say that you were thinking of them. Choose whichever reason for reaching out feels the most natural to you. Make sure, however, that you don't push too hard to bring up the past – especially if you have decided to move on and forgive and forget. Your friend may run scared in the other direction if you decide to rehash the reasons why you had the dispute in the first place. Instead, extend the olive branch, be humble, loving and supportive. Tell your friend that you miss their presence in your life and suggest that you do something together. These are always the most successful methods for healing friendships. If your friend is not receptive and needs more time, back away gently and allow them the time they need to heal. If your intentions are genuine and you acted with care, your friend will probably come around and contact you shortly on their terms after they've built up the courage

to do so. Friendships are delicate, but also stand the test of time when we treat them right. They need to be nurtured like the flowers in a garden.

Focus on rebuilding positive memories with your friend if you are just coming back together after a period of being apart. Shared experiences make us feel happy and connect us with each other. Choose an activity that you can both do together that you will both enjoy. Perhaps it is a bike ride, or a pottery class, or a day of sailing. Whatever you choose, make sure it is something that you both enjoy that will make you feel connected and joyful. Make sure that the effort in your friendship isn't only one sided, each of you should be putting equal effort into the friendship to make it a successful one. Be cautious if you are always the one to run to the rescue, to make the effort, or to reach out and communicate. Friendships are two-way streets and the most rewarding ones are the ones where each friend contributes something to the friendship as a whole.

Face time with friends

In today's busy world we have less time than ever before. Somehow we have become so busy that we often forget to spend face time with friends. Instead we Facebook them, or perhaps we "Face Time" them using the camera phone program on our iPhone or iPad, but we aren't spending as much time with them face-to-face as we used to. We are missing out on the magic of friendship when we don't spend time with our friends in person. Of course we can still feel connected to our friends when we send an email, comment on their photographs on Facebook, or talk to them on Skype – but it isn't the same as being in their presence and laughing at the same jokes, experiencing the energy

of the friendship. When we spend time with our friends in person, we see the light in their eye when we first see them, we feel the energy of how they are feeling, and we get to go out in the world together to experience life. Shared experiences bring us closer together, and getting out and doing things with our friends is important to our sense of happiness and wellbeing. Think about how you feel after a few days of being cooped up inside your home. Sure you might have a few phone calls, send some emails, and talk to friends online – but contrast that with how you feel when you go out for coffee with friends, visit them at their home, go bike riding, or go out for dinner with them. It's a different experience all together isn't it? The interactions that we have online are not as meaningful or impactful as they are in person. The quality of those interactions can't possibly be as deep as the ones that we go out of our way to nurture, because the effort isn't the same. Sending a text, an email, or writing on someone's Facebook wall to wish them a Happy Birthday isn't the same as driving to their house to give them a card and a gift. By contrast, supporting a friend through the loss of a loved one isn't the same when we talk to them on the phone or online, as it is when we are there with them in their home offering them a warm embrace or supporting their family in whichever way we can. Our online lives can certainly supplement our friendships and even enhance them in some ways, but it shouldn't be a replacement for face-to-face contact and quality in-person time with friends.

If you've embraced your online life and spend most of your friend interactions online, why not think about ways that you can step outside of your digital bubble and get out into the world with your friends. Don't worry if you haven't seen them in a while, if

you've turned down the last few invitations to hang out, or if they have done the same to you. Simply reach out and set up a face-to-face friend date with them.

There are tons of things you can do together on a friend date:

- Hiking, biking or walking
- A backyard BBQ
- A festival or live music event
- Go out for dinner
- Go golfing
- A guided meditation
- A class or workshop
- Scrapbooking
- Cooking

And the list goes on.

Don't wait until it's too late to realize that you have forgotten to nurture your face-to-face relationships. It doesn't take much to reach out and spend time with your friends in person. They will appreciate you for it.

Better versions of ourselves

Our friends (our good ones anyway) make us better versions of ourselves by pushing us to be the best we can be. Perhaps they inspire by doing, motivate us by offering words of encouragement, or support us with love and affection. Each friend has a unique impact on us and serves our emotional needs in a different manner. Without friends life

would seem bleak and we would be lonely and depressed. We wouldn't be as likely to try new things in life or to step outside of our comfort zones. Our friends urge us to be better versions of ourselves by giving us the courage we need to embark on new adventures, to tackle new life changes, and to set sail towards our goals and dreams. Our good friends will also voice their concern for us when they feel that we are about to make a mistake in our lives or do something that is out of character or detrimental to our personal development. A good friend won't sit idly by as we self-destruct or stay in an unhealthy relationship or job, they will urge us to be happy and take the steps that we need to take in order to live in the power of who we are. Our friends have the unique advantage of being able to view our lives from various perspectives. Sometimes when we are caught up in a situation we cannot see the woods for the trees and we become too close to our own situation. A friend can see from the outside looking in and can offer advice from a different perspective. We don't always have to take the advice of our friends, but most of the time their intentions are genuine. Our friends want us to be happy, to enjoy life, and to be the friend who they've always known us to be. When they see us floundering or having difficulty in a relationship or family situation it is hard from them to stand by and watch it happen, just like it is hard for us to watch them struggle in a similar situation. We are there mutually for each other to lift each other up, offer a shoulder to cry on, words of encouragement, and plenty of laughs.

It has been scientifically proven that shared experiences and friendship lead to happier, more fulfilling lives. We simply cannot live in a world on our own with our head down,

defeating the world. Human beings were meant to share, connect and support one another. This is what the gift of friendship offers us. We sometimes forget how profoundly important our friendships are, but a dinner, night out or gathering with friends will surely remind us of this. Our hearts and minds can be healed by friendship and we have the power to impact others lives in the same way. Think about your role in your friends lives. Are you being a good friend? Is there room for improvement? Tell your friends what they mean to you because you never know when they might be taken from you and you will be left wishing that you had spent more time with them, or wishing that you had expressed how important they were to you. Never take this moment we have in life for granted. We can always choose to pick up the phone, to make plans with friends and to make something happen. We need not feel guilty about the way we have been in the past, or worry about whether our friends will still be there. We have the opportunity now to take action and remind our friends of the reason that they are in our lives and the reason why we are in their lives. And there is indeed a reason. We have lessons to learn from our friends, and they have lessons to learn from us. The lessons come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some friends are challenging to deal with or communicate with, but we love them anyway. These friends teach us to be patient and accepting of who they are and to not expect them to be like us. Other friends are competitive and want to challenge us at every opportunity, almost as if they want to defeat us or claim superiority. These friends teach us to be humble and appreciate what we have in life. They teach us that it is not about winning or being the best, but about the experience of the journey that matters, not the destination itself.

Some friends are depressingly negative and cynical about every single situation, obstacle or new circumstance in life. These friends teach us to be more open-minded and accepting of change and not to be afraid. Our friends offer a reflective mirror in which we are able to see ourselves and identify with behaviors, emotions, and thoughts that we have struggled with ourselves. When we see our friends acting in a certain way it reminds us of the lessons that we need to embrace in our own lives in order to be happy. Our friendships offer profound opportunities for us to learn and grow and become the best we can be. We take their negatives and turn them into positives, and we take their positives and embrace them in our own lives. There is always something to be gained and learned through each unique friendship that we have, including the challenging ones. Sometimes the challenging ones are the most worthwhile in the end because they teach us the most, but we can't always hold on to those ones if they aren't healthy for us. But a little bit of healthy conflict is a good opportunity to learn a lesson about communication, boundaries, and accepting each other's differences.

Friends will come and go, like some relationships, but once in a while we get lucky and we find a friend for life. Someone to grow old with who sees us through all of the changes in life, who accepts who we are and pushes us to be better at the same time. These are the special ones that we must nurture and learn from. Be open minded and mature in your relationships. Accept your friends for who and what they are, even when they are different from you. Ask yourself what you can learn from them, and what they have taught you about yourself. And finally, don't take them for granted. Always take the time to let your friends know what they mean to you whether you do it in a casual

passing comment, a letter, or a heart-to-heart discussion. Don't let the opportunity to express your gratitude to your friends pass you by. Friends are special souls that come into our lives for a reason, each of them special, each of them unique.

Chapter Eight

Challenging Relationships

Relationships are important to our life as human beings. We are prewired to connect with others on an emotional level, and the relationships we have teach us many things about ourselves by offering a reflection of, or contrast to who we are. The lessons that come along with human relationships are as varied as the relationships themselves. But one thing is for sure. Nobody can make it through life feeling spiritually aligned and connected without the closeness of connection with others. We can't do everything alone or ignore the importance of relationships. They shape us and it starts at an early age when we begin learning how to form relationships. When we start school in kindergarten we begin to learn how friendship works. We meet a variety of personalities, which is a contrast to the sheltered family life we had prior to beginning

school. Most of our interactions prior to kindergarten are based on family, and family friends, so we don't really meet many people who we just don't like or clash with. In kindergarten and early grade school, however, we begin to meet people who teach us that we simply cannot be friends with everyone. We learn that some people will not like us no matter how hard we try, and that others are mean for no reason, but also that there are some special people who bring love and happiness into our lives. We meet our first chosen friends in our first years in school. Friendship is magical to children at that age, they will often speak of their friends to family members at home, become elated when in the friends presence, and enjoy comparing their lives with the lives of their friends. Friendship is easier at that age, things like having the same favorite color, owning a dog or a cat, and having the same shoes are the basis of our early connections. We look for things that make us the same when we are children, we don't seek to differentiate ourselves and stand apart from other kids, we want to be the same and have the same interests. We enjoy the feeling that comes with interconnectedness. Somewhere along the lines, when we get older we begin to feel that being like everyone else doesn't make us special and that we need to individualize ourselves and become different so that others recognize how unique we are. Often this happens in high school because it is such a hard place to get by in. Most teenagers want to be different enough to be perceived as special or unique, but not so different that they are considered outcasts. There is a fine balance between standing out and being on the outside of the social norm. Teenagers will often experiment with their individuality through their appearance. They may color their hair a certain way, wear clothing that makes them

stand out, or have piercings and dark makeup. This act of “I am different” causes others to look their way instead of blending into the crowd and possibly being forgotten, which is the fear with being too agreeable or similar to other kids. When we are in grade school, fitting in is a positive, sameness is encouraged and celebrated – but then later in life it becomes a perceived risk and we try hard to make ourselves appear to be unique and to be loved by our peers.

Of course as adults, we know that being like others isn't really a risk because we are all unique in our personality but also all connected. We return in some ways to our childhood mentality as adults and begin (again) to look for adult friends who have things in common with us and who are like us. We may join a book club and befriend others who love reading, or start running with others in our community who love to run, or join a yoga group or meditation class. All of these activities we do as adults are both for ourselves (to support who we are on the inside) as well as to form new meaningful relationships with others. As adults we value connection, we are less concerned with how unique or different we are, we know that each of us is beautiful, unique and creative. As adults we want our friendships and relationships to be fulfilling and meaningful. We seek out relationships that support who we are on the inside and we look to connect with people who provide us with heart-centered connections.

Somewhere along the lines when we are growing up, we learn that life is really about the connections we make and the relationships we have. We change our attitude about fitting in and having friends. Sometimes, however, if we struggled with something in high school or grade school, those feelings can come back to haunt us. For example, if as

a child we were overweight and made fun of at school, we may always feel that way as an adult. Even if you have lost weight and are a different person, if you never dealt with the feelings you had from your childhood, you may not get past them and they may still wreak havoc on your life and relationships. For this reason it is important to accept the life that you had in the past, deal with those emotions and then move on and live your life in the present moment. If you are launched back into childhood memories each time someone says something snarky to you in your adult life, you will be imprisoned by the energy of not feeling good enough. We make mistakes when we are children, teenagers, and adults. Everyone does. So it is important to not let those circumstances, memories, and past hurts create pain in your present life. You are a profoundly wonderful human being who can attract anything into your life. Why would you willingly choose to attract feelings of unworthiness and pain? By feeling anything less than you are, you invite negativity into your life. If you feel bad about yourself and are haunted by memories from the past, make peace with those memories, or go and talk to a therapist to get past them. But make it your mission in life to move forward because you cannot be love and light while you are lurking in the dark. Your life will flourish and open up in ways you cannot imagine if you simply take a leap of faith and trust in yourself. Keep your thoughts present and don't allow yourself to drift off into the past. You may try placing a thick rubber band on your wrist and write the word "present" or "now" on the band. Each time you catch yourself drifting back into a past memory, especially a negative one, snap the band or glance at it. Then begin to observe what you are doing in the moment. What is around you? What do you smell? Is there a taste in your mouth? Can you hear

anything? Use your senses to keep you present. You may have to practice this often and will be surprised at how much work it requires initially to stop ourselves from drifting into past painful memories, especially if you have always done so.

Negative thoughts create negative relationships

The reason why we have been speaking about the danger of going into the past and spending too much time dwelling on things that have already happened is because each time you do that, you invite the energy of negativity into your current life. If you had a traumatic experience as a child or teenager and cannot move on you will operate from a place of FEAR (Fantasized Events Appearing Real). This will shape you in a negative way and cause you to attract the wrong people into your life. You may find that you get taken advantage of, or that you attract people who are critical or unsupportive of you, or that you never feel that you are important to the friends and loved ones in your life. When you change your attitude, you change everything. Fear keeps us from doing things and perpetuates negative thoughts that have no basis on reality. The things we fear happening, never usually happen, and when they do it is because we have placed so much emphasis on our fears that we invite them into our lives. You may have heard the term “Self Fulfilling Prophecy”, which is an example of fear manifestation. If you believe that you are destined to die of cancer your whole life, there is a good chance you will if the belief is strong enough. If you were keep thinking that you are going to get fired and then it happened, you would feel justified in believing that. It wasn't that you knew what was coming though, which many falsely believe. All that has happened is that you

manifested your thoughts and created a vibrational frequency of that which you fear. It then becomes so strong that the universe simply cannot ignore it and says, “Okay, I guess he/she wants that”. The universe does not distinguish between negative and positive, and simply gives us what we think about most. So if we spend all of our time thinking that we have no friends, or that nobody likes us we will begin to see evidence of that in our life via the relationships we have. These relationships are negative in nature, just as our thoughts are. These people serve as a mirror to the way that we feel inside, they are here because you allowed them into your life and because you felt that they were the type of relationships you deserved. When you feel good about yourself inside and feel happy about who you are, you would not be willing to accept a relationship with someone who doesn’t love and support you or make you feel that you are unworthy of being loved. When you feel good inside you seek out positive, loving people who enrich your life. When you feel bad inside, you tend to attract people who perpetuate those negative beliefs you hold about yourself.

Sometimes we cannot control the negative people in our lives, especially if they are family members or people that we must deal with. In this instance, it serves us best to either limit the contact we have with those people or change the way we view the relationship by changing our own internal attitude. Instead of expecting negative experiences with the person, expect that you might see something new in them. Expect that they will surprise and delight you and show you that they are loving and caring.

Change your thoughts, change your relationships

Often the thoughts that we have about people form the basis for our interactions with them. When we are in the light of love and happiness we operate on a different level than when we are coming from a place of fear and negativity. We can change our relationships with others by changing our thoughts. Sometimes we hold beliefs about people that stem from things that others have said, experiences from the past, or by the way they make us feel. These three things can be very dangerous and damaging to relationships and are not how we should judge the people in our lives. If we judge somebody based on what others have said we are not giving them a chance or the benefit of the doubt. Additionally some people are more affected by the way they feel inside rather than on how others make them feel, so their viewpoints on others can be somewhat distorted if they have low self-esteem. People are unique and so are their individual relationships with each other. Each interaction is different and specific to the people involved. Choosing to believe something that someone else has told you just means that you aren't willing to see the good in that person. Every being has something good about them, but when you believe something negative about someone based on hearsay, you rob them of the opportunity to show you. Additionally, when we judge somebody based on an interaction we had with them from the past, we are being unforgiving. Perhaps they were dealing with something that day and had poor judgment, or maybe there is more to the story than you know. Often people lash out at others when they are dealing with stressful or emotional events at home such as the death of a family member, the end of a relationship, or financial hardship. These circumstances can affect the way that we speak to people, especially when we are

walking around feeling upset or preoccupied with our life circumstances. Don't automatically assume that somebody is a bad person if they lashed out at you; perhaps they were just processing some hard emotions that day. Instead, give them the benefit of the doubt and try to reach out to them again. Forget about what happened in the past, and form a new opinion based on today. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow isn't here yet, so all you have is today. Use today to create the relationships that you want with people. We must also be careful about thinking negatively about people who "make us feel" a certain way. Nobody can make you feel anything without your consent. You choose your feelings each moment of the day. If you are having negative feelings about yourself that are triggered by a relationship with someone, ask yourself what karmic lesson you may need to learn. Perhaps they do something that makes you afraid that you have that same tendency inside of you, or maybe their success triggers a fear in you that you will never be that successful. Whatever you are feeling, you need to examine your inner beliefs and challenge your own attitudes in order to avoid feeling those things. Nobody should ever have the power to make you feel a certain way unless you let them. Your feelings are yours and no one else's. If someone in your life makes negative comments and says mean things to you, you can choose to smile and say "I'm sorry you are feeling so negative" instead of internalizing it and believing what they say.

Changing our thoughts is the most powerful thing we can do to transform our relationships, but it isn't easy, especially if we have always been prone to negative thinking or grew up with parents who (despite their best efforts) impacted our sense of

security and wellbeing. Remember that your thoughts are things, they shape the experiences you have in your life and when you have thoughts that continue to be problematic or recur and cause disruption in your life, it is imperative that you change those thoughts so that you can change your life and relationships. Many people live the same cycles over and over again because they fail to learn the lesson of that cycle. For some people it is with commitment and relationships, and for others it is financial. If you continue to do something over and over again and you don't know why, it is because you are not learning your karmic lesson. You have to change the way you normally deal with something. So if you fall in love too easily, jump into a relationship only to have it in ruins within a year and then repeat the same cycle all over again, ask yourself what you can do differently. Perhaps you need to step back and be more cautious with your feelings, take your time to get to know someone, don't just move in with them immediately or introduce them to your children. Take your time and let things happen naturally. Cycles in relationships happen often and are sometimes easier to spot when you have the advantage of another person being involved. Perhaps you and your husband/wife fight at the end of every month when bills are due. Notice these patterns and work to change them. If you are fighting at the end of every month, ask yourself what you can do to change that next month. Perhaps you can pay some bills earlier, or have your budget discussions sooner than the last week of the month. The important thing is to recognize when something isn't working and ask yourself what you can do about it. Your thoughts form your experience in life and relationships; it is up to you to

recognize when those thoughts don't serve you and when they become a problem. And then, do something about it.

When love is a challenge

Perhaps one of the most important relationships we have is the one we share with our spouse or loved one. This relationship is the one that shows us all of our fears, habits, and anxieties as they come to light. Anything we feel about ourselves will come up in the love relationship. So if we feel inadequate or insecure, it will show in our relationship with our partner. By contrast, if we are overconfident and presumptuous that too will become problematic. Achieving a balance between two people who love each other is a learning process. There are two personalities involved and two sets of skills and beliefs. The key is in accepting each other for who you are, without trying to change the other. It is okay to want to help your partner build confidence, feel better, and believe in themselves – but not if it means criticizing the way they have always been. Because we are so close with our loved ones, we often believe that we have an all-access key to tell them exactly how we feel without regard for our delivery. This is where couples get into trouble because they attack each other's beliefs, morals, attitudes, and work ethics. This creates divide and separation rather than closeness, even if the intention was to help.

If you are in a challenging relationship with a spouse or loved one, consider how your actions contribute to the difficulties that you experience. Do you help or hurt the

situation? Be honest with yourself. Write down all of the things that you do to help and hurt the relationship. If there are things you are doing that are hurting the situation, ask yourself what positive steps you can take to correct it. Are there things that you can do to make the relationship better and to lighten the atmosphere? Most couples have hot button issues that they fight about continually. Often it is financial, division of household chores, and jealousy. If your fights revolve around finances and you can change something (for example your spending habits), why not try a different approach. You can always resume the way you were if it doesn't work. The point is to try something that you haven't tried yet and to show that you are willing to work at the relationship. Similarly your partner should also be willing to try something different to make the relationship work, but be careful about how you bring up the topic of change. You don't want to change who your partner is, but if there is something behavioral that can be changed for the better, there is no harm in trying. Remember when you speak to your partner to only talk about how you feel, avoid telling them what they do or how they feel because that is not for you to decide. Each of you is an individual and can only speak to your own feelings. You can assume what your partners feelings or motivations are, even if you have known them your whole life. Avoid putting words and feelings into their mouth and you will be more successful with your conversations and interactions. Instead of saying "You are lazy. You never help me around the house" try saying "hey babe, do you think you could help me fold this laundry?" or "why don't we divide and conquer on the house this weekend?" Whenever you remove the element of criticism from your conversation and make it more about collaboration, you open up the door to

have positive interactions. Criticizing your partner simply creates negative energy in the relationship. It may make them feel worthless or bad inside, and it will have the exact opposite effect that you had hoped for.

When you have difficult conversations with your spouse, remember to keep the conversation present. Don't bring up things that happened years ago, or relate current issues to ones from the past. This type of thinking will surely destroy you. You must remember that there is nothing more important than this moment right here, and if you want to create change in your relationship, begin here and now – you cannot start something from a past experience. You can only start with what you have right now here in this moment. If you notice yourself thinking or stewing on events of the past, take some deep cleansing breaths in and begin speaking when you are ready to address the now, not the past. You will notice that you will fight less if you don't bring the past into your current conversation with your partner. You will deal with things as they arise and then have the ability to let them go so that they cannot wreak havoc in your relationship. Try making a pact with your partner to only keep your conversations present and to forgive any past transgressions. If both of you agree to do this, your relationship will flourish in unbelievable ways and the things that you used to fight about will no longer be a problem because you will have released them and moved on. You can even choose to create a contract with your partner, so that you both agree to concentrate on current issues, leaving the past in the past where it belongs. Each of you sign the contract and place it on the side of the fridge, or somewhere that you will be reminded of your pact. Many conflicts can be avoided by not focusing on things that

have already happened. Deal with things as they arise in the moment that they happen. Make sure that you don't forget to mention something and then bring it up a week later when you are even angrier. If your partner does something that upsets you, say something in the moment of it happening. Be careful with your words, make sure that you focus on your feelings, but then after you've discussed it, move on and trust that your partner understands how you feel and that it will not occur again.

Family challenges

Our parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and everyone else in our family are the ones that we cannot choose to remove from our lives, unless they do something so horrendous that it is unforgivable. But more often than not, our negative family members are more of an annoyance and an irritation than an unsolvable problem. They know us well, and we know them well so they sometimes take advantage of this by treating us in ways that they would never treat their friends or coworkers. Remember, everyone has their own individual issues, so when a family member verbally attacks you or complains all the time, or burdens you with their problems, chances are it has nothing to do with you. They are battling with their own internal problems and it manifests into their every day relationships. As long as you have your own inner thought garden weeded and taken care of, you will survive these relationships unscathed and be relatively unaffected by even the most negative of family members. We become much less affected by negative people, comments, and circumstances when we take care of our own thoughts, and belief systems.

Sometimes the source of family problems stem from things that have happened in the past that have never been dealt with or vocalized. If you sense that this is the case with one of your family members, take initiative and bring up the tension that exists. Give your family member a chance to get out anything that they feel they need to get out and then find a way to put it behind you and move on. Sometimes not saying anything is worse than venting your frustration. This creates tension that builds over time and the relationship never gets the opportunity to be repaired when neither party is willing to speak about why they are at odds. It isn't always easy to be the one to get things out on the table and in the open, but it is the best thing you can do for your relationship. Try to see things from your family members point of view and mirror their feelings. Try to put yourself in their position and ask how you would feel in the same circumstance. Most disputes stem from inner feelings of unworthiness. We all want to be loved, accepted, and acknowledged and we can lash out, put up our defenses, and become angry when we don't feel this way. Try to see the real source of the feelings, rather than the events that lead to the dispute. You will find that humanizing your family member's feelings will make you feel closer and help you to resolve the situation faster.

As with our love relationships, we cannot change other people and shouldn't try. We can offer advice, a shoulder to cry on, be an example, use our own life to inspire others, and share our own experiences. But we cannot tell somebody else how to live, what to think or what to feel. The second we see ourselves doing this or attempting to do this, we must step back and acknowledge that we need to let others live their own lives.

Benefits of challenging relationships

Every person and relationship that you have in your life is there for a reason. This is true even when it comes to the difficult ones. Relationships teach us lessons about others and ourselves and help us navigate through life. We learn compassion, understanding, sacrifice, love, and change through our relationships. We grow into better people through our challenges with others. We learn to be more patient and understanding and also learn a lot about ourselves, and where our tolerances are. Some people go to great lengths to avoid conflict with others, they will avoid being around certain people because they fear getting into a dispute, or they remove people from their lives who they haven't gotten along with. At times you simply have to make the decision to move on from unhealthy relationships that cause a lot of conflict, but sometimes we need to dig deeper and look at ourselves first. Are we the source of the conflict? Have we seen this happen before in other relationships? Is there anything that can be done to save this relationship or is it best to part ways? We are too quick to end relationships these days rather than get to the heart of the matter and deal with the real issue at hand.

Relationships actually get stronger through conflict. When you are able to have a conflict with a loved one or friend, talk about it, or argue, and then come out on the other side, your relationship is stronger as a result. Conflict teaches us about problem solving and compromise. No two people are exactly alike and the beauty of our human nature is in the diversity of our beliefs, opinions, and preferences. If you are used to getting your own way all the time, it can be very liberating and rewarding to give that up

and let someone else decide for a change. When you experience conflict with someone, don't be so quick to defend your feelings and your position. Instead, ask yourself why they feel so strongly, and what caused them to react in such a way. Try to see things from the opposite viewpoint before you rush into defense mode. Most arguments are pointless and don't accomplish anything because each side is simply worried about defending their unique viewpoint. Neither side is really listening to the other, and instead of hearing the feelings contained in the words, each person is busy readying their next comment (or rebuttal) while giving the illusion of listening. Really try listening to the person you are experiencing a conflict with the next time you face this. Don't allow yourself to form a defense or a follow up comment until you have listened to and absorbed what they have said. It will change your conversation entirely.

The difficult personality

There are so many personality traits that can create challenging relationships; we may even have some of these traits ourselves. The important thing is in recognizing when there is a problem and having the courage to support others even when they are negative. We cannot change a person or their personality, but we can always change how we react to them. The next time you have a relationship challenge with a negative person, ask yourself what you can do to be supportive without succumbing to the negativity and without judging them. It is important to separate the person from the personality traits they exhibit, because often negativity stems from a need to be loved, accepted or feel useful. Rarely are negative people just negative for the sake of being negative. Their negative personality traits may define them in the eyes of others, but

underneath all of that negativity there is a real person with a good heart who is just afraid to come out.

Here are some common personalities and suggestions for how to better manage these challenging relationships:

The Cynic

We all know these people. They view the glass as half empty on a daily basis and always seem to notice what is wrong rather than what is right. You may feel drained and depressed after being in their presence or simply want to go lay down and sleep. Try counteracting their negatives with a positive each time they notice something negative. So if they say “boy the food here really sucks” you can say “yes, but I love our waiter”. By continually showing them an opposing point of view, you may over time influence their viewpoint and assist them in seeing the positive in every situation. Make sure you lead by example with this personality trait, you will come under fire if you attempt to preach to them. You can also mirror their feelings by saying things like “I am sorry that you experienced that. That must have been hard for you.” when they are venting about a negative situation. This will instantly cause them to drop their guard and appreciate that someone has actually heard what they are saying.

The Victim

The victim is the person who believes that they have no control over their life or what happens to them and they refuse to accept responsibility. They blame everyone else for what happens in their lives and rarely feel in control. They often believe that they have

bad luck, that others are out to get them, or that they are trapped in their own negative patterns of the past. They often seek the sympathy of others, rely heavily on other people to do things for them, and have a hard time making decisions. These people tend to lack self-esteem because they refuse to accept responsibility for their own lives, so they don't feel confident about their ability to make good decisions. When dealing with a victim personality the best thing to do is to support and encourage their independence. You can do this with some gentle encouragement. You can also try some redirection by focusing their attention on something other than their misfortunes. Try making them laugh, reinforce their strength and ability to handle any situation. You can say things like "you're a smart cookie. You will bounce back in no time, I'm sure of it." Don't play into their negativity and always offer positive words by not acknowledging their victimization. Continue to gently make light of their victimized comments and offer an alternate viewpoint. Eventually they will feel silly and will slow down on the victim comments or stop all together.

The Manipulator

This is the person who gets whatever they want when they want it. They have to do things their way, all the way. Manipulators are control freaks who cannot fathom the thought of trusting anyone other than themselves. Normally this stems from a negative childhood experience where they learned that they had to fend for themselves. Their sense of security is normally very shaken, which has caused them to be untrusting of others. The manipulator often doesn't even realize that they are manipulating because

they are just so accustomed to having to do that in order to get what they need. The problem with the manipulator is that they take advantage of good people and can prey on the weak-minded. Manipulators are strong-minded and put up walls around their emotions. On the inside they crave love, security and true connection, they just don't know how to get it. The best way to deal with a manipulator is to establish trust first. Start with small things that won't freak them out. Ask them to let you choose a restaurant or an outfit for them. Ask them to put their trust in you. You can also do the fall back exercise where you have them close their eyes and throw their body backwards, at which point you catch them. This demonstrates trust, something that the manipulator knows little about. The establishment of trust, however, will bring you closer. Once you have established trust (you choose how best to do this based on the personality of the person) you can begin to gently challenge their decisions. You don't have to be argumentative, but can be suggestive instead. Say things like "well, since we did it your way last time, can we try it my way now?" This will inevitably make them uncomfortable, but if you have done the work to establish trust, they will likely agree to give up some control. Getting them to step outside of their comfort zone will make them feel happier and they will appreciate the experience.

The Narcissist

The narcissist is someone who believes that the world and everything in it revolves around them. They spend a lot of time thinking about themselves and devote little time or attention to caring for others. They may spend a lot of money, time and attention on

their aesthetic appearance and place a greater emphasis on the outside rather than the inside. Often the narcissist is someone who at some point in their life felt that they weren't good enough, they felt ugly or that no one cared about them, so they went to drastic measures to ensure that they never feel that way again. They falsely believe that if they look good, they will get love and attention from others. The problem with this is that they ignore their inner needs and miss out on the magic of true connection with others because they are too blinded by their dedication to self. It is great to be committed to the journey of oneself, provided that you support the mind, body and soul, and that you can care for and connect with others. The best way to deal with a narcissist is to encourage them to give, share, and connect with others. Invite them to a group meditation or a Reiki session. Try to point out the spiritual side of life and lead by example. Show them that life is more meaningful with spiritual experiences and connections. Don't praise their narcissist traits; instead praise them for things like sharing, doing good for others, and creating meaningful experiences. The narcissist always wants to impress and be told they are doing great, so if they perceive that they are failing in the spirituality department you may be able to help them be more gracious and loving. Show them that love comes from within.

Regardless of the type of relationship it is, dealing with a negative or difficult person is never an easy task, but as long as we are honest with ourselves and tend to our own inner beliefs and thoughts, we will be better equipped to handle it. Never take offence to these challenging relationships, there is always something that can be learned and

even taught. We each have our own unique circumstances that we are dealing with on a day-to-day basis and we don't have an inner glimpse into most people's most inner thoughts and fears. So it is unfair of us to judge the negative people in our lives based on their reactions, comments, and behaviors. They are simply trying to get by in the only way that they know how, and often they have grown up with unhealthy attitudes towards self, or been exposed to traumatic experiences that made them who they are. Trust that underneath the negativity there is a loving, wonderful person who has lots of love to give and simply wants to receive love from others. Changing the way you view negative people by humanizing them will also change the way that they react to you. Don't expect the worst, expect the best. Visualize them coming out of their negative fog and becoming the person they have always wanted to be but have been too afraid to be. You can meditate and send them loving heart-centered energy. They will receive the energy of your love and begin to feel better. Negativity always comes from a fear of some sort. Most of us simply want to be loved, accepted, and acknowledged.

Chapter Nine

Learning to Let Go

Perhaps one of the hardest things we do as humans is let go. Whether it is of a relationship, a limiting belief, a grudge, an attitude, or an argument. Letting go isn't easy when we think that what we are holding onto is what defines us or makes us whole. Sometimes we hold onto things for pride, because we think we are weak if we let go, or that we aren't standing up for our beliefs. More often than not, however, letting go requires more strength and courage than holding on. When we hold onto things that don't serve us, we rob ourselves of the opportunity to create lasting peace and success in our lives. There are so many wonderful things to feel good about, but if we are simply focused on past regrets or pain, we aren't allowing ourselves the chance to feel good inside. Many of us have accumulated a series of disappointments over our lifetime and

continue to refer to these events as evidence that we aren't smart enough, successful enough, attractive enough, etc. What these things actually are, are lessons for us to rise above those feelings of discontent and find the meaning that allows us to change course next time. We hold onto our negative feelings as if they were permanent scars that we must wear daily. The reality is that we choose to carry those things around with us, instead of choosing to let them go. We falsely believe that we have to remind ourselves of all of the mistakes of the past so that we do not repeat them in the future. But all this does is keep us living in the energy of failure and sadness. We relive our regrets as if they are going to suddenly change us one day after years of pontification. As humans we hold on to so much unnecessary mental and emotional baggage, we would feel so much happier and lighter if we were to just see that it doesn't serve us in any way. In fact it hurts us more than anything. We hold onto emotions, mistakes, relationships, pain, beliefs and attachments all with the hope that the information will somehow improve our lives in some substantial way. The truth is that the improvement comes in letting go, not holding on. Letting go is the ultimate freedom.

Imprisoned by identity

We like to define ourselves by many things. Sometimes our careers define us, other times it is our look or something that we are known for doing (ie – giving to charity or hosting great parties). Whatever your “thing” is, be sure to remind yourself that that which you are is greater than your career, your look, or your network of influence. We sometimes become imprisoned by our identities, which makes us go into shock when

we want to change something about our lives, when we lose something, or shift directions. When we are inflexible with who we are it creates pain when something about us suddenly changes. So if you have always been the fat funny guy who loses a hundred pounds, you can't be that fat funny guy anymore. Or if you have been the columnist for a newspaper giving advice for the last ten years but suddenly lose your job, you may feel that you have lost your identity. Who you project to be is not who you are. Those are things you do. They do contribute to your personality and your experience as a human being, but they most certainly do not define you. The fear of losing our identity stems from a fear of being unloved. We want to feel important, respected, acknowledged and loved. This rings true in all areas of our life, and is possibly the reason why we place so much emphasis on our careers and external identities. We want people to think that we have it all together, that we are living life to it's fullest and that we are the definition of success. But really, what most of us need to do is redefine what success means. Does success mean losing ourselves in a job so that we can say we are an investor, a writer, a marketer, an entrepreneur etc.? That doesn't do anything for the inner you. In fact your inner self doesn't care what job you do, all it cares about is whether you are fulfilling your soul's purpose. But if you care more about external appearances than what is happening within your own body, mind and soul, I would argue that you are not a success.

How can we stop caring so much what others think and redefine success to be more inwardly focused? One way we do this is to stop defining ourselves by our past. Sure you have had success in the past, and many people live their present lives on the glory days

of the past, but let it go. That was then, not now. Similarly if you are defining yourselves by your past failures, you will never give yourself the opportunity to shine in the present moment because you keep holding yourself down out of fear you will fail. You are not the sum of all of your mistakes or the definition of all of your fears. You are so much more than that and in order to believe that and be the best you that you can be, you simply have to let go of who you think you are and embrace the now. Be who you need to be in each moment that you live. You do not need to be labeled, have a title, or have the world have a clear definition of you as long as you are living in the present moment. In the present moment you can breath and take all of that identity pressure off of yourself and just enjoy being human. This doesn't mean that you don't do the things you normally do or change your personality. It just means that you stop putting so much pressure on yourself to be that person who you think you have to be. Stop trying to live up to the false beliefs that you have imprisoned your identity with. The ego constantly wants to be stroked, defined, and wants you to go out there confidently with a label and a title for who you are and defend your position to the world. The ego wants you to back up who you are with evidence and proof, which means proving your worth. This is complete nonsense and is one of the things that we must constantly be aware of. The ego stops us from listening to others, considering alternate viewpoints, or from seeing ourselves for who and what we really are.

Letting go of the past

Often letting go of the past can be impossible. We remind ourselves routinely of all the times we failed, we felt pain, or we made mistakes. We remind ourselves of what others did to us, the way they made us feel, and how it has affected us today. We remind ourselves that these things must be remembered so that they are not repeated, and so that we can hold on to how that felt in an attempt to somehow feel better. Do you see how crazy this sounds? It does. And this is exactly what we do. There is a reason why enlightenment is only possible in the present moment. You won't see Buddhist monks dredging up their painful childhood memories or bringing up traumatic events with each other to compare notes. They are too focused on the beauty and magic of this very moment. And they smile. They smile because there is no reason to frown, to cry, or to feel bad. The present moment is perfect and you are handling it just fine because you are living it now. There is no pain or fear in the present moment. It is here now and so are you. Don't miss the opportunity to really experience life. When we are too focused on the past we aren't really living. In fact we are stuck in the old days when things were different. Sometimes we are so stuck there that we spend hours per day thinking about things from the past. The past belongs in the past. It has happened and will not happen again ever in the same way, but you must focus on being here now. We do not drive backwards in a car on the highway, we drive forwards; constantly moving forward responding to what happens on the road in the moment that it happens. We adjust our speed when we need to, we change lanes, we signal to move over, and we stop when we need to. But everything we do in a car is in the moment because we simply would not be able to get anywhere if we were going backwards or attempting to skip over

what was right in front of us. Think of your life in the same way. It is not the destination that matters, but the journey. Your vehicle is your human vessel. You cannot drive backwards because you are on a journey and your journey will not be very enjoyable if you keep turning around to go back to where you came from. You can certainly think fondly of memories from the past, but allow those thoughts to go through you and then welcome back the present. And if your memories from the past aren't serving you and are keeping you in a place of pain, sadness, or regret – stop thinking them.

If you are haunted by memories from your past or reminders that you are not good enough, attractive enough, or successful enough based on something that happened – make a pact with yourself to stop feeling that way. Write yourself a list that documents all of the ways in which your past thinking is hurtful and harmful to your current life. Write down missed opportunities, harmful emotions, fears, and things that have prevented you from living the life that you want to live. Record as many things as you can think of, as long as they are based on your past-based thinking and the ways in which it has negatively affected your life. Next on a separate piece of paper, write down all of your successes. It doesn't matter how small or trivial they seem, write them down. Anything and everything that you are good at, have been successful with, or feel good about. You can write down things like being a good parent, a good gardener, an artist, and being helpful and loving to others. Write down all of the things that make you a success and then spend some time looking at what is on the page. Now take the other page where you wrote down the effects of your negative thinking and observe it. Read each line carefully and ask yourself if you really deserve to feel like that. Is that how you

want to feel each day? After observing the page and recognizing how harmful those thoughts have been to your life, you are going to release them. You can choose to burn the page in a safe environment, crumple it and throw it in the garbage can, cut the paper up into pieces, or shred it. Discard of that page however feels best to you. This is your way of releasing what no longer serves you. You don't need those thoughts anymore and have seen the damage it has done to your life. You are letting go of past-based harmful thinking. Now take your list of successes and read it over. Notice how good you feel reading through the things that make you a success. Post this list somewhere visible to remind yourself daily of all the things you are. Add to it whenever you need to and refer to it when you are tempted to journey back into past self-loathing.

The pains of the past have absolutely no bearing on who you are now. You are a different person in each moment of life and can be whoever you'd like in each moment of life. You can choose to change right now if you want to. The present moment is always the right time. Change doesn't come from the past or the future, it happens now and there is no better time. Release your painful memories of the past and embrace the present moment and the glory of who you are now.

Releasing attachment

We become very attached to our human way of life. We often define ourselves by our attachments. We become attached to lifestyles, possessions, relationships, and beliefs. Think about how free you would feel if you were not held down by your attachments.

We talked about identity, which is another form of attachment. We become tied to beliefs about our identity and imprisoned by those beliefs. By accepting the now for what it is, you avoid that harmful way of thinking. The present moment is enough. You must see this and believe it. We are often too busy trying to relive an attachment from our past or create an attachment to our future, that we miss what is right here in front of us. The present moment is perfect and we must accept it for what it is and ourselves in this moment. You, exactly as you are, are perfect in this moment. Accept yourself and know that everything that you are is perfect right now. Trust that you are headed in the right direction without the need to jump into future-based illusions and fears.

If you are experiencing difficulty holding onto feelings, you can use meditation as a great way to release yourself from those emotions. Many of us walk around in fear and never allow ourselves the opportunity to enjoy life because we are too busy trying to protect ourselves. This is an attachment to safety. Attachment to safety is dangerous because there is no danger, only perceived danger. FEAR is really Fantasized Events Appearing Real and does not serve us in any way, other than to prevent us from stepping outside of our comfort zone. We become attached to the way that we do things, to our comfort, and surroundings. So much so that leaving these things becomes stressful to us, so we have a hard time trying. If we never tried to experience something outside of our comfort zone, however, we would never appreciate life for what it is. We would stagnate and become bitter and bored with life. Release the attachment to your comforts by accepting each opportunity as it arises. If there is a new opportunity in the

moment to try something new or different than you have in the past, jump at the chance to experience it without fear of the future.

Many of us are attached to the idea that we are a certain way and have always been that way. This prevents us from having to change, or try to be anything other than what we already know. What a shame. How can we ever really shine if we are afraid to step into the light? Instead of thinking about who we are and attempting to define ourselves by the attachment we have to our own beliefs, embrace newness in each moment. Try taking up a new skill or hobby. Learn something different that will give you a boost and release your ideas about who you think you are. You can challenge yourself by taking on something that you have always wanted to do but perhaps thought that you couldn't. Learning new skills keeps us living in the moment by allowing us to continually redefine ourselves by the moment in which we live, this helps us release our attachment to unhealthy patterns of thinking and negative beliefs we hold about ourselves.

We hold onto many things. Think about your inbox. Why do you need all of those emails going back five years? What would happen if you just deleted everything from before today? Would the world crumble? Would your business or job be in danger? Probably not. But we hold onto things because we think we may need them later on. We tell ourselves this story out of fear. We are attempting to keep ourselves safe, our butts covered, and our comfort level intact. I challenge you to test this theory. If you aren't ready to delete the emails in your inbox, why not just delete the ones from last year? Or how about your bookmarks folder on your computer? When was the last time you

checked out your bookmarks? Do you really use those? We surf the Internet and find something cool, we bookmark it for later, but rarely do we go back. The reason is because we appreciate it in the moment, but the moment passes. Our attachment to that moment is what causes us to bookmark the page. We want to relive the experience of reading that article, or we think we may need that website in the future. But again, we are projecting into what we think we might need in the future instead of accepting and releasing each moment as it comes.

Perhaps one of the most obvious forms of attachment is to our stuff. Our possessions have such a hold on us that we have entire garages, basements and storage lockers filled with things that we “might” need one day. I challenge you to ask yourself if you really need all of those things. Chances are, holding onto those things creates more stress in your life than it would if you were to just let them go. Why not get the family together and go through a weekend of de-cluttering where you each rid the house of things that are no longer needed, used, or important. If you have boxes of stuff in the basement that haven’t been looked at in two years, call a junk removal company and haul them out. Don’t go through them or trick yourself into thinking that you had better “check” to make sure there is nothing you’ll need. If you haven’t used it in more than a year, you’re not going to need it. You are holding onto stuff that takes up space in your mind and life. They are things and you don’t need them. Trinkets, appliances, artwork, old sports equipment, clothes, lamps, and toys; get rid of them. Only keep what you truly need. If you get into the habit of giving things away once per month, your life will feel clear and you will have the space to breathe. Humans get so attached to

possessions, but we also become stressed out by those attachments. We refuse to let go of things out of fear that we may need them someday, but that very attachment causes us to feel flustered and creates anxiety. Think about the way you feel when you walk into a basement or a storage room that is filled with things that you no longer need. You inherently know on an inner level that you don't need all of that stuff. And that knowledge is demonstrated by the way you feel when you walk into the room.

Relationships and letting go

Relationships are one of the biggest areas that we need to practice the art of letting go. We hold onto relationships themselves, ideas we have of people and who they are, interactions from the past, anger and pain. All of these things are harmful to who we are and prevent us from living in the present and experiencing the most out of our relationships. We become attached to people very easily, which is why it is often hard to leave a relationship that no longer serves us, whether it is a love relationship or a business relationship. We often feel that we will be at some kind of a disadvantage if we let people go. We fear that nobody will love, acknowledge, or respect us so we stay in what feels comfortable to us, even when we know it isn't good for us. This is the way many relationships are. Parents stay in unhealthy relationships "for the kids" and expose them to the energy of an unloving, unhappy relationship instead of doing what they know is right, which is letting go. People stay in unhappy jobs because they are loyal to their boss or a friend who works there and don't want to disappoint anybody. They do what is best for others rather than what they know is best for themselves. We do this

because we are nurturing our need to feel safe and comfortable, while ignoring what our inner voice is screaming at us.

Another thing we do in relationships is hold onto anger and events of the past. When we have been hurt by our loved one or a friend, we sometimes hold onto that feeling and bring it up every time there is a disagreement or something doesn't go the way we had planned. We use this past hurt as "proof" that we shouldn't trust anybody and that we are right. Our ego wants to be right and protect us from perceived dangers, this is especially true in a relationship. The problem with this, however, is that you can never truly learn forgiveness if you cannot let go of a painful event or circumstance that you have experienced with another person unless you leave it in the past. What a person does in their past isn't always an indicator of what they will do in the future. This is especially true with humans. Look what happens when you make mistakes, you carry them around with you like heavy bags reminding yourself never to do that again. Of course there are also times when you are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past too, but don't assume that someone is going to hurt you again if they have in the past. Always expect the best and you will be delighted with the energy that those thoughts attract. Holding onto a negative attachment of someone based on a previous event holds you and them a prisoner of the past, and you will never allow the relationship to flourish into what it could be. When someone hurts you, assume that they were having a bad day, were dealing with some internal issues. Don't make it about you. The only thing that makes it about you is your need to hold onto it and use it as evidence in your current life. Let it go and move on. You will feel better and so will the other party in the

relationship. How would you like to encounter a giant billboard on the side of the road every 5 miles containing your biggest mistake every time you went out? That would feel pretty awful after a while. Holding a persons past mistakes over their head and reminding them about it frequently is the equivalent. It isn't fair and it is something that you (not them) need to let go of.

Many couples have circular arguments about the same things. Sometimes it's finances, household chores, or jealousy. Whatever your hot button issue, your inability to move forward and get over it stems from your attachment to your own belief. When you allow your partner to think and feel what they want to without trying to convince them or sway them to your side of the figurative coin, you send out the message that you respect him or her as an individual. This will create greater peace in the relationship. You don't have to believe the same things, be the same person, or share exactly the same views about how the relationship should work. Try to hear what your partner is saying the next time you have an argument. Listen without the need to defend your position or sway him or her to your way of thinking. Mirror your partners thoughts by saying things like "I hear how you are feeling". This will show that you are in fact listening and trying to see things from their point of view.

Changing your perspective

Letting go is going to mean changing your perspective on a lot of things. One area that we often become attached to is the idea of outcomes. We embark on our goals and activities with a specific outcome in mind, and when we do not achieve that outcome or

something beyond our control happens we become upset and frustrated. If we were just to go into something with an open mind and an open heart, not thinking about the outcome but just the experience itself as it is happening, we would be happier and feel at peace. We only become disenchanted by our own self-imposed need to control the outcome. Let it go and accept things as they happen without the need to push things into what you think they need to be. Just allow things to be what they are, as they are. Trust that the universe will deliver the exact outcome that is needed in each moment of life. If you are attached to specific outcomes that keep you living an illusion, release those outcomes and accept what is. Many of us have these false ideas that things will be perfect “when”. We think that we will finally be happy when we achieve our goal weight, or find the love of our life, or get the perfect job. These are all examples of attachment to outcomes that prevent us from living in the now. If you are waiting to be skinny you are telling yourself that you are not good enough right now, as you are. Only when you begin to accept yourself right now, will you be able to invite change into your life. Because when you are tied to outcomes that aren’t here yet you are spending all of your time thinking about what you don’t have, which attracts more of what you don’t want. We attract what we think about most, so if all you are thinking about is what you don’t have, guess what? You will continue to keep attracting more of what you don’t want. By contrast, when you release the need to cling to those outcomes and accept yourself and your life for what it is today, you actually open the door to attract the things that you want. Have you ever noticed how women who can’t get pregnant obsess and fret over the fact that they can’t get pregnant? Eventually, after it takes a toll on

their sanity, their relationship and their emotional state, they give up and leave it to the universe. Often what happens is they quickly get pregnant when they stop thinking that they can't get pregnant and just live their lives without the stress and worry. The same happens with relationships. People who continually believe that their lives will be complete when they meet that special someone continue to focus on the fact that the person hasn't arrived in their life yet. Because they are so focused on the fact that this person hasn't arrived, the person never does arrive. The universe simply gives us what we think about most, so if we are thinking about not having something – then we continue to not have it. But when we stop thinking like that, and just live our lives accepting what comes to us, we often find that we get the very thing that we had been hoping for, almost effortlessly. Don't sabotage your life by tying your hopes to outcomes and then living in the energy of lack. It is fine to have a goal and strive to achieve something, but once you establish a goal, take steps to achieve that goal and don't spend time thinking about the fact that you haven't achieved it yet. Trust that you will achieve it when the time is right and continue to live your life with your goal in the back of your mind, without obsessing over it or worrying that you won't achieve it. Dwelling on things doesn't do anything positive for you. In fact it is harmful to your sense of wellbeing and your ability to manifest what you desire in life. Dwelling makes us feel uncomfortable, sad, upset, angry and uneasy about our lives. Letting go feels good. It feels lighter and easier. Trusting the universe to deliver what is right for our lives at the time that we need it is the best way to get what you want.

Simplify

Our lives can all stand for a bit of simplification. We have too much stuff, too many commitments, and too much emotional baggage. Creating a simpler life is a great way to invite peace and happiness into your life. When you let go of attachments, you are letting in happiness. Think about the ways in which your life could stand for some simplification. Perhaps your house can use some de-cluttering. Our minds function better when we are surrounded by cleanliness and organization. By contrast we feel stressed out and chaotic when our environment is messy and unorganized. If your house is getting too full of stuff get rid of it. Clothes is a great place to start. We often hang onto things that we haven't worn in years thinking that we will fit into them again. While that is a nice thought, why not give them to someone who can use them now and treat yourself to something new when that time comes? Holding onto things that don't fit also creates negativity because it is a reminder of what you're not and causes you to think about the fact that you are not happy with who and what you are right now in this very moment. When de-cluttering your house you don't have to throw out absolutely everything beyond a basic necessity, but most people can cut back on the amount of stuff they have simply by cleaning out cupboards, drawers and storage spaces. Try giving a bag of clothes to Goodwill every 3-6 months. You will feel so much better going through your stuff and clearing it out. We also hold onto things like knick-knacks, cards, magazines and memorabilia – most of which we never end up using again or wanting to look at. We just keep it because we think it holds some sort of sentimental value. De-cluttering your home will help you simplify your life and create more peace.

Another thing we often do is over-extend ourselves. We put our kids in too many activities, we commit to a ton of social events and dinners, and then end up feeling continually stressed out by time and time commitments. Take a look at your calendar and see if the division of responsibility is equal among your family members. Is there room to spread around some of the responsibility? Perhaps you and your spouse can alternate taking the kids to their extra-curricular activities. Make sure that you have at least one to two days for rest and relaxation per week. If you are living every week in the fast lane you are going to feel disconnected and burned out. Take a look at what is on your schedule. Do you absolutely need to do all of those things? If you don't create space for yourself to relax and enjoy some downtime you will live in a constant state of chaos and fear because you will perpetually worry about missing something, forgetting something, or not achieving the outcome that you had hoped for. Be flexible with your schedule and allow yourself the opportunity to just do nothing every once in a while. Follow your intuition about these things. If you've had a long day at work and aren't really feeling up to going to your spinning class, don't feel guilty. Just take some time for yourself to relax and enjoy the moment of relaxation. Don't worry that missing that one event will lead to future missed classes and the ultimate failure of your personal body goals. That is harmful snowball thinking that is rooted in an outcome. Trust the universe and your intuition to guide you where you need to go and listen to the subtle signs that will help you in knowing where you can simplify your life.

There has been a positive and growing trend towards local food, community and business. Increasingly we have felt the disconnect between our lives and our community as we have embraced globalization and big brand thinking in the past. We are beginning to crave connection with our community now more than ever. So if you find yourself feeling disgruntled about your one hour train commute to the big city in the mornings, or your forty five minute drive in bumper-to-bumper traffic, you are not alone. Chances are if you are feeling this way, it is because you are looking to simplify your working life. You may be attached to the idea that in order to be successful you have to commute to the city, or that you will never find as good of a job locally, or that your career will suddenly plummet if you take a job locally. All of these things are fears and are all based on outcome-based thinking. Imagine how happy you would be to ride your bike to work each day, to walk down the street, or drive five minutes instead of sixty. These are huge benefits to simplifying your life and finding work in your local community. Not only that but the sense of community you will feel in connecting with others who live in your city will be rewarding and create happiness and new connections. When you commute and work outside of your city, you are too busy commuting back and forth to spend time with anyone new. Working in your city allows you to connect with people based on where you live and work. You also become more in tune with what is happening in your city and local community. This is a great way to simplify your life. Another option is in working from home. Many companies now allow employees to work from home a few days per week. Talk to your boss and see if this is an option for you, especially if you have a long commute to work. You may find that your boss is more supportive than you

think. There are many ways in which you can simplify your working life. Meditate on the ways in which you'd like to improve your working life and release those thoughts to the universe. Trust that you will be faced with the opportunity to make a change in a positive and meaningful way.

Stay present

At every opportunity you should seek out the present moment. There is nothing more satisfying and rewarding than staying present with your thoughts and life. When we are present, we are letting go without even realizing it. Being present means forgetting about the pain of the past, the worry of the future or obsessing about outcomes. We are able to experience simple pleasures like the sound of a baby's laugh, the feel of the wind in our hair, or the way the warm sun feels on our face. We miss all of these things when we are busy in the past and future with our thoughts. We miss the magic of life. It isn't always easy to stay present with our continual mental chatter, however, with a little bit of patience and practice we can do it and get better at it every day.

Meditate

Spend some time each morning if you can in meditation. Maybe you have ten minutes or a half-hour. Don't worry so much about how much time you have to dedicate, just commit to doing it as often as you can. Make sure that you have a quiet place to do this where you will not be interrupted by a telephone, email messages, children or pets. This is your time to connect with your inner self, to breathe in peace and happiness and

release negativity, stress and worry. Focus only on your breath and allow your senses to experience the present moment. If your thoughts try to drift into the future, gently steer them back into the room by focusing again upon your breathing.

Stop multitasking

Multitasking doesn't work and only makes you more flustered. Instead attack one thing at a time and complete things as you need to. You may find it helpful to create a "to do" list in the morning to outline the priorities for your day. Sometimes things will come up that cause you to have to deviate from your list, but do your best to focus on one thing at a time. You will find that your productivity increases and you feel less anxiety as a result. If you are worried about fitting everything in you can also assign yourself a timeline for each activity and once you have given each item the allocated amount of time, move on to the next activity. Doing things one at a time is a smarter way to work and will keep you smiling and feeling productive.

Observe your emotions

The present moment is never stressful because we are living it. Be mindful of your emotions and recognize when you are trailing into past pain or future fear. If you catch yourself in the midst of stressful thoughts from the past or future, immediately bring your attention and focus back to the present by observing your surroundings, focusing on your breathing, and using your senses. You can also shout "STOP" in your mind to help. Your emotions are an indicator of how you are doing. The present moment is the

only one you need to think about because yesterday is gone and tomorrow isn't here yet, so remember to keep yourself here in the now. Use your emotions as a guide.

Letting go means many things. It is about beliefs, attachments, possessions, and outcomes. Being tied to these things creates mental clutter and stress that we don't need and doesn't serve us. If letting go seems like a daunting task for you, write down a list of all of the things you would like to learn to let go of, big and small. Then, approach them one by one. Practice daily and trust that your focus on letting go of these things will allow you to release negative energy, inviting peace and happiness into your life. You don't need to be anyone other than exactly who you are in this moment right now. You are perfect, divine, and so much more than the labels people place upon you. True happiness is found in peace, not wealth, power or success. Peace with ourselves and the world around us is the only way to obtain lasting happiness. Think about the freedom that comes in letting go. You can shed yourself of all those negative beliefs you've held about yourself for years, all those past hurts and regrets, and all fear from the future. Embracing the now and letting go is quite simply the best thing you can do for your life and sense of wellbeing. You have everything to gain, and nothing to lose, except of course all that negative energy you've been lugging around.

Chapter Ten

Attracting Rewarding Relationships

Relationships and the people we have in our lives have a tremendous impact on our overall health and wellbeing. When we surround ourselves with wonderful people who love and support us, we thrive in life and walk around with our head held high and a sense of accomplishment. By contrast, our lives can feel weighted by unsupportive and negative relationships. We are affected by those around us and cannot deny the influence others have on our wellbeing. While the people in our lives have a tremendous impact on us, we also must take responsibility for this. The energy that you create on a daily basis is what attracts people to you. Just like the law of attraction works to attract things into to your life that you think about most, the relationships that

are in your life are there because of the energy you created at one time. For this reason, it is important that you are more aware of your own energy, as appose to the actions and behaviors of others. Your energy and vibrational frequency is the most important aspect in the type of life you create for yourself. If you have room in your life to improve the relationships in your life and perhaps attract new healthier ones, then you must look first inwards at your own beliefs, attitudes and energy. Are you happy? Do you feel that you are where you want to be? If not, why? An important step in understanding yourself is understanding your beliefs, many of which may be holding you back. Sometimes we truly feel in the dark about why we can't seem to land a good job, or find our soul mate, or get ahead with our finances. If we don't reflect on our decisions, thoughts, and attitudes about things it shouldn't be a surprise that we have no awareness surrounding these things. We must spend time focusing on that which we want to change, otherwise we will be destined to repeat the mistakes of the past. If we don't think about the ways in which we can improve, there will be no improvement. And if we don't spend time thinking about our limiting beliefs, we cannot change them. So before you go kicking people out of your life, or putting out wanted ads for new friends and loved ones – think about your self and your own attitudes about life. Is there room for improvement? Are you doing anything that is perhaps holding you back from achieving the life that you desire? If your life isn't where you want it to be, the answer may be in the discovery of self. A little bit of reflection may be exactly what you need.

Raising your self awareness

Many of us go throughout our lives doing for others, giving to people, and reacting to life's circumstances without stopping to think about what we actually want for ourselves. You will find that the universe provides for you when you set your intention on that which you want most. Unfortunately for many of us, we spend far too much time thinking about what we don't want, which attracts (yes you guessed it) more of what we don't want. But how do you switch from thinking about the negatives to the positives? How do you go from being stuck to experiencing the life that you have always dreamed of? Well it starts with a bit of self-reflection. This part isn't easy if you are a people pleaser who does for others and someone who rarely thinks about your own needs. You are going to have to carve out some time for yourself to focus on your own needs and put them first. Know first and foremost that this isn't selfish or greedy of you to need time for yourself. This is part of the human experience and the discovery of self. You will never get where you want to go without taking time for yourself to assess where you are and where you're headed. If you enjoy living on the seas of life like a ship without a sail, then by all means, stop reading here. But if you want to be the captain of your ship and lead it in the direction that you want to go, then you simply must take control of your own life and allow it to flourish in the ways that you want. The relationships you have in your life support your way of life and are a direct manifestation of your inner beliefs, desires, and attitudes about the world around you.

When was the last time you asked yourself "what do I truly want"? Many of us don't ask this question and are surprised when we don't get what we want. But if you don't ask

for what you want or set your intention upon it, how can you possibly expect to manifest it? You can't. It's that simple. But in order to ask for what you want, you first need to know what it is that you want for your life. This is where a little bit of self-reflection comes in. Spend some time thinking about this as deeply as you can. There are many things you can do to establish the right mindset. The following two suggestions will help you raise your self-awareness if you feel like you are in need of a little direction in your life.

1. Meditation

You know the benefits of meditation and always think to yourself "I should meditate more", but you never seem to find the time. Your inability to take a few minutes out per day to meditate is partially to blame if you are feeling lost and thrust about by life. If you can't find a few minutes per day to quiet the mind, breathe and focus on silence, how can you expect to find that clarity in your daily life? Clarity comes to those who seek it out. Living in a constant state of reaction is not the kind of life that is conducive to finding clarity. Meditation should be your best friend, especially in times of uncertainty. We often feel that we need to act, when many times we simply need to do the opposite of that and meditate before we act. Adding this simple step can mean the difference between going down the right path and experiencing the pain or frustration of the wrong path. If your higher self isn't guiding you to a decision and you aren't sure about something, meditate on it. You will be glad you did.

2. Journaling

The act of writing down our feelings every day is a tremendous help when it comes to identifying and understanding our feelings. Writing can put you in a trance like state and often what comes out is not what you may have expected. Through regular journaling you may discover habits in your thinking or attitudes you hold. At first you may not know what to write, but just writing will allow the energy of your thoughts and feelings to flow through you and onto the page. Journaling provides you with the opportunity to experience epiphanies or realizations about your life because you are simply taking the time to reflect and think about things that are happening in your life at the present moment. All too often the present moment passes us by without us noticing it or even acknowledging it. So we miss the present moment, and we move into the next as we think about the future and the destination rather than the journey itself. The problem is that we never get *there* (wherever that is), because *there* is not the goal of life, *here* is. And when you journal, you are *here*.

Your energy vs. the energy of others

Have you ever walked into a room and suddenly felt incredibly uncomfortable? Your social interactions become awkward, you feel self-conscious and shy and out of sorts. You may be under the stressors of social anxiety and truly feel uncomfortable in a room full of strangers, or you may be picking up on other people's energy and feeling the anxiety of others in the room around you. This can happen with loved ones and family members, especially those who you are around a lot. Ever notice how simply being

around your spouse when they are in a bad mood puts you in a bad mood? This is energy transference and it happens often without us even knowing it. With a little bit of focus, however, we can learn to identify when we are picking up on the energy of others and when it is our own energy that is creating our emotional state.

First let's focus on your own energy, because that is the most important, since it is the only one that you can change. You have the ability to choose how you feel and react to things on a moment-by-moment basis. If you get it wrong one day, no problem, you have a brand new day to practice the following day. That is the beauty of the 24-hour cycle. It affords us the ability to recreate our lives each day. We can choose to be a victim of circumstance, or we can take control over the way we feel and become the architect of the life we want. When we get bad news or something frustrates us, we tend to outwardly display that frustration with verbal and/or physical cues. You can often spot a stressed out person from across the room by any number of physical cues. They may bite their nails, pace, pull their hair, sweat, breathe heavily, or just look visibly frustrated. The same is true with you, although you are probably less aware of how you appear when you are in that state. The fact that others can see your frustration isn't the problem, but the fact that you transmit that energy to others and strengthen the frequency of the negative energy **is** the problem. And it's a problem because it means that you end up feeling bad for a longer period of time. When you are aware of your own energy, and you know this, you can change it and dig yourself out before it is too much of a problem. This doesn't mean that you will never be affected by stress, sadness

or frustration again. It just means that when it happens, you will be better equipped to deal with it in a way that is the most beneficial to your wellbeing.

Usually when something happens that puts you in a negative state of mind, it can be traced back to something; a hurtful conversation, an unfortunate circumstance, some bad news, or a negative self-observation. Most of the time there is a way to pinpoint why you are feeling the way you are feeling and you will be able to ascertain what it was that put you there. The trick when this happens is to remember to not let one negative event snowball into multiples. Often when we are in a negative state of mind we become frustrated by everything around us, and all of a sudden that one thing we were angry or upset about is transformed into a variety of other things that also upset us. Negativity has a domino effect and is powerful enough to attract further negativity if we allow it to happen. Always remember that the most important aspect of living a peaceful and happy life is your inner feelings. Regard them closely and protect them at all costs. Do whatever is necessary to snap yourself out of a negative state and into a positive one. Call a friend who makes you laugh, make a cup of tea, read a funny email, watch your favorite show, or go outside into nature and enjoy the outdoors. Get good at identifying your own negative states and learn to catch them before they get too far. You may be having a great day and be in a good mood until all of a sudden you receive some news that makes you angry, your energy changes and you express physical stress cues such as frowning, clenching your jaw, or pacing. You know yourself best and are the best person to identify your own negative states, but if you aren't sure about what

you do when you are in a negative state of mind, ask someone. Your spouse, children, or a close friend will likely be able to tell you what you do when you are in a negative state of mind. Listen to what they say, without the need to defend or protect yourself and then use that information the next time you become agitated. Identifying when you are in a negative state is the first step towards changing your state. And why would you want to do that? So that you don't continue to attract further negativity and manifest additional negative outcomes in your life. Nobody wants to feel bad, experience bad luck, or walk around feeling as if the world is against them. You are the only person who can change this state and it must be a conscious decision.

Other people, especially those who are close to us can also have a profound impact our state of mind. But we must be weary and protective of our own energy so that we don't take on the emotions and energy of someone close to us who is in a negative state. We can still be sympathetic and supportive without sinking to the emotional depths that those closest to us may be in. Sometimes the best way we can support our loved ones when they are feeling bad is by being strong, gentle and kind. Recognize when the energy is not your own. If you feel yourself beginning to become sad or angry after talking to a loved one about an unfortunate event that they are experiencing, ask yourself if the energy you are experiencing is yours or theirs. If you hadn't talked to your loved one, would you be feeling like this? You must protect your energy field from the invasion of external negativity so that you can objectively support your loved ones without losing your own sense of inner peace.

When a loved one is going through a difficult time, be there for them to hold their hand, be a shoulder to cry on, and listen to them in their time of need. But do not take on the burden of their negative emotions or think that you must also feel what they are feeling in order to be sympathetic. Focus on being loving and supportive without the need to identify with the negative emotions of others. Mirror their feelings by showing that you sympathize with how they are feeling. Use the same techniques you use on yourself to try to assist them in coming to a better place. Perhaps they will feel better after just having you there to listen, or maybe they need to get out of the house and go for a walk, or perhaps a nice gesture like you bringing them a cupcake or a bowl of soup is all that's needed to warrant a smile. Use loving gestures and supportive means to make them feel better. You don't have to feel the same way that they feel or angrily repeat the events that have caused them to be in a negative place. Simply listen, love, support and smile. Your generosity, strength, and love are the things that will have the greatest impact. Your loved ones will remember how supportive you were during their time of need and will likely reciprocate by being supportive to you.

When you walk into a room, a party, or even your workplace – be mindful of how you are feeling when you walk in. This way if you experience a sudden shift in your mood or energy, you will know that you are picking up on someone else's energy. If you do find yourself being affected by external energy that is not your own, find a quiet place and do some deep breathing exercises. Meditate on feeling peaceful, happy and content. If

you have a visual representation of your happy place, go there. Perhaps it is on a beach with waves crashing against the shore and birds flying overhead, or maybe it is the tranquil setting of a forest with the smell of crisp autumn air. Your happy place can be whatever you want it to be, so long as the visualization of that place makes you feel at ease and content, like all is well in the world.

Expectations

Sometimes the relationships in our lives go sour because we place too many expectations on them. This is especially true in romantic relationships. We expect our partner to live up to the expectations that we have set forth and probably never vocalized. In our minds, we carry the image of who and what they are supposed to be and what they are supposed to do for us. We often do this without analyzing our own energy and effort. Which, is where we all must start before we begin placing expectations on others. When you are mindful of your own behavior, actions, and contributions in any relationship, you create the foundation for a positive relationship. Many marital experts will tell you “give more than you expect to receive” in relation to making a marriage work. I believe this is true in all relationships. Don’t expect that everyone is going to reciprocate your generosity, love the same way that you love, or mirror your contributions. Instead, love without expectation. Give without the hope for reciprocity, and share without the need to have it returned. Only then, will you begin to attract the type of relationships that you desire and will you begin to change the ones you currently have.

Expectations can breed inner anger, resentment, jealousy, and guilt, all products of the ego. Relationships do not benefit from these types of negative emotions and can become strained and challenging. Placing expectations on others is unfair and is often setting them up for failure. The expectations we place on others often stem from our own life history, emotional needs, and past hurts. In these circumstances, they have no relevance to the person we place them on, and therefore cannot possibly succeed.

Expectations come from our inner sense of insecurity and our desire for safety and predictability. It is an attempt to control others, even when we don't believe that we are that type of person. Letting go of expectations can be one of the most freeing and liberating things you ever do in your life. You leave your relationships and life direction in the capable hands of the universe and just trust that things will work out the way that they are meant to. Your relationships will flourish when you release the need to control them and allow others to be who they are going to be. Your life will unfold magically and you will end up exactly where you are meant to be.

When relationships are unhealthy

Surrounding yourself with healthy and rewarding relationships unfortunately sometimes means having the wisdom to know when relationships are unhealthy. Relationships should always be two-sided and be mutually beneficial to each person in the relationship. But sometimes relationships can become unbalanced and feel heavy and strained. This can happen if one person is putting all of the effort in and feeling

resentful, or if one person is a giver and the other a taker, or in the presence of control, jealousy or manipulation. There are a variety of reasons why a relationship may be unhealthy. It is your job to identify which ones do not serve you and your wellbeing. If you are left feeling uncomfortable, angry, and exhausted after each encounter, then perhaps the relationship no longer works. It is okay to take on a nurturing supportive role in the lives of others provided that you enjoy that role and that you aren't being taken advantage of. But the moment you feel taken advantage of, you must ask yourself "is this an isolated event, or is this a recurring theme in this relationship?"

If ending a relationship, such as a long-term friendship or a relationship with a family member is not an option, consider the ways in which you can limit or reduce the impact of the relationship on your life. Sometimes we become trapped by our unhealthy relationships and feel obligated to be around people that don't make us feel good inside. If this is the case, you must take steps to begin to branch out with your relationships and spend time with people who are a positive influence on your life and who you feel good spending time with. If there is a lack of these positive people in your life, seek them out and start new relationships. There are a lot of ways for you to meet new people in your community, whom you can begin new positive relationships with.

Some of these are:

- Join a local club, group or meetup
- Volunteer your time for an important local cause
- Start a book club and invite some new friends

- Sign up for exercise classes or group hiking events
- Donate your time at your child's school
- Knock on your neighbors doors
- Join a local theatre group or drama club
- Buy tickets for local charity events
- Join a country club or a social club
- Find a meditation group nearby
- Invite your child's friends parents over
- Take an art class at the local art center

There are a variety of ways to meet local people in your neighborhood, be it for friendship or even if you are still seeking Mr. or Mrs. Right. Drop your expectations and get out into the community and enjoy yourself. Sign up for events and activities that resonate with you and that will make you feel whole. Finding others with similar interests will help attract the right kind of relationships to your life.

When you are trying to limit your time with others who an unhealthy influence on you, be sure to do so gracefully. Do not start an argument and tell them all of the reasons why you don't want to be around them, simply begin to branch out in other areas and extend your time towards those relationships that are rewarding and meaningful. You can still have people in your life without them being the center of your universe, and vice versa. You do not have to burn any bridges or create emotional turmoil in your unhealthy relationships. Simply reduce the impact that they have on you by spending

less time and attention focusing upon them. This doesn't mean that you have to cut people out of your life for good, but there also may be times where this is necessary. It is up to you to assess the risk that each unhealthy relationship has upon your sense of wellbeing. If the risk is very high and the relationship toxic, then cutting them out of your life for good may not be a bad idea. If the risk is smaller and the relationship is simply unbalanced or one-sided, then reduce the amount of time you spend with them so that you can appreciate their presence in your life instead of feeling angry and resentful towards them. You have heard people say that they can only take people in "small doses". This is true of relationships that are unbalanced and one sided. Perhaps the person talks too much and doesn't listen, or they always ask to borrow things and don't return them, or maybe they just carry a lot of negativity around and you end up feeling exhausted and in a bad mood after spending time with them. These are perfect examples of relationships that aren't toxic beyond repair, but are perhaps ones that you would like to limit in your life to make room for healthier more rewarding ones. People will often just be who they are at all costs, regardless of how they appear to others. You can only change yourself and choose the relationships that you want to have in your life. Never try to change someone else or make them conform to who you want them to be. We are each free to be who we are and have to find our way with our own inner guide and voice. We change when we are ready, not when others are ready for us to change.

Conversations that create intimacy

The best relationships are the ones with people who we can be open and honest with and bare our soul, the ones where we can talk for hours and express our fears and share our hopes and dreams. Conversations are really what shape relationships. It is communication that brings us close together and creates an environment that supports who we are as a person. If we desire positive and meaningful relationships we must be prepared to give of ourselves, and this means sharing our true feelings and what is inside of our heart. Often people project an image of who they think they are supposed to be. They wear masks and present themselves as what they believe is necessary to be liked, respected, and kept safe. It is our insecurity that causes us to wear masks and be what the ego tells us we must be. Imagine how your relationships would flourish if you gave up the desire to be right, strong, successful, or admired. What if you just let go of all of those expectations and let yourself just be. Allow conversations to flow freely without trying to position things to appear a certain way, really listen to others when they speak instead of preparing your next sentence, and share yourself freely without fear of judgment. We wear masks because we are afraid. And as we've discussed, fear is really just **Fantasized Events Appearing Real**. So the things that you fear are not even tangible things, they are the product of your ego-self attempting to protect you. You fear felling people how you feel because you think you will be ridiculed, judged, or rejected. You fear letting your guard down because you think it is what keeps you safe. You fear letting yourself fall in love because you fear that you will be hurt. All of our fears prevent us from experiencing true intimacy with others. It is only when we release our fears and allow ourselves to be our true selves, that we experience profound

changes in our existing relationships and create the possibility to attract new meaningful relationships.

Think about the way you converse with others. Are you always the one speaking? Do you listen but not share? Do you selectively choose what you tell people and only communicate the positive things that make you look better? Be honest with yourself. How you communicate is important to the quality of relationships that you will attract in your life. We often become so overwhelmed by our busy schedules that we allow ourselves to have surface relationships with people and think that merely seeing them or saying a few words is healthy communication. We do this with our friends, loved ones, parents and children. We sacrifice meaningful conversation for surface fluff because we think that we don't have time to really spend engaging in meaningful conversation. This attitude will have you feeling unfulfilled and lonely. Your relationships will eventually feel empty and you will be left wondering why. People usually give back what you put in, so if you expect to have meaningful relationships with others, you must be prepared to have meaningful conversations and share yourself. It doesn't mean you have to spend an entire day pouring over beliefs, childhood traumas, and exploring the depths of your history with each other. Simply saying "I love you" and asking how someone is feeling is often a great way to create intimacy. Acknowledge what is happening in the lives of those you love. If they just lost a loved one, ask them how they are doing, feeling, and if there is anything that you can do. If you have a friend who lost a job, be supportive and helpful. Send them job listings, words of

encouragement and tell them a story about a time when you were laid off or fired so that they will feel better in knowing that they aren't alone. Identify and sympathize with your friends and loved ones. If you are too busy to spend time with them, send them a card, a text message, or an email saying "I love you" or "you are in my thoughts". Those gestures can go a long way towards developing a rewarding relationship and creating open, honest communication that is the foundation to any great relationship. This is true in any type of relationship, be it a romantic relationship, a friendship, or a familial relationship. You are never too busy to communicate kindness.

Sometimes we have people in our lives who may have trouble with intimate conversations. They may protect themselves with exterior masks and choose to keep people at a distance. If this is the case, you can prompt them to be open and honest by identifying with their feelings when something happens. Show them that you are a good listener and that you will not judge them. It takes time to build trust in these relationships, but communication will improve with a bit of prompting, listening, and sharing. Ensure that the flow of conversation is balanced so that you aren't doing all of the talking or vice versa. Ask probing questions that come from the heart and prompt your loved one to dig deep for an answer. Sometimes it is simply a matter of spending more time with these people. Arrange a dinner, coffee date, or have a spa day. Connect with each other by making eye contact, sharing stories about what's happening in your life, and by asking questions and really listening. Don't ask questions if you aren't going

to listen. Attentive listening means absorbing what the other person is saying and really hearing their words without thinking about what you want to say next.

Don't forget IRL

In this day and age of Facebook, texting, and Twitter – it is no wonder that we see people in real life less often than we used to. We have the illusion of having lots of friends and relationships, but how deep do those relationships go if all you do is comment on each others Facebook posts or text message each other? There is no replacement for face-to-face contact and currently no digital equivalent. You simply cannot create the same kind of intimacy that can be created in person, online. Sure you can have some great conversations and exchanges and feel close to someone that is far away, but you should never rob yourself of the experience of being in the presence of others. Humans are meant to connect and create together. We were designed for community and collaboration. Think about some of your happiest memories with others. Were they spent emailing back and forth on the computer or commenting on each other's photos? Or were they when you spent time together belly laughing and connecting, sharing in each other's lives? I am a huge advocate of creating relationships online. I have met so many wonderful people from my blog, podcasts, and Facebook page – but this is never a replacement for real life contact. I use these online experiences to enhance my real life experiences. When I connect with people online I also invite them to connect with me offline at a retreat, event, or workshop. Because I

know that there is nothing quite like sharing a smile with someone when you are able to look into their eyes or offer them a hug.

If you are an online collaborator, look for ways to expand your online relationships and take them offline. Invite your twitter friends for coffee or to a workshop. Find local meetups in your area that are of interest to you and post them on your Facebook page asking your online friends to join you. Intimacy is created one-on-one and is best when you are in the physical presence of someone. This is true whether we are speaking about a business relationship, a friendship, or a romantic relationship. The best sales people are the ones who invite their customers out to lunch, who spend time getting to know them and who show up. Sending an email isn't the same as showing up on someone's doorstep. If you have a friend in your town who is going through a difficult time, instead of sending them a hug on Facebook why not drive to their house and bring some fresh baked cookies and give them a real hug? The Internet is a wonderful tool for creating new connections, keeping in touch with people, and allowing others to share in what is happening in your life, but it can also make us lazy with our relationships. Ask yourself who the most important people are in your life right now. When was the last time you saw them in person? How was your communication and connection with that person? What did you do? What can you do to continue to foster this relationship in person?

Relationships are tricky and require a delicate balance of giving and receiving. You must be open-minded enough to listen to the views and feelings of others without your own personal preferences and beliefs interfering. We are all connected but are all free to have our own beliefs, lifestyles, and set of values. You don't have to only have relationships with people who are exactly like you or who share your values, you can and should interact with a variety of people. Experience life from multiple viewpoints and try to see things from the perspective of others. This makes you more compassionate and a better human being who will be understanding to the needs of others. Having good relationships means being willing to share yourself and to accept others for who and what they are without trying to change or judge them. People are unique and will be different from you, and that's okay. Let them be who they are going to be, even if they make choices that you yourself would not make. Even when you can see that they may have chosen a path that might not work out for them. You must allow people the space to breathe and to be who they will be. Some people learn from the lessons of others, and others must learn things on their own. Don't assume that because you gave advice to someone they will follow it, and don't be offended if they don't. We all have our own path, our own needs, wants, and desires in life. We must listen to the voice that guides us from within, instead of to the opinions and desires of others. We are each responsible for our own wellbeing, and as long as we focus on being a good person who is loving and compassionate towards ourselves and others, we will be okay. We must always focus on self, before we can focus on another. What's happening on

the inside will always be reflected in the outer world. Our relationships and the state they are in are often an example of this.

Be love, be light, and be compassion. Don't let fear stop you from sharing your feelings and your heart with others. True connections are made when the ego disappears from the equation and we operate from a heart-centric place rather than from the distractions of the mind. Focus on the positive and do what you can to be peaceful and content on the inside, which will surely be reflected in the outer world.

Chapter Eleven

Your home. Your sacred place.

Our homes are our sanctuaries. The place we go when we want to escape from the world or when we need some downtime with our families. Our homes help us sleep, relax, enjoy dinner with family and friends, watch movies, do crafts and paintings, meditate, and feel grounded. When our homes are cluttered and messy it makes us feel uneasy and stressed out. You often hear people apologizing for the state of their home when someone comes to visit and their house is a mess. We do this because we all have

an inherent need to make our home a quiet, comfortable, and clean space that we can be proud of. There aren't many people who really don't care about their homes, we all want to live somewhere that we can feel good about and we all want to appreciate our space and feel good in our homes. Everything around you emits an energy and vibrational frequency, even things that you don't give much thought to. When you look around each room in your home, how do you feel inside? Do you feel stressed out and negative towards a particular room in your house? Or do you instantly love and feel at ease? The way you feel in each room is the best indication of how well you have done when it comes to making your home sacred.

What it means to make your home sacred

Your home should be the place that you feel at peace and the place where you feel most like yourself. You deserve to have one place in this world where you can escape from the daily stressors of life and sink into a couch with a good book or a cup of tea and forget about things for an hour. Our lives are filled with stress, responsibilities and time. We are constantly racing against the clock in some form, so it's nice to return home and feel at ease, even if it's just until the following day. Your home can be made sacred by creating a space that makes you feel your best. To do this you must think about what appeals to you, what inspires you, and what things evoke a positive emotional response. Sometimes we place objects in our home unconsciously, without thinking about the impact that they may have upon us. We unknowingly place an old painting we had during a previous relationship on the wall, but each time we look at it we are reminded

of past pain. Or we put on display an object that has a negative feel to it in a central place. We even block the energy flow of our rooms sometimes by placing furniture in locations that are unnatural and create barriers to entering and exiting a room with ease. The things around us each carry a unique energy depending on their shape, color, size, history, meaning, origin, and position in the home. Making your home sacred means carefully considering each piece of furniture and its position, each object on display, each piece of art, the color of the room, the light, and the smell. All of these things are important to the overall feel that your home provides you with. Our home can be our sanctuary and a sacred place when we consciously create our spaces in accordance to what inspires us. Making your home sacred doesn't mean that the whole house has to have the same feel either, each room can have its own energy, own objectives and be completely different from the rest of the home. You may choose to convert a spare room into a writing or meditation room and paint it darker with rich tapestries on the wall, incense, candles and a bookshelf full of wonderful books. In another room you may want to inspire family activities and have a big harvest table with a bookshelf full of board games and family photos adorning the walls with the paint a vibrant energetic color. Even your kitchen should inspire you to cook. Pull out your favorite cookbooks and place them artfully on a shelf. Place objects that inspire you to cook around the kitchen and clear your workspaces so that you have room to chop, cut and prepare when you are in there. Carefully consider each room in the house and what its primary objective is, and then build the space around that energy. A bedroom for example should be serene, peaceful and uncluttered. You should feel at peace in your

bedroom and not be distracted by the buzz or hum of electronics. Try to keep the television out of your bedroom. Your quality of sleep is improved if you do not watch television right before bed.

What inspires you?

Often when we are decorating or cleaning our home we don't give much thought to what inspires us. We simply move things around or decorate with what we have on hand. But what if you really sat back and thought about your space and how to invite your dreams, hopes, and aspirations into your home, it would be a much more delightful place to be. Inspiration can come from anywhere and can strike at any time. Inspiration is what drives us to try new things, to push ourselves, and to achieve greatness. Great pieces of music were written from inspiration, famous paintings created, novels written, and innovation born. Inspiration is that intangible thing that prompts us to want to reach for the stars and be something greater than ourselves. Inspiration tells us that we can achieve anything and that the universe will always support us. It can come from anywhere at anytime and be in any form. Some of us are inspired by books, plays, operas, people, products, websites, design, nature, architecture and virtually anything else that we as humans can observe and take in. Everything we see, touch, experience, feel, taste and hear is a form of input. We observe, take in, interpret and decide whether we can find beauty in that thing. Before you start creating (or recreating) your space, consider what inspires you. Look to your past, present, and surroundings for clues. There are likely things in your life that you have always been passionate about,

possibly since childhood. Are these things represented in your home somehow? If not, why? If you have always been passionate about gardening, bring that into your home. Your backyard doesn't need to be the only place to express this passion. Bring fresh cut flowers into your home from the garden. Take photos of your flowers and plants and frame them. Post inspiring images of gardens around your home, with coffee table books on gardening and flowers. Introduce floral prints and patterns into your furniture and décor bringing your love of gardening into the home. We all have passions for things in life, even if we don't have time to focus on them right now or have ignored them for years. Look deep and ask yourself "what am I passionate about?" Write a list of things that you love and then circle things that really resonate with you. Ask yourself how you can incorporate these things not only into your home, but also into your life. Placing visual cues around your home as a reminder about your passions is a great way to inspire you to live the life that you are here to live. There will always be responsibilities and work and taxes, but there will too always be passions and inspiration. It is a delicate balance of work, life and art. You can and should feel inspired on a daily basis if you structure your surroundings in a way that makes you feel good inside. Truly think about what inspires you and identify those things, as many as you can. Then decide which objects you can buy, dust off, or create in your home to support your inspirations. If you grew up around horses and love them, hang a horseshoe above a door, repurpose an old barn door, find a beautiful Black & White horse photo, or an iron statue of a horse. There is no limit to what you can do in your home to support your inspiration. You can find things in antique markets, at garage sales, and even packed up

in boxes in your basement or storage area. Everybody is inspired by something, you just have to put your thinking cap on and remember what that thing is if you've forgotten in the clutter of life, work and responsibility.

Creating rituals

Part of making our home sacred also includes the rituals that we engage in while in our home to mark special occasions or to create routines that make us feel grounded and peaceful. I love sitting down with a warm cup of tea each morning before starting my day, as well as setting my intention for the day and doing some deep meditative breathing. This is a ritual I enjoy, and my day just wouldn't be the same without these things. Some people include exercise as a part of their daily ritual. Going for a run on the treadmill, doing some yoga or weight training in the morning before the work day begins can be a great source of stress relief and can start your day off on the right foot. This is why many people opt for an exercise room in their home. You don't have to pay hefty gym fees and force yourself out of the house each day to be healthy. You can work out in your own home and start your day off like that each morning. Tea and coffee are the most popular rituals that people have in the morning before they start their day. Anything you do routinely each day that makes you feel calm and better about yourself is a ritual. You may also have weekly rituals, such as having a bath surrounded by candlelight each Friday night. Normally we are so busy that we hop in the shower, wash ourselves and get out so that we can get ready and get to where we're going. But a nice bath in a soaker tub surrounded by candles is a completely different experience.

Another ritual that many of us employ is to write in our journal each day, this allows us time to reflect on the type of day we have, perhaps set an intention, express gratitude and take the time to discuss our inner feelings. Journal writing can be done in a peaceful setting in a special room in the house, on the porch, in the kitchen with a cup of tea or coffee, or while still sitting in bed.

Consider the rituals that you have in your life. Which ones bring you the greatest amount of joy? Are you doing them regularly? Is there room to introduce new rituals that could create greater harmony in your home? Having daily or weekly rituals in your home makes your space truly special because you are creating opportunities to connect with the energy of your space. When we don't enjoy our homes and simply live to clean them and function practically within them, we miss the opportunity to connect and can feel empty, bored or overworked when we are in our home. If you work inside of your home, make sure that you have a separate area for that so that you can "go to work" and retain the living areas of your home for daily life and relaxation. If you work in your living room you will always feel a sense of stress when you are in your living room, even when you are not working.

The importance of de-cluttering

Our homes become quickly filled with dishes, paperwork, laundry, toys, boxes, shoes, and a dizzying array of other things. When our space is messy we tend to feel messy inside, our thoughts become cluttered like our space. Feeling disorganized can create low self-esteem, shame, guilt and anger. When people come into our home we may feel

paranoid that they are judging us based on the state of our home, or we may feel embarrassed or shamed if our home is chaotic. You often hear people apologize for the state of their home when it is messy or unorganized. It is a natural human instinct to want to be proud of our homes and to invite others in and welcome them by wanting them to feel comfortable. We all accumulate clutter in our homes, and the more clutter we have the easier it becomes for our mess to get out of control. We run out of places to put things, we shove things in drawers and do our best to keep the clutter out of our eyeshot. But eventually it starts spilling out of drawers and into our living spaces making us feel uneasy and stressed by our own mess. Why do we do such silly things? The most common answer is that we might need it. Every item we hold on to that we no longer use is being held onto out of fear. We fear that we may need it one day and will be disappointed or disadvantaged without it, we fear that we will forget a memory if we throw something away, we fear the guilt we may feel with throwing away, and we fear being judged or angered by others in our family if we throw something away that they deem to be important. All of this fear ruling clutter behavior is making us miserable. It perpetuates a problem and keeps us unhappily shoving things in drawers while more stuff stacks up on the table. We need to change and free up some space to breathe, feel good and relax in our homes. Clutter makes us feel awful and it takes up unnecessary space in our minds too.

With a few relatively easy habit changes, you can transform your house from somewhere that makes you embarrassed of, to somewhere you will look forward to

spending time. If you are packrat prone, fear not – even you can do what I am suggesting here. No matter how busy our lives, how many responsibilities, and places we have to be – we can all find just 15 minutes in our day to devote to our homes. Start small and begin day-by-day. Resist the urge to see your house in a whole new light and think about that junk drawer that needs emptying. Pull everything out and analyze it. What is it? Have you used it in the last 10-12 months? Do you really need it?

If you need help sorting you can create bins. Creating the following bins will help you organize your stuff and eliminate what you don't need:

DONATE: The donate bin is stuff that you can't use anymore, you don't want to sell and is too good to be thrown out. Often people donate their old clothes, jackets and furniture.

SELL: This bin is for the things that you have in your home that are worth something, but that you just don't do anything with. Perhaps you have antiques or collectibles, or electronics. But if they are just collecting dust or sitting in a closet or a box - get rid of them. You are not using them.

MAYBE: The maybe bin is for things that you can't make a decision on. Perhaps it is because the things in this pile hold sentimental value, or you fear you may need them one day. Sometimes things in the maybe pile are things that we had hoped we would use, but never did. You can come back to the maybe bin.

KEEP: Last but not least is the keep bin. These are the things that you just cannot fathom having out of your life. You need them, use them, want them and they hold value to you (either functional, sentimental, or monetary).

Creating bins will help you organize your stuff and look at things in a new light. It's no longer a matter of toss or keep. If you can make money on your no-longer-needed goods, you may change your mind about keeping them. If there are children in need in your community that could use those old clothes that your kids grew out of ten years ago, that will make you feel better about donating. Not everything has to be garbage. But you will probably find that much of it is. There are some great services for junk removal, and many of them will come to your house and either remove the junk for you or give you a giant garbage dumpster for your driveway to use while you sort through everything. How wonderful is that? You can finally rid yourself of all of those old boxes in the basement collecting dust, that old broken furniture you thought you might refinish one day, or the severely outdated exercise equipment that you use for hanging laundry.

If it takes up space and you don't use it, get rid of it. Re-evaluating what we have also forces us to look at how we are living. Do we buy things consciously when we need them, or are we impulsively buying things we don't need that eventually become useless? It is our job to be a good global citizen by not consuming more than we need, sharing what we have too much of, and evaluating the manner in which we live our

lives. If you spend a small amount of time every day going through one drawer at a time, then moving on to a closet, a storage area or a bedroom – by the time you know it you will have created a stress free environment in your home filled only with the things that you need to live. The things that bring you joy and create a feeling of peace and wellbeing.

Believe it or not but our stuff and the attachment to it keeps us sick. We want to be perceived as successful so we buy homes that are too big, cars that are too expensive, and give our kids whatever they want so that they won't be the kids without. The whole time we are doing this, we are placing more emphasis on things than on our own sense of inner happiness. Things don't make us happy. Buying more stuff won't create peace in our lives or provide us with the type of gratifying and meaningful experiences that we seek. Too many people are addicted to the rush of spending and buying things that they really don't need, but the reason why is because they seek something more for their lives. Spending for the sake of spending is an attempt at creating happiness in one's life and there are so many better more eco-conscious ways to do that. Ways that work and bring clarity, meaning and peace to your life instead of just another credit card bill. And believe it or not, this all begins in your home, your sacred place.

Finding room to meditate

Do you have somewhere in your home that you can go to escape the noise of kids, the television, the ping of emails coming in on your computer or the banging of pots and

dishes in the kitchen? If not, you should seriously think about creating a room that you can relax or meditate in. Meditation has so many wonderful health benefits and can greatly assist in making each day better by allowing you a few minutes to breathe without intrusive and stressful thoughts invading your mind. Meditation brings us closer to the universal energy that guides our life in magical ways. When we meditate we clear the space in our minds and hearts to manifest what we truly desire in life. Answers come to us, we have realizations, and all of the muscles and senses in our bodies can relax and just be without the need to work hard. Everyone can meditate no matter how old you are, whether you have done it before, or what your physical limitations are. We are all capable of meditation. If you feel uncomfortable with the term meditation, you can simply refer to it as conscious relaxation. You can call it whatever you want and structure it the way you need it to be in order to be comfortable. Meditation is not just for yogini's and Buddhists, it is for all of us here on planet earth. Think of it as a tool for managing the daily stressors of life. When you meditate you feel significantly less stressed. If you are unsure how to meditate or are looking for some ideas, visit my Mind Body Smile website and follow one of the many meditations I have posted over the years. Alternatively you can also find great quality guided meditations on YouTube or attend group meditations in your local community. Many group meditations and spiritual groups are available on Meetup.com and many are free or very low cost to attend. Meditation will ensure that you have a smoother day, especially when you practice in the morning. Find some time and a quiet escape and focus on your breathing and comfort for fifteen minutes. Just breathe, be, and allow your thoughts to drift away

from you so that all you are thinking of are the deep conscious breaths you take in and out. Resist the urge to think about anything other than the moment you are in. This is how you meditate. It's not complicated or intimidating or strange, it's just about simple relaxation and it has so many overwhelmingly positive benefits to your mind, body and soul and no known negative effects whatsoever.

You may think it's strange to devote a room entirely to meditate, but it doesn't have to be only for meditation – it can be where you go to read, where you journal, where you relax, nap, paint draw, or meditate. If you can't devote a room in your home, what about a corner? This is the room or space that you want to be able to go to when you are experiencing a lot of stress and need a break or where you just go for a nice relaxation session – whatever that means to you. Painting, knitting, drawing, or drinking a warm cup of tea can all be meditative. Think about that thing in your life that brings you the greatest amount of peace and commit to doing more of that. Maybe it is meditation, or perhaps it's playing music, or making paper flowers. As long as you are keeping present with your mind, body and soul and resisting the urge to jump into the future or analyze the past – you are helping yourself relax. Activities that keep you present have meditative qualities. But I would suggest that you add pure meditation to the mix if you can. The way that you feel in your home when you meditate is different than the way that you feel when you are busy trying to prepare meals, clean up playing host to guests. The less cluttered your home is, the easier you will find it to meditate, to relax and feel at peace in your home.

Make sure your relaxation room or space is comfortable, free of clutter, and inspiring. You may choose to introduce incense, candles and crystals to the room to create extra energy and healing properties. Ensure that the lighting in the room isn't too harsh so that when you meditate in the evenings you aren't flinching at the light in the room. Remove any electronics or devices that make noises and sounds so that you will be able to hear yourself breathe and take in the beautiful silence that you enrobe yourself in. Make this place your relaxation room, the place where you don't respond to emails, talk on the phone or answer text messages. Encourage others in your home to use the room for the same purpose and explain to them the benefits of doing so.

Every Space Needs a Purpose

When you look around in your home does everything have a place and every space have a purpose? Or do you just unconsciously place furniture and belongings wherever they will fit? Planning out your home requires careful consideration into what the room is used for, what type of atmosphere you want the room to have, and what energy the room will carry. If you have a small home you will have to think more carefully about where you put things and each room individually. Smaller homes can look cluttered more quickly if you are not careful and the rooms have a tendency to be multi-function rooms, making the likelihood for junk accumulation even greater than the average home. It is okay if you need to have rooms serve more than one purpose, but think about the manner in which this will happen. If you don't have an office and you use your

eat in kitchen like an office, think about how you can reduce the paperwork and messy look of your office. Can you tuck away the work when it is time for the family to eat? Make sure that there is no wasted space and that every space serves a purpose of some kind. When you have a smaller home, you can't afford to buy large pieces because you like them you must think about the practical functionality in relation to the other things in your home. If you have a bedroom or a mudroom in your home that is not doing anything other than accumulating storage and junk – start the process of organizing it and decide what else you can turn the room into. Perhaps you can turn it into an office, an art studio, or a meditation room instead.

Rooms with purpose get more use and feel better spiritually than those rooms in our home that are just left to accumulate storage and stuff. Every room in your home carries a unique energy and vibrational frequency. You can tap into this energy by simply walking into the room, taking a few deep breaths and tuning into your emotional barometer. Ask yourself “how do I feel when I am in this room?” and “Am I getting the most out of this room in its current state, or could it be something more?” By asking yourself these questions you will tap into the inner feelings you have about the room and be able to identify which areas of your home feel blocked energetically. If you do in fact discover that there are areas of your home that create a negative emotional response, look around and ask yourself why. Perhaps it is because the space isn't used often enough, maybe it is cluttered and messy, there are bad memories there, or you have objects in the room that create a negative energy. Believe it or not but the objects

in a room can carry just as much energy as an entire room, sometimes more depending on what the object is. If you are holding onto old trinkets from a painful past relationship, let them go. If you have keepsakes from a deceased loved one that bring up feelings of sadness or loss each time you look at them, commit to packing them up for now and deciding to move forward in a more positive way. Packing up sentimental items that create pain is helpful in moving forward with your life, especially if those things create a negative or painful emotional response. When our stuff conjures up any negative emotions, including sadness, it is creating an energetic blockage in our soul and home that we need to release. Maybe you aren't even aware of the fact that it is our things that are making us feel sad when we enter a room. Doing an energy assessment and analyzing the purpose of each room, however, will uncover these things and will help you move forward. Each room in your home should make you feel positive, inspired, relaxed, uplifted, peaceful, happy, or accomplished. If your rooms aren't creating these positive emotions, then it is definitely time to repurpose them.

Using the senses

As human beings we are incredibly blessed to have 5 wonderful senses to use on a daily basis as we explore the world around us. Our home is the place where we spend the most amount of time, so it makes sense to build our home experience around our 5 senses. You may haven't of ever given this much thought before, but they are important questions that can affect your happiness factor at home.

With the exception of taste, your home can be explored using your senses:

How does your home look?

How does your home smell?

What does your home sound like?

What does your home feel like?

Of course, how your home looks is the one that we focus on most and the one that we have just talked extensively about. We fret when visitors come over, we tidy relentlessly so that we can appear to have it all together, and we constantly evaluate the aesthetic appeal of our homes. Think about the way your home looks from every angle. As mentioned above, go through each room to eliminate clutter, create positive energy and bring purpose to each space in your home. The way your home looks is an important factor in your level of happiness. If it doesn't look good, you are not going to feel good. Home won't feel relaxing and peaceful if you have to dig your way out from a mound of clutter. Create spaces that are inspiring and beautiful to look at.

Equally important is the way our home smells. Have you ever noticed that some people's homes have a distinct smell? You can pull a sweater over your head after being at your mom's house for the weekend and say "Mmm this smells like moms house".

When you walk into someone's home use your sense of smell to take in the energy of how the house smells. Some people's homes smell like cookies and baking, others smell like cleaning products and bleach, some smell like fabric softener, leather and wood, and others less desirable. We all have a unique and distinct smell to our home. The next time you walk in your front door stop in the doorway and consciously breathe in. What

does it smell like? Another important part of using your sense of smell is in eliminating bad smells. You probably don't want your cat litter box to be right by the front door or in an area where people will have to smell it all day. Your garbage should be kept outside if possible, or at least stored somewhere unobtrusive until collection day. If you have pets make sure that your home doesn't smell like a dog kennel or barnyard. These things are easily corrected and can drastically improve the way your home smells and the overall energy created in your home.

Just like each home has a unique look and smell, each home also has a unique sound. You may think this is odd, but your house makes noises – even if you haven't given it much thought before. Some of the noises you can hear inside of your home are the hum of an air conditioner or heating unit, the buzz from a baseboard heater, the hum of the fridge, settling noises, and the subtle vibration of furniture or floorboards. Those are just some examples of noises inside of your house, you must also factor in the noises that are on the outside of your house, especially when they can be heard from inside the home. Perhaps you can hear the highway, trains passing, waves crashing, a highway, an airport, birds singing, kids playing. Consider all of the sounds that come in through your home. Are the sounds positive and uplifting? Are any of them changeable? For example if you have a malfunctioning fan that is unbalanced and makes a funny noise, it could be creating a subconscious source of stress within you. Any noises in your home that are irritating should be resolved and eliminated if possible. There isn't a whole lot you can do about the noises coming from the outside, except perhaps replace the

windows. If you have a great deal of noise pollution from outside your home, consider whether your home is the right location energetically for you. If it doesn't bother you, great, but if it does – it's time to start looking elsewhere for a home.

The last sense we will talk about is the way your home feels. How does your carpet or floor feel on your bare feet when you walk around in the morning? How do your chairs, sofas and mattress feel? The sense of touch is very important within a home, especially when creating a sanctuary and a place of comfort. Is that old couch you inherited in college truly comfortable or do you just keep it for the sake of keeping it? If your floors constantly feel cold, lay down some throw rugs to create more warmth. If your chairs are uncomfortable and too hard, replace them. It isn't hard to find second hand furniture if money is an issue. Search your local Craigslist to find people who are looking to sell their furniture to make room for new stuff. If you do buy secondhand to replace the uncomfortable pieces in your home, be wary of the energy that someone else's furniture has. Ensure that you are solving the problem you had and that you are not buying solely based on aesthetics. Try the furniture out. Is it comfortable? Could you take a nap, read, or relax for an afternoon? Consider how often the furniture will be used. This applies to both the sale of new and secondhand furniture. Walk around your home and touch the things around you. How do they feel? How comfortable is your home? Assess the sense of touch in every room and ask yourself how it feels. Make changes where necessary.

Plants and flowers also add a great deal of life and vibrancy to your home, while creating greater air quality and less dust. Additionally, plants and flowers positively contribute to the sense of smell in your home and bring you greater happiness. It has been proven that spending time in nature and being around plants make us happier, more balanced and connected with the living world outside of our homes. We feel good when we have plants in our home and experience less cold symptoms due to better air quality. One of the best plants for improving air quality is the Areca Palm, which many people have in their living rooms. Plants provide us with the opportunity to care for them, which is rewarding and therapeutic. Our backyard garden is a wonderful place for us to care for plants outside of the home, and possibly grow our own food. It is rewarding to be our own source of food and grow tomatoes, herbs, snap peas, lettuce, and other delicious vegetables right in our own backyard. There is nothing like eating a fresh salad picked from the garden. You can taste the love, care and attention that went into caring for all of the plants in the garden.

When your home is free from clutter and has a good energy and flow, it frees up space for you to think about other things and enjoy your home in a variety of ways. I urge you to take stock of your home and belongings and reduce the amount of stuff you have. It feels great to minimize the amount of junk in your home and have clear open spaces to enjoy freely. Your thinking will be clearer, your home will have positive energy and people will feel it when they walk through the door. Make sure that you place items of importance around the home in appropriate places and eliminate items that have

negative energy. The objects, imagery and environment that surround you is important to how you feel when you spend time in your home. Your home is your escape from the world, your retreat and sanctuary when things get stressful. Use your senses, intuition, and emotions to learn about your home's unique energy and to change the areas that you think would benefit from an energy clearing or de-cluttering.

Chapter Twelve

The Community You Live In

Human beings have and will always be naturally social beings. We congregate and collaborate with each other and share in our experiences. We have the gift of language, which allows us to converse and identify with one another and feel closer as we engage and uncover our similarities and emotional synergies with one another. Community has always played a big role in the advancement of our civilization. We depend and rely on

each other to fulfill particular roles within a community and we all work together for the greatest good of the community in which we share. Everyone from our neighbors, teachers, friends, local business owners, and public figures are a part of our community. Each of us has a different level of involvement, depending on our career, values, and the amount of time we have to devote to local initiatives. Getting involved in community can mean many different things. To some it is volunteering in the community, to others it is rallying support for political initiatives that affect the community, and to others it is simply getting out there and being involved in local clubs, groups, and organizations. When we are involved in the community in which we live, we feel that we are a part of a greater picture, which contributes to our happiness and helps to make us feel connected to our surroundings.

Our first sense of community begins in childhood. Our family provides us with the opportunity to learn about functioning as a group while contributing individually. We learn how to understand and anticipate the needs of others by observing our parents and siblings. We feel an inherent connection to our family group and naturally have their best interests at heart when we set out to represent them in the world. We affectionately refer to our family members to others when asked about our home life, and we loyally defend their honor if ever in question. We each take on a natural role in a family group environment, which often is dictated by age and/or experience. Older kids help younger kids figure out life experiences and adults help kids make decisions without putting their safety at risk. Children get the opportunity to learn and make decisions from the safety of the family circle, before going out into the real world and

testing their decision-making ability. This early foundation of social family community gives children a sense of accomplishment, confidence and connectedness. Our family roots are the first experiences we have feeling truly connected to other beings. We begin forming deep relationships that help us formulate our opinion about the world and the people in it. If we didn't have those formative years to develop relationships with our family members, things would be much different for us as adult. However, most people in this world had at least someone caring for them as a child, even if the family was not a typical or traditional family. So most of us can identify with the feelings we had towards our families as children. We felt safe, loved, and we had this group of people around us who all cared about where we were and what we were doing. They comforted us when we were sad, they shared in our joy when we felt happy, they encouraged us to try things that were out of our comfort zone, and they helped guide us through the challenging parts of daily life. Our family circle is the closest bond many of us will ever have in our lifetime, but it is certainly not the only opportunity we will have to bond within' a group of people. That is where community comes in.

What is community?

Often when you hear the word community, people think about people that live within a city, town or village. While geography does encompass community, it goes beyond that and contains many subgroups for us to explore within those geographic groups. Our community network can consist of our neighbor's, our children, our children's friends and their parents, our elders, our teachers, our politicians, volunteers, our service

workers, our friends, our book club, our exercise groups, our meditation circle, our activist group, our painting class, our running club, and many more subgroups within our community. So you see that community is much more than just people living in a particular city or neighborhood. Communities are as diverse as the people who live within them, and there are so many subgroups to which you can belong. Every town, city and village has a variety of clubs, teams and groups available to join that span a variety of interests. For kids it's often hockey, baseball, soccer, girl guides, cubs, or dance. For adults it can be anything from a group of seniors who play bridge together to an exercise class, or a Friday night book club. A community is any group to which you belong and come together to share in that common interest. Being a part of a community makes you feel more connected to where you live and what you do, and the people who are a part of it. Communities teach us about sharing, being a part of something greater than ourselves, learning, teaching, striving to achieve something as a group, and sharing in the division of labor. As we get older our community extends and becomes larger and larger. It extends outwards from our family, to our school, to our street, and eventually our town or city.

Caring for your community

Where we live is important to our overall quality of life. It connects us to others, to nature, to the energy of happiness and achievement, and solidifies our sense of belonging. Putting down roots in a community is a commitment we make to our family, the environment, and ourselves. People become very connected to the parks, rivers,

schools, neighborhoods, people and natural habitat of the community in which they live. It is your responsibility to care for your community and all of the things and people in it. Would you be happy if the city wanted to rip out your favorite park in favor of condos or would you have something to say about it? Most of us would have something to say about that and would work hard to make sure that didn't happen. We would rally our neighbors and community together to take a stand against it. Nobody wants to see something they love within their community taken away. This is why people protest when things in their community become threatened in some way. People bind together for the common good of saving the community from becoming something that they don't want. You often hear about communities rallying to fight against things like pollution, garbage dumps, and building on protected land. These are all causes that support the betterment of our communities and the world at large. The way you treat your community has a direct correlation to the energy you put out to the universe and the energy that is transmitted to our mother earth. Caring for your community is caring for our earth. We live in communities and cannot be everywhere in this world at one time, but we can make a difference in the communities in which we live. We can treat our environment and land with respect, we can love our neighbors and friends, and we can be involved in building a community that supports each other. When you take an active role in your community, you create a positive vibrational frequency that inspires and motivates others and uplifts the entire energy of the community as a whole. You may not be aware that you are doing this, but it is happening. There are so many ways

you can become involved in your community. It is up to you to decide in which way you would like to become involved.

1. Volunteering

Volunteering time in your community can be rewarding and help you feel connected to the people within your community. There are a lot of opportunities to volunteer time for various reasons, causes and organizations. Moms donate their time at schools to help out with lunch programs and school administration, pet lovers donate their time at animal shelters, and good Samaritans help at local shelters and food banks. A quick Internet search in your city should yield a variety of volunteering positions. There are even websites that list volunteering opportunities by type and location. Think about the non-profits or causes in your own community. What do you feel aligned with? What could you be passionate about becoming involved in? Follow your heart and find your volunteering opportunity based on what resonates with you energetically.

2. Donate Blood

Donating some blood takes very little time and goes such a long way to help people in need. The only way that people who need blood can get it is by relying upon blood donations from the community. Blood has a very limited lifecycle and will not last more than a couple of days, therefore it is important to make blood donation a regular part of your routine, not just a one-time thing you do

during a crisis or an annual event. Make donating your blood a weekly or monthly routine. Giving your blood can save someone's life, and up to three people can be helped with the blood you give from just one donation. The energy transmitted from donating your blood raises your vibration and sends healing energy to the person who receives it.

3. Activism

Sometimes the laws that get passed are not in the best interest of our community and neighborhoods. Often decisions are made based on capitalism, politics, and money. People are capable of changing things and pushing things forward, but we often need numbers in order to do that. There is great power in numbers. Many things in our society wouldn't be where they are today without the brave souls who stood up for what they believed in and became involved in causes to create change. If you see things happening around you that you don't like, don't just sit by idly and watch it happen; form a committee, join a rally, take a stand and get involved. Activism is our human right and is something that can truly create lasting change, making this a better place to be for all of us.

4. Local Events

Every city, town, and village has events in their community that bring people together. Perhaps it's a parade, an Oktoberfest, a concert series, a craft show, or a local food fair. Look around you and observe the events happening within your

community. Getting out and meeting people at events is a great way to connect to people in the community, and to feel good about supporting the city in which you live. Perhaps you can offer something to these events like your home baked cookies, crafts to sell, or your expertise in a particular area. Align with the events in your community that you feel most connected to. There are interest groups and events in every community; it's just a matter of finding the ones that work the best for you and your life.

5. Animals

Have you been to your local animal shelter? It can be very sad to see how many cats and dogs are abandoned and mistreated by their owners. The shelters are always full with sad cases of neglect, torment, and abandonment. Most animal shelters rely on the support from the community in a variety of ways. You can contribute financially and make donations, volunteer your time at the shelter helping with clean up and feeding, or you can offer your home to help recovering or nursing animals who need a safe temporary home until they are adopted.

Animals don't have a voice, but they communicate with us through affection and behavior. Their energy is pure and they have simple needs. If you are an animal lover, working with your local shelter is a great service to your city and to the animals themselves. It will fill your heart to do this type of work.

There are endless opportunities to get involved in your community. The above examples are just a few suggestions. Each community is unique and has different needs. There are interest groups formed daily in every community around the world, a quick scan of meetup.com shows you how eager people are to seek each other out and support one another. We are social beings who like to congregate and connect with each other.

Your Closest Network

In order to truly embrace community and connect with others, you first have to be conscious of your inner network. Your community at home; your family and loved ones. They are the most important. While it is great to volunteer your time, be active within the community, and have a full schedule; all of that is meaningless unless you also give that time, attention and devotion to your family members. Often people take for granted the people closest to them. They donate their time at shelters and non-profits and they are well-known in their communities. But sometimes their own kids aren't getting enough attention, or their husbands or wives are feeling neglected. Our inner network is the community that means the most. Start looking at your family first before you are quick to involve yourself in the community. Are you giving your children, parents, and siblings enough of your time and attention? If any of your loved ones were to die tomorrow, would you feel confident in knowing that you loved them and supported them with all that you are? Or would you feel guilty about how little time you gave to them? If it is the latter, then I urge you to spend more time cultivating your family community first. Community engagement swells outwards from the family, but it

always begins with the family. We take our children to school and meet other parents and teachers, we go to church with our family and meet other members of the church, we enjoy our neighborhood with our family and meet neighbors. Our community is so strongly tied to family that we cannot overlook the importance of our family.

The family is very much like a community with each member contributing their own unique personality, role and identity to the overall group. Each member of the family is an individual but also works towards the common cause and overall goals of the family unit. Within the family there may be alliances, conflicts, and shared interests, much like the traits of a larger community. The family presents themselves to the world as a solidified group and are identified by their surname. The members of the family community may also leverage their surname or pre-existing relationships that other members of the family have in order to connect with people outside of the family. For example, if the father of the family is a retired postal service worker, the son (when of age to work) may approach the postal service using his father's reputation and history as leverage so that he may work there too. Similarly the younger members of the family may rely upon their older siblings to assist them socially at school. They are less likely to be picked on or bullied when they have the protection of an older sibling to watch over them. The relationships and alliances we have within our family community are just as important outside of the family home. Our family relationships affect our relationships with others. The energy that is present in the home will continue to extend out into the community around us. If we have troubled relationships with any of our family

members, chances are we will also have troubled relationships with friends, authority figures, or coworkers that reside in our community. The family is the first community that we must nurture before we can offer ourselves to the community at large, and become involved in what is happening in our city. Make sure your family is well equipped to handle life and the relationships they encounter out in the world. You cannot do everything for them or take away all of their troubles, but you can help guide, teach and protect them.

If you have children that are still young, chances are you will have a great deal of contact with the school, other parents, and possibly coaches or group leaders of extra curricular activities that they may be involved in. Your children are the pillars that connect you to those other people and they are the reason why you are engaged in those communities. It is important, however to ensure that the lines of communication stay open with your children, even when you have a supportive network of people who communicate to you about how your child is doing. A teacher's perspective on how your child is doing at school may not be the same as how your child feels personally. Your child has emotions that go along with the experiences they have, so they are the only ones that can convey those emotions to you. Teachers, coaches and mentors may be able to guess how they feel – but your child is the only one who feels the emotions and can communicate them to you. The community ties you have with your children's surroundings are very important when they are young. The community helps to protect your family by being supportive, offering advice and perspective. To some degree it is

easier to connect with the community around you when your children are young because we do so much for them and have to be involved in all of their major life events and activities. They are not capable of driving themselves to dance lessons or hockey and cannot talk to the teacher themselves yet about their progress in the classroom. So we are their advocates and represent them until they become responsible enough to represent themselves. When our children get older they become less dependent on us, so our ties to the community may become weakened, as our children are able to do things on their own. They may walk themselves to school, have their own jobs and engage in extra curricular activities and clubs of their own choosing. When this happens they aren't quite old enough yet to leave home, but are well on their way to preparing for adulthood. During this phase of life, any community involvement you have personally is usually self-directed. The advantage to this, however, is that you can choose what works best for your schedule, interest level and location. But many adults take a hiatus from community involvement during these years and re-focus on connecting with self. We spend so much time and energy raising our children that we sometimes forget to acknowledge our own interests and desires. When the kids are old enough to look after themselves, there is a bit of relief. We suddenly don't have as much responsibility and have more free time. Time we can potentially devote to reconnecting with our inner self. After our children are out of the home, off at University or just working and beginning their own life we may find that we crave projects, people, and community again. During this phase of life we may be retired or simply have way more time on our hands than we know what to do with. Many of us

return to the community once again, looking for interest groups, causes, and clubs to become a part of as we mourn the growing up and expansion of our own family community.

Togetherness

The heart of every community; be it at home, in your neighborhood or with friends is the shared experiences and togetherness we feel when we spend time being a part of something larger than ourselves. We are inspired by others and feel deeply connected to the energy of sharing in conversation, work, responsibility or hardship. Human beings are natural collaborators, so when we are cut off from our community or not spending enough time with others we can become depressed. This begins, as all communities do, in the home. Being a part of a family is busy and challenging. We each have our own roles and responsibilities and we sometimes take each other for granted. We forget to spend time looking into the eyes of our family members, sharing ourselves emotionally and reaching out to them to make sure everything is okay in their lives. Life is busy and we can become entangled in the daily responsibilities of life very easily. The togetherness shared with your family is an important foundation for creating positive interactions with the outside community. Families are supposed to do things together and spend time with each other. If your family is young, you may have very busy schedules and have little time in the week for recreation. But set aside just one day a week where you can commit to doing something with your family. Create a special day that fosters togetherness. Have everyone switch off their phones and digital devices

during this time and really connect with each other and the energy of the family.

Perhaps you can go on a family hike, go out to eat together, or visit a farm. Whatever you choose to do together is inconsequential, as long as you are getting quality time together and have the opportunity to connect, share and talk. When families get older and kids are out of the house, more planning is usually required to get people together, but togetherness is still important and shouldn't only be reserved for holidays and special occasions. Show your family that spending time together is important; organize a dinner, a family game night, or a Sunday brunch just for the sake of getting together. It is better if you do this outside of birthdays, anniversaries and holidays because this sends the message to the family that togetherness is important, no matter what the date. The atmosphere that is created when a family comes together transmits an energy of love, inclusion, and happiness. This energy stays with each member of the family, even the following day and facilitates in the manifestation of positive experiences for each member of the family. Have you ever noticed that you feel at your best and confident when you are around your family? Many people experience positive effects in their every day lives simply from spending time with their families.

The reality, like all communities, however is that not all family members will get along. You may have a difficult family member who just thrives on conflict and whom you find it very challenging to get along with. Don't let the experience of one negative relationship affect your relationship with other family members. Sometimes people stay away from their families because of turmoil they have with one family member. Doing

this could affect your life negatively in a number of ways. You will be carrying around the burden of that negative relationship and may feel resentful, even subconsciously about the fact that you are unable to be close to your family. You may mourn the closeness that you once had, or wish that you could see other members of the family that you have also been avoiding. The best thing you can do for yourself and your family is to accept everyone for who and what they are. You can't force anyone to change or be who you expect them to be, but you can be who you are and you can protect yourself from the impact of a negative relationship. When you are confident in who you are and accepting of others, what they say and do will not impact you unless you allow it to. You get to choose every minute of the day how you wish to feel. If you have a negative relationship with someone in your family, it is because you are choosing to allow that relationship to be sour. You could instead, put past experiences behind you, be the bigger person and just accept that your family member is a difficult person. Love them anyway. There is tremendous healing and power in that.

Benefits that reach beyond sharing

Having a close-knit community with your family, neighborhood and surrounding city is important, not only to your social life, but also to your mind, body and spirit. The energy and frequency that is transmitted when you share with others puts your entire being at ease and makes you feel connected and peaceful to the world around you. As a result of this energy, you will notice that you have an increased feeling of confidence, more energy and less instances of stress, depression or isolation. When we have people to share with we lead happier lives. Being involved in community also helps to ward off

illness. Our immune systems function better, our whole body responds to happiness in magnificent ways. We crave togetherness and the bonds that come along with social sharing and our bodies and minds become weaker when we don't get that bonding. No matter what your interests in life, there are others like you who would love to share their experiences and have someone to talk to. Seeking out a supportive community for any interest is a healthy step towards supporting the self. When we support our whole being by allowing ourselves the freedom of expression and meaningful exchange, we give ourselves the opportunity to embrace who we really are and feel connected to all that is. Our entire being shifts into alignment with the universe when we embrace this connectedness and it reaches far beyond joining a club or helping a charity. Feeling connected to our community and embracing our interests socially gives us a sense of purpose that drives our wellbeing and level of happiness in life. It's not just about getting out of the house, participating in a group activity, or meeting the people in your community. It's about being who you are and allowing yourself the opportunity to shine and experience life in a meaningful way. Contributing to a group is just the conduit that provides you with that opportunity. The community involvement fuels your wellbeing, happiness, and sense of purpose. So it doesn't really matter which interest you pursue, what club you join, or which charity you align with. What matters is that you do something in the community that resonates with you in a fundamental way. Something that really matters to you and makes you want to do more.

When we give of ourselves freely there is something liberating about that, something that drives us to want to give even more. Giving our time, assistance, and care to others in the community makes life worth living. It makes waking up every day a pleasure and gives us a great sense of pride and purpose. The feeling that you are living a life that supports and gives back to your community in any way is an important factor the level of happiness you experience in your life.

It doesn't have to take a tragedy to bring your community together, but often that is what prompts people. If there is a silver lining to a natural disaster or a tragic event in a community, it is that people come out of their shells and realize that they can no longer live alone, isolated from others. We are all connected. Whether you are going to work each day traveling from your car to your office and back home again, or you are working in a homeless shelter to support and feed your city's homeless – we are all connected. It doesn't matter if you choose to keep to yourself or share with others, that connection still exists and will always exist. We just need to be reminded sometimes that we are all the same, and unfortunately tragic events are often what trigger this reminder. Our lives are filled with responsibility, work and a constant awareness of the 24 hours in each day. Time dictates everything we do and for how long. There are only so many hours in each day and the reality is that most of us are trying to cram far too many things into a day, so much so that we often have little contact with the community around us. When we have too much going on in our lives it can make us feel frustrated, stressed out, angry, isolated, and disconnected from the universe. Ultimately our power and

happiness in life comes from the feeling that we are all connected, and that we are energetic beings living in a physical world together. We are more than our jobs, the balance in our bank account, or the successes and failures that we face. Spending time with others whom we aren't forced to spend time with through work or family gives us a great feeling inside. We choose to share, communicate, work together, and create. And in this choice there is an energy of creation that nothing else can match. We feel intellectually stimulated by conversations with others, and our heart swells when we are able to help someone in need. Community is so much more than mere groups of people with the same interests; it is the fiber that connects us all to each other in all of our diversity.

It's wonderful to spend time with people who share your interests and who have the same values and beliefs. But we expand our consciousness most when we embrace everyone, regardless of their beliefs and learn to see things from varying perspectives. We would never evolve beyond our own limited point of view without the contrast of others who demonstrate their beliefs differently than our own. You may live in a community with people who are starkly different than you. Religion shows us just how different everyone's beliefs are; some are Catholic, some Jewish, Muslim, or even Atheist. What people believe doesn't make them any more or less of a person than you are. And what they believe is secondary to the fact that we are all non-physical beings experiencing a physical existence. These bodies are our vessels, but they do not define us anymore than the church we belong to or the political beliefs we hold. When you expand your thinking outside of your community, your country, your continent and even

your world – you begin to see that those things matter much less than you think. What really matters is energy and love. And we are all capable of energy and love. We are emotional beings who feel things deeply and we each transmit an energy frequency based on what we feel, say and do.

There is a larger community outside of the one in your neighborhood and town, and it is the largest one you belong to – the community of human beings. We are all a part of this community whether we choose to be or not. And every group, club, committee, team, and society that exists is a part of the community of human beings. Getting out of your home and into your local community just reminds you of this, that is why it feels so good to connect with others. You are returning to the energy of love and inclusion, which is what resonates with all of us. We are at our best when we collaborate and communicate with others. It is our brain that tells us that we must align with this group or that group, and it is okay to have preferences and align with things that you are most drawn to. Just make sure that you don't disregard or judge others for having different beliefs or interests than your own. We are all here on earth to fulfill the soul's purpose and we each have different reasons for experiencing what we experience. We have karmic lessons to learn from and other human lessons that we decided to embark on long before we came into physical form. Use your emotions as your guide rather than your mind and preconceived notions about who and what you should align with. Follow your heart and listen, you will end up in the right place, with the right people and a full heart.

Chapter Thirteen

Elements of Nature

We live in curious times. We have more technology at our disposal than ever before and the ability to create things previously thought unfathomable. But as exciting and revolutionary as this age-of-technology is, we have forgotten something crucial to our lives. We have forgotten to connect with nature and pay Mother Nature the respect she deserves. Without nature we would not exist. Humans act at times as though we are above nature. If you really sit and think about how intelligent nature is, you probably wouldn't feel that way. Everything from the way the seasons change cyclically to the way a spider weaves a web is brilliantly designed to perfection and something that we cannot replicate as humans. Nature is in everything we see, touch, and do but we often forget just how important it is to our lives as we sit in our human made homes, on our human made computers, eating our human made food. Many of us spend less than twenty minutes per day outside appreciating nature in all her abundance. Instead we are distracted and consumed by things that we have created to fill our time with. We feel disconnected because we are disconnected. We are more stressed out than ever before as a species, and we have less time to spend with family and friends doing the things that we enjoy the most, and the things that resonate with our higher being. Instead our lives revolve around the clock and the all mighty dollar, which takes us further away from nature. We race around the clock each day trying to be more, do more and see more – but we aren't seeing the most important thing of all.

Make the effort

In order for us to truly see our lives for what they are and appreciate life in every way, we must be still. Stillness affords us the opportunity to reflect, breathe and just be – without the need to manipulate, control, or direct the outcome. Unfortunately, for most of us to do this, we are really going to have to make a concerted effort to get outside. Meditation is great when we can find the time and quiet space to do it, but what is even better is meditation outdoors among the stillness and beauty of nature. And we can find stillness without mediation, just being in and observing nature affords us with this opportunity. Think about taking a walk in the forest and the way we feel when we embark on such an activity. We breathe in the fresh scented crisp air, we listen to the twigs crunch under our footing, we observe the sunlight breaking through the trees, we hear the wind blowing through the trees, and we watch the trees sway back and forth under the gentle guidance of the wind. All of these things are in the moment observations that keep us from thinking about finances, relationship conflicts, and trouble at work. When we are present in the moment of observing nature, we are far from our troubled human thoughts and simply exist in the moment with nature. We return to nature in that moment and remember (either subconsciously or consciously depending on who you are) who and what we are. We know that we aren't our thoughts, our things, or our physical lives. We are so much more than that, greater than we ever thought and powerful, like the elements of nature. When we connect and surround ourselves with that energy, we feel expansive and whole. We remember an important part of ourselves.

But in order for us to experience the wondrous feeling that we get from being in and observing nature, we actually have to get out there, which takes effort. It takes effort because we aren't used to doing it anymore. Humans have structured their lives around going from house to car to building and enjoying nature is viewed as an extra-curricular activity now, rather than a necessity. I suggest that you change this way of thinking. Make an effort to get outside every single day and do it because your state of mind and whole being depends on it. Even if you spend twenty minutes per day observing nature and being fully present in it, you can change your life profoundly. It sounds crazy that only twenty minutes per day can make a difference, but it can. Most of us are too busy working, shopping, walking to our destination, or lost in thought when we are outside in an urban setting – so we must remove all of those distractions. Remove the buildings, the traffic, the honking, the cars, and the people. Just surround yourself with nature and nature alone, or as close as serene as you can get. Twenty minutes per day can mean a great deal of tranquility in your life and help you manifest things into your life that you want to manifest. Twenty minutes in the moment of observing nature is meditative, healing and expansive. Your being will thrive on this experience and you will wonder why you didn't do this before when you begin to take note of the effects it has on you. But it is going to take dedication on your part. You are going to have to make the effort to make nature a priority in your life every day, and that isn't always easy with our human lives. Make a commitment to yourself to do this for yourself as an act of love, because the results you will see just from getting outside are incredible and magical. It sounds so simple, because it is. We aren't above nature. We are nature.

Here are some ideas to help get you outside:

1. Create a morning ritual

Sometimes the best time to get outside and enjoy your surroundings is first thing in the morning. When you wake up you are less affected by stress and responsibility. As the day wears on you become increasingly caught up in the responsibilities of the day and less flexible with your time. Set some time aside first thing in the morning and commit to a morning walk or run. Be conscious in this activity and observe nature with all of your senses.

2. Find a special place

Most of us have unbelievably beautiful settings right in the place where we live. Maybe it's a park, a forest trail, a waterfall, a river setting, or some cliffs. Whatever the natural setting, choose a place that resonates with your being and begin to go there as a means of clearing your mind, relaxation and meditation. If you aren't comfortable meditating, just sit in your special place and look around you. Think about how amazing nature is and how beautiful she made these surroundings. This special place should be yours and yours alone. You can share it with loved ones or friends if you'd like, but make sure that the place you pick is yours. There is a reason why your being resonates with particular environmental settings and you will get the most out of choosing somewhere that you really feel connected to.

3. Outdoor journaling

Many of us like to keep a diary, record our thoughts or just write for personal improvement. Whatever your reason, it is a good practice to get into and can help you

realize many truths in your life. Journaling is cathartic and profound. We write what we feel in the moment and often observe our whole truths when we write without filter. Nature can be a wonderful muse and make us feel at ease. When we write outside we aren't distracted with the television, the sounds of people in the house, or the phone ringing. We feel the wind in our hair and the sun on our face, we instantly feel at ease. This relaxes our whole being and allows us to write with ease. Words pour out and we may have epiphanies that surprise us. Outdoor journaling is a great way to connect with our higher being and nature at the same time.

There are four elements of nature that make up our physical world; air, fire, water and earth. These are elements that we are all familiar with and experience frequently without question. We don't question how these perfect things came to be or how they provide us with the ability to thrive on this planet. Without air we could not breathe, we would have no seasons, and most life on this planet would cease to exist. Without fire we would have no warmth, no protection from predators, no light to work in, and no way to cook our food. Fire was one of early humans earliest means of survival. Without water we would be thirsty and die, our plant life could not grow, and in fact no living organisms on the planet at all. Water is the basis for life. When we search for signs of life on other planets the first thing we look for is water. Lastly we have earth, which is where our feet are firmly planted. The earth is our habitat. We could not live without it. We would die if we were to float out in space without being grounded to the earth. You see these elements work together with each other. No one element is exclusive of the

other, they work harmoniously to provide the basis of life on planet earth. When you stop to think about how truly amazing that really is, perhaps you will realize that spending time observing your natural world is of great importance. Most other things that we stress, worry, and think about are human made things that don't matter in the far reaches of the universe. The universe doesn't care about taxes, your relationship problems, or how much money is in your bank account. It only knows attraction and repulsion. At every point in time you are either attracting things into your life, or pushing them away. We do this with our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The elements of nature are so ingrained in who we are that they are a part of us and life itself. We are not separate from the elements and they even correlate to the star sign in which we were born. If you were born under the Pisces, Cancer or Scorpio sign your element is water. This typically means that people born in these signs are emotional beings who are sympathetic, nurturing, loving and intuitive. Water signs can also be psychic or intuitive. Those with the signs Capricorn, Taurus and Virgo are born under the element of earth. This means that they are grounded, practical and stable. They make logical decisions and can be somewhat conservative. Those with the signs Aquarius, Gemini or Libra are ruled by air and are adaptable, artistic, thinkers and have excellent communication skills. Lastly Aries, Leo and Sagittarius are ruled by the element of fire. These people tend to be passionate, energetic, bold, daring and courageous – much like the fire itself. You see each one of us relates to an element of life, whether we are aware of it or not. Think about yourself. Are you emotional and nurturing like the water, courageous and bold like the fire, grounded and stable like the earth, or artistic and

adaptable like the air? Chances are you will identify with the traits under the sign in which you are born. The elements of nature are not only around us, but they are in us.

Nourishment from nature

As we go about our lives living in our homes, driving in our cars and working in our buildings – we may feel disconnected from nature, but also from our food sources. One of the primary factors in the development of a healthy human body is what we consume. The food and water that we take in play a substantial role in how we feel and the way that our bodies function and look. We often don't consider the importance of nature because we are busy living our human lives. But each piece of food that we put into our mouth is either helping or hurting us. Our bodies are very resilient and forgiving, but most illnesses can be attributed to food in one way or another. Nature plays a very large role in our overall health. When we eat too many human made unnatural food items like carbs and sugars, our bodies cannot process them as effectively and store them as fat. We store more fat than we could ever burn off because we aren't getting enough exercise, so we become overweight and develop other health problems as a result. Our ancestors used to be outside a lot more than we are today. They worked outside, walked more and enjoyed spending time outdoors. Today we are sheltered and cut off from the natural world and we sometimes mirror this in our food. We have factories to produce food-like items for us consume. These food-like items are made up of chemicals, ingredients you can't pronounce and others that are just plain unhealthy for us. But when was the last time you picked an apple off a

tree and heard someone tell you that they are unhealthy for you? When was the last time you heard any human being tell you that they were taking a break from fruits and vegetables because they are trying to be healthier? Never. Because food that grows in nature is the most nourishing, satisfying, and health-promoting food on the planet and we take it for granted all the time. Nature is good for our body, mind and spirit. You cannot get too much nature or eat too many fruits and vegetables. What is killing us is the other things we are eating. The things that don't come from nature don't grow in the ground and can't nourish us. Nature is nourishment in all its forms. Our amazing planet and ecosystem provide a supportive environment for fruits and vegetables to grow, ripen and be picked for us to eat. A system of perfection that doesn't need the intervention of capitalism, packaging, and a healthcare system. We wouldn't need the healthcare system as readily as we do now if we were all to just listen to nature and allow nature to nourish us instead of attempting to create our own version of nourishment. Before you eat something and allow it to pass through your sacred body ask yourself "am I nourishing myself? Or am I hurting myself?" Your energetic response will tell you the answer to that question before the words come to your mind. You know at every point in time whether something you are eating is good for you or bad for you. Think of the food you take in as an offering to your higher self. Would you make an offering of pizza and hamburgers? Or would your higher being be more aligned with a gorgeous salad adorned with nuts, berries and chopped veggies? All from nature herself. What you put in you get out. So if you are going to eat manmade items that are produced in a factory and have never seen the soil, air, or earth – then you are going to

create that energetic vibration within your body. That energetic vibration will not be one of nourishment, health and satisfaction. Instead your body will be screaming out for those things and reacting negatively to the fact that it isn't getting them. Your energetic vibration will be one of poor nutrition, tiredness, and dissatisfaction. Your body is not satisfied when you consume unhealthy food made in a factory. Your body knows more than your mind about what is good for you. Listen to the energy of your food. Think about how you feel when you consume a fresh salad, steamed vegetables from the garden or pick a delicious tomato off the vine. Every sense in your body shouts "YES this is what we want". But then we ignore those internal messages and return to our factory-produce food and our body once again must find a way to process and break down this foreign food. Our bodies simply weren't designed to take in all of these unnatural foods. Our bodies are simple and desire simple whole foods that come from nature, this is what we know how to break down and this is what makes our bodies and health thrive. Nature can nourish us if we allow it.

Have you ever observed how healthy people look when they eat an all-natural diet? The next time you speak to someone who eats only natural whole foods from the earth, observe the way their skin and hair looks. Look at the vibrancy in their faces; observe how youthful and wonderful they look, notice how happy they are. This is all possible simply from ingesting food found in nature and giving our bodies the nourishment they are screaming out for. It might feel good to eat a piece of pizza temporarily or a piece of cake, but eating like this every day is harmful to your body, mind and spirit. Sugars and

complex carbohydrates are damaging to us. We aren't as intelligent when we eat poorly, our bodies are out of shape, and we feel lethargic and unmotivated. When we allow the earth to nourish us with foods from nature, all of those negative vibrational frequencies are replaced by a vibrancy and zest for life. We are invigorated by nature and every cell in our body responds to a healthy meal that comes from the ground.

Be a part of it

We don't have to be outside of nature or simply an observer, we are nature and can remind ourselves of that any time we'd like. Our bodies are made up of predominantly water, light and electricity. The very fabric of our being is tied to nature and the universe in all its abundance. But why then do we choose to separate ourselves from that which we are? Why do we choose to embrace the idea of being a person over the idea of being of nature? We came from nature; we are born from the very thing we resist. So why not embrace that in all its glory and really tap into our true potential. By cutting ourselves off from the source from which we came, we cut off a part of ourselves and cannot ever reach our true potential. We will always be limited by our thoughts, beliefs, and attitude about things. But when we allow ourselves to be a part of the natural world from which we came, when we embrace this truth, we become expansive and abundant. Things we never thought imaginable will unfold before us as we allow them to. There are no accidents in life; just as everything in nature has a purpose and a reason to exist, so too does everything we experience, choose and embark on in our life. We choose these things long before we incarnate into physical

form; perhaps to understand emotion, to figure out a human problem, or to experience things on a level not possible in spirit form. Whatever your unique karmic lessons, you will expand your consciousness by viewing yourself as being a part of nature, rather than being above it. View yourself as a tree, flower, body of water, or bird. You are no different. Allow yourself to feel truly connected to the nature from which you came. You cannot feel connected to nature when you do not go outside or spend time among the creatures and elements of mother earth. You must treat everything with equal respect and view yourself as a part of the whole. You cannot put yourself above an ant, a spider, or even a cockroach. These are all beings that belong on this earth, just as you do. Allow them to exist, just as you are allowed to exist. Of course you may have to put them outside sometimes if they have wandered into your home, but that's okay.

Just as the elements are tied to who we are, what we do, and how we live – they also exist when we die. Our bodies return to the earth when we are buried. Our physical bodies decompose and go back to the earth, while our spirits are free to soar. The earth element rules us in death when we are buried. If we are cremated our bodies are offered to the element of fire. Both are natural elements important for survival. We are always offered to one of the elements of nature in our physical death.

The ultimate reminder

Nature is the ultimate reminder about who we are, what we are, and how we should be living. It isn't always the reminder that we want to hear, but it is crucial for our

development as an energetic and spiritual being on this planet. We cannot come away from the fact that we are energetic beings experiencing a physical life here on earth. We are not here to rape and pillage the earth, robbing her of all of her resources and building structures to avoid contact with the earth. This is not okay for our minds, bodies or spirits. This feels energetically wrong and all of us know it. When we see the injustices happening around us in the name of profit and greed, and at the expense of our earth, it angers us. Many of us have risen up and spoken out against these things. But together we need to shout louder, we need to protect and cherish our earth and only take what we need. There is enough for all of us if we simply work together and stop allowing a small percentage of ill-intentioned people to rule the world.

There is a reason why nature provides us with everything we need to be nourished, sustained, healed and protected. Nature gives us absolutely everything we need to survive and thrive on this planet. Think of the amazing and versatile coconut palm tree, also referred to as the tree of life. Virtually no part of the tree is unusable and every part serves a purpose. The trunks are used for lumber and constructing buildings, homes and dwellings. The leaves are used for roofing and are resilient enough to be water-resistant yet flexible enough to allow ventilation. The leaves are also used to weave textile products like baskets and mats and many cultures still use them to adorn themselves with hats or ceremonial skirts. The coconuts themselves also have a wide use. The young coconut flesh can be eaten raw and used to nourish the body, as can the coconut water itself. Coconut water is one of the best natural sources of hydration in existence,

in many ways better than water itself. It contains electrolytes that quickly work to replenish the body's hydration. The coconut water is tapped from the center of young green coconuts. Mature coconuts produce meat that is squeezed to produce coconut milk and oil. The milk is the liquid that is extracted from the coconut meat and the oil is the solid. The coconut oil can be heated and then used for cooking. Even the coconut shells themselves have a variety of uses. When dried they can be used as bowls, drinking vessels and ladles. Dried and cut up coconut shells can also be used as fuel for fire as an alternative to charcoal. As you can see coconut trees are simply amazing, and that is just one example of what nature provides for us. Each time you cook with coconut oil, drink coconut water, or eat coconut in your food say thank you to mother earth for providing you with such abundance. Allow the coconut to serve as a reminder to you about the many ways in which nature is here to support life on earth.

Shamanism

A shaman is someone who is able to enter into an altered state of consciousness and access the spirit world for the purpose of healing, channeling, and communicating with spirit. Shamans interact with the spirit world and believe that everything has a spirit including a flower or a tree, a drum, a person, or a path. A shaman may also be called a medicine man or woman. They use nature and the natural world in combination with spirit to bring about healing to their people. Perhaps a couple of decades ago this practice would have been considered strange or ceremonial in nature, but for the past twenty years or so shamanism is seeing a huge surge of interest by non-indigenous

people who want to return to nature and who want to see themselves as a part of the whole, rather than a dominant force within nature. Shamanic healing and medicine uses the natural world and its resources to bring about healing to the mind, body and spirit. It heals our conscious and subconscious and helps us release energetic blockages that cause us physical and spiritual illness. It balances and harmonizes the mind, body and spirit restoring our equilibrium. Shamans believe that every illness has an energetic body or spirit attached to it, and they must find the source so they can communicate with it and release it. Everything is alive and with spirit in shamanism. Therefore we are not above nature, but beside it and in it and even our illnesses can be communicated to. A large part of shamanic healing is journeying. This is the act of entering into a trance-like state for the purpose of releasing yourself from the prison of the mind. Our minds are wonderful tools, but can also cause us a great deal of distress, worry and sickness. Shamanic journeying takes us out of our minds and into our being and expansiveness through the sound of rhythmic drumming. The sound of the drum puts us at ease and reminds our higher being of our tribal roots and who and what we really are. When a shaman reaches this altered state of consciousness they are able to communicate with any and all spirits. They can ask questions in their minds eye about what is required to heal. Often plants reveal themselves by way of vision and communicate what their use will be for a particular person. The plants have a vibrational frequency that tunes into the intention of the shaman, therefore if the intention is to heal, the plants that aide in such a healing will be revealed in the shamanic journeying.

Although shamanism isn't typical in Western medicine, there is still a lot we can learn about our own healing process by studying shamanism. Specifically the notion that we are in tune and equal to nature. Everything has a spirit and energy, no matter how lifeless you think something may be. A shaman can communicate with anything and everything. Consider this when you are outside among the trees and the plants. Look at them with different eyes than you saw them before.

Switch off and tune in

Part of the problem with our modern interactions with nature is our eagerness to observe and identify everything we see. We spot a species of butterfly and snap a picture of it then Google it on our mobile phone to find out what it is. Or we seek to record the deer running in the forest instead of just watching with our naked eye. We are distracted by our devices and our need to categorize, label and record everything. Our immersion in nature isn't really authentic when we have our camera, mobile phone, and binoculars with us. What we really need is our whole self and the energy of being present in nature without the distractions of electronics and devices. When was the last time you sat on a rock or walked through a forest without a phone in your pocket or a camera in your hand? Yes, nature is beautiful and makes for some wonderful photography and artwork, but before we observe nature for the purpose of art, we must observe nature for the purpose of our soul. Only when we truly connect with nature on a one-to-one basis without distraction, can we tune in to the energy of a flower, a plant or a tree. Breathe it in and feel the life force that comes with every living

thing. Don't ruin the potential to experience expansiveness by bringing your iPhone. What would really happen if you spent an hour without a mobile phone or a camera? Nothing. You would enjoy every moment of tranquility that you had and would truly connect with your natural surroundings. When we are distracted we miss the subtle sounds and hints that nature provides us about our lives. Nature has a profound effect on human healing and can make us better simply by spending time with it. You've heard people say "nature heals" and this is what they are talking about. Spend some time out there, it won't hurt you. In fact it will do the opposite and give you a newfound vitality that you thought long gone. Whether it is to elevate your mood, ease your nerves or mend a broken heart, nature is capable of instantly soothing your soul. Think about how it feels on a nice day when the sun is warm, the birds are singing and the grass is green. Think about how your toes feel in the grass, how your face feels with the warmth of the sun on your cheeks, and the wind in your hair. Few things are more precious. It feels magnificent to experience that. And we have the gift of being able to experience it any time we like, yet we don't. We claim that we are too busy or too stressed out, when in fact if we were to just take a few moments out of our day to go outside and look around, we would find ourselves calmer, happier and feeling great about life.

Nature heals us

It isn't just the medicinal quality of plants, the meditative sounds of a stream, or the warmth of the sun on our face that heals us. Just the act of being in and among nature heals us. Showing up and escaping from our dwellings, cars, and homes. Not being

bound by time and human concepts of what we should and shouldn't be doing at any particular point in time. Our souls remember what it was like to be connected to nature, they don't forget. But we forgot. Through the evolution of our species and the advancement of technology, we began placing ourselves above nature thinking that we had the answers to solve life's great mysteries and problems. But what we did was create more problems for ourselves and for our mother earth. Our earth is now sick because of the way we've treated her. She is being robbed of her natural resources and we are attempting (as a species) to control and manage the natural world. Nature was not put here for the benefit and profit of a few rich business moguls. Nature is here for all of us. Every single one of us, no matter where we live, how much money we have or whether we have a job. Our mother earth is our natural healer and provider and to deny any of her inhabitants of the natural benefits that she provides us to for free is simply wrong. We can all be healed by the earth and live a better life, but first we must change our concept of nature and what it means to us. We must see nature for what it really is and come into harmony and balance with that energy. We can restore balance and healing to the earth and possibly reverse the damage that's already been done but we simply must stop disrespecting nature and each other. There is enough for everyone on this planet. There is enough water, enough food, enough shelter – no matter where you live. We simply must be willing to share and work together to allow nature to provide for us. We must communicate to nature and listen to her so we know what to do next. We have to return to nature and get outside more. An estimated 50% of adults are Vitamin D deficient. Vitamin D is something we need large doses of in our bodies in

order to feel our best and for our bodies to function optimally. Vitamin D is actually a hormone that comes from the sun, so it is not really a vitamin. We simply do not get enough Vitamin D in our diets and daily life, so we end up feeling lethargic, depressed and our body's function poorly as a result. Lack of Vitamin D affects our appetite, our weight, our sleep patterns and our blood cells. The modern solution to this problem is simple – take a supplement. Well if you stopped to think about that, you would probably know on a deep and energetic level that there is another way. Simply being outside gives us high dosages of Vitamin D directly from the source, the sun itself. No supplement, tablet or pill can come close to that. Just as nothing in a bottle can replace the healing qualities that come with being connected to nature. I urge you, the next time you are feeling depressed to just go outside and see if it makes a difference. I guarantee you it will. Things will seem brighter, better, and just not so bad. Our disconnection from nature is a large problem in our society. We keep trying to manufacture products that bring us the solutions that nature already provides for free. Why pay to be healed by something manufactured in a factory and packaged in a plastic bottle, when you can go outside connect with nature and be healed that way? Why pay for gastric surgery or expensive diet programs when you can just eat food from the earth and not need those things? It sounds simple because it is simple. But we have come so far away from this that it seems difficult and challenging to us. Nature heals us in ways that we can't fathom, package or bottle.

When you think about what kind of a future you want for yourself, your children and your grandchildren does it include nature? Or is it a future where everything from water, to plants and grass is controlled and managed – possibly even taxed? Why should these things be profit-based when the earth provides them for free? Nobody is stopping you from planting a garden and growing your own food. You can do that today and begin producing your own vegetables, fruits, plants and herbs. Imagine being able to rely upon your own arsenal of vegetation to create nourishment for your family and loved ones? Growing your own aloe and being able to heal using the healing properties of aloe or growing your own Echinacea to use to boost your immune system to ward off flus and colds. We don't have to give away our personal power to companies who manufacture these things and put them in bottles. For significantly less money and a little bit of love, we can go directly to the source. We can be self-sufficient and live off of our own land, grow our own fruits and vegetables and grow our own medicinal plants. Imagine never needing to go to your family doctor because you feel great all the time. You are eating natural whole foods from your garden and taking preventative measures with medicinal plants. You feel great because you are outside more tending to your garden, being in nature and feeling the warm sun on your face. Your weight melts off because you walk more and enjoy the outdoors instead of sitting on your couch all day. All of these things are possible with a return to nature. Nature will always be there for us waiting to nurture us once again. Waiting for the day when we realize that we can and must work together cooperatively for a better world.

Chapter Fourteen

Feeling Connected to Source

When we are in alignment with the universe, we manifest things into our lives by thinking and focusing positively on those things. Our lives unfold before us in ways that we never thought possible when we are connected to source. These outcomes are what allow us to trust in the universe and know that our life's path will emerge for our highest good at all costs, no matter what. You will know when your life is in alignment with source energy because everything just flows beautifully in your life. Things seem to happen as if by magic. Most of us can think back to a time when we experienced the act of manifestation almost magically, perhaps we landed a new job that we had always dreamed of having, found our dream home, or met our spouse. Usually when you think of these events, everything happened just right and fell into place perfectly. Some people call this being in the right place at the right time, good luck, or an act of fate. You may refer to this phenomenon in any way you wish, but all it is, is living in alignment with the universe and manifesting the life you desire as a result of that vibration.

What is source energy?

When we speak about "source" we are referring to the energy from which everything is born and through which everything exists. We sometimes say universe or universal energy. It is the same. Source energy is energy and vibrational frequency that created everything in our universe, both physical and non-physical. Source is everything;

everything created, all energy, intention, thought, everything you see, and anything and everything you can imagine. Source energy is what allowed humans to evolve, animals to thrive, and plants to grow. It is the energy that flows through everything that is, was and ever has been. Even though we are all different and unique, we are all from the same source energy and just vibrate at our own frequency. But source energy allows us to feel connected to each other and everything around us. We feel a sense of Oneness when we are connected to source; we feel at peace with ourselves, the universe and everything in it. We see people on the streets and we feel an immediate sense of connection to them even though we may not know them personally. Being the expansive beings that we are, we have the ability to use source energy to help guide our lives in ways that can help us manifest the things in our lives that we want for ourselves. When we are in tune with the universe and our inner selves, we can do magical things. At every point in the day we are either attracting or repelling based on our thoughts, behaviors, actions and intentions. Source is connected to all that we are and when we are in tune with source energy attraction comes faster, stronger and more readily. When we are disconnected to source, we tend to attract negativity and unfavorable circumstances to our lives. Negativity begets more negativity, so we also must be careful not to dwell in negativity for too long otherwise we will continue to attract more of the same energy that made us unhappy in the first place. Source energy is easy to identify because you can use your emotions and your inner feelings as your guide. When you feel good inside, peaceful, content, and filled with hope – you are in alignment with source. When you feel sad, angry, frustrated, depressed or stressed out – you are out of

alignment with source. It is important to stay in touch with your emotions and allow them to be your barometer for how well you are doing at each stage of the day, they are your indicator for whether you are in flow or not.

How can source energy help us?

Some people think it is difficult to identify whether they are in tune with source energy and question it or have doubts. When you are truly in flow with source energy, there are no doubts, no questions, fears or uncertainties. There is only peace, joy, content, and happiness. Most humans on this planet can at least think of one time in our lives when they were so in flow that things just unfolded magically around them. We have all witnessed the magic of this at one time or another. The trick to experiencing a happy and abundant life is keeping yourself basking in the glow of source energy. Source energy is the reason that we are able to land that dream job, marry the love of our life, pay off all of our debt, accept our body, and follow our dreams. Source energy is the energy of acceptance, love and success. It allows us to do and be anything we desire. We just have to become good at navigating through the bumps in the road and not letting them pull us down and ruin our experience. The law of attraction is working every second of the day whether you are aware of it or not. It is either attracting or repelling to you what you want or don't want depending on what your vibrational energy is putting out. The problem with us is that we often focus too much on what we don't want instead of what we do want. And what this does is mess up our future by bringing us more of what we don't want. Why? Because that's what we are thinking

about and that's what we are creating for ourselves. We are not living in the light of source energy when we are fearing, worrying, stressing, obsessing, and pouring over the unsavory details of our lives. We wouldn't be human without challenges, obstacles and hardships. Those are part of the human experience. But source energy can help us by allowing us to rise out of those challenging experiences, learning what we must learn and rising to success. Experiences are temporary and everything changes. When something happens to us that is negative, it isn't going to be that way or feel that way forever, so it is important that we acknowledge the lesson and move on.

Source energy is a wonderful resource that we all have at our disposal at any point in time. There is no right or wrong, good or bad, or judgment of any kind. Source energy is always there for you ready to take you and help you realize your power. You just have to be willing and have belief in yourself. Source energy is really about nothing more than the relationship with your self. You cannot access, be guided, or helped by source energy without acknowledging your own inner desires and paying homage to who you really are. When you stop making decisions based on what others want for you, or what others think, and start doing it for yourself – you give yourself the gift of source energy. When you feel hopeful about life and begin to believe in your own dreams and what you want for your own life, you put yourself in the light of source energy.

Source energy is your guide in life to how well you are doing. When you feel alive, exhilarated and joyful you are in alignment with source energy. When you feel defeated,

tired, sad, depressed or frustrated, you are far from where you need to be. At any point in time, how you feel can dictate how close or far you are from the energy of source. So really your emotions are what help you most, pay attention to your emotions and let them be your guide to living your life in the light of source energy.

Resistance to what is

When we experience uncomfortable feelings it is almost always due to resistance of some kind. We are very good at resisting what we don't want, and by resisting what we don't want we actually attract it into our lives through the law of attraction. Resistance is simply fear. We fear the unknown or unfamiliar because we haven't been there before and don't know what to expect. We are creatures of comfort and we like to know what is next and be comfortable with what we know. There is no change in comfort, however, and many of us observe that in fact life begins at the end of your comfort zone. Don't fear what you don't know, embrace it and know that whatever happens you will be fine and you will get through it and it might just be the best thing that ever happened to you. Allow what comes to you to be experienced and then move through it confidently knowing that there is something else lined up for you right behind it. Nothing is forever. No feelings, circumstances or uncomfortable situations; it is all temporary and part of the overall experience. So why stress and make yourself sick with worry over things that are temporary?

Resistance is the thing that most often gets in the way. It stops us from achieving what we know we want, stops us from believing in ourselves, makes us question our thoughts and decisions, and takes us far away from where we need to be in order to manifest what we want in our lives. Resistance happens to us all and it is only in recognizing that resistance that we can work to change it. Most of us can identify with this particularly as it relates to relationships. Many of us have experienced being either the resisted or the resistor in a romantic or marital relationship with another. There is something you don't like about the actions or personality of another so you try to mold and change that person into what you want them to be instead of allowing them to be who they really are. This is resistance. Or perhaps you are the one who has been the victim of this type of relationship, where your partner has attempted to change who you are and make you into something you are not. We often also do this with our children when we see them expressing undesirable traits. We resist the notion that our child is simply experimenting and temporarily pushing the boundaries and we worry (unnecessarily) that a particular trait will define them. We often resist who and what they are and try to push them to be what we think they should be. For example, we may have a child who only wants to draw all day every day and we constantly battle with them to read, to clean their room, or go outside – instead of channeling that wonderful energy of creativity. What a gift to have a child who pursues something with such commitment. It is okay to allow people to be who they are. It is fear that causes us to want to change them. When we are in alignment we feel no need to change anyone, we feel no resistance, and we just accept things as they are with a knowing that it is for our highest good and will serve some

purpose in our lives. At every point in time you are doing something worthwhile in your life and the experience you are living is a stepping-stone to another experience right behind it. Nothing is ever wasted, even when you perhaps made a decision that wasn't the best choice you could have made. You will still learn, grow and come out a better stronger person for having had the experience. Resistance just makes things harder for us. It takes us a longer time to figure out the lessons we need to learn in order to see ourselves for what we are. Those same lessons are already present within our intuition and our higher self. We know ourselves on such a deep level that we always know the right way forward, we simply need to tune in and listen. That involves quieting the mind and ego, which is hard for us at times. And that is where resistance comes in. Resistance is typically fear or ego speaking. Eternal love never speaks through resistance.

When our lives are in flow everything just clicks into place and moves magically throughout each day. We have a sense of lightness to our being; we smile more, feel at peace, and feel confident with our lives. We know that we are on the right path because we can feel it and it feels good. It's really that simple. When we feel good we are doing good, and when we feel bad we are doing bad. But doing bad doesn't mean that you have to feel guilty or defeated, it just means if you adjust your course slightly your ride will be smoother, you will be happier. So why wouldn't you do that? You cannot change the things outside of yourself. You can only change your own being and your own life. Other things outside of you will happen, will change, and you will not be able to control

them. So avoid resisting what you cannot change and you will experience a greater degree of happiness through your acceptance of what is.

Recognizing when we are out of alignment

Being in alignment by being in tune with source energy is the most wonderful place for any human being to be. It is where anything is possible, where you feel your absolute best, and where you can be, do and think anything you desire. Whether you are aware of it or not we are all striving to be in alignment each time we try to succeed, accomplish a goal, pursue a dream, work on ourselves, practice positivity, and tell the truth about how we really feel. Almost everything we do in a day is an attempt in some way to connect to source energy, but we often cannot do so because we are affected by external influences, the opinions of others, and our own emotions. Recognizing when you are not in sync (or out of alignment) is a great way to live consciously. Being out of alignment means not getting what you want, not manifesting or attracting, and taking the longer and harder path when you don't have to do that. When we are out of alignment we just coast through each day without the sense that we are in control of our lives. We allow the waves of life to thrash us around on choppy waters instead of just steering the ship where we want it to go. Often we give up our power in life and tell ourselves that we have no control, or that no matter what we do, it doesn't seem to make a difference. This is just resistance in our willingness to take the reins. Many of us fear that if we do take control of our lives we will have more responsibility, perhaps more than we can handle, or that the distance we will fall could be further. We allow

ourselves to wallow in a quiet comfort, even when it is not where we want to be in life because it is familiar. Dissatisfaction, as unhappy as it can make us is at least familiar to us. There are no surprises; nothing outrageous is going to happen when we are just coasting by each day living a mediocre existence going through the motions of life. It is when we take risks that we create uncertainty, possibility, and change. The reason why so many of us continue to live out of alignment is that we are afraid of change. We don't want things to change because we don't know what that looks like and whether or not we can handle it. But the truth is, unless you are willing to stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone, you will probably not make it very far in life as far as your goals are concerned. Many people will tell you that life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

So hopefully you are willing and ready to extend yourself beyond your comfort zone and ready to embrace the power of who you are. If this is true, congratulations. Being willing to change is the first step in creating change. Most of us know the areas in which we must change but can't identify our negative patterns, or muster the willpower or courage to change – so we continue doing the same things that make us unhappy day after day. A big part in identifying the parts of your life that you want to change is in knowing what those things are. Sometimes we are just unhappy and we don't know why. We feel tired, uninspired, miserable, and complacent. But emotions such as these do not just crop up without reason, we just haven't fully explored the reasons why we feel this way and have cut ourselves off from knowing. Recognizing when we are out of alignment begins with our emotions. Our emotions are the key indicator to how we are

doing. You already know that when you are feeling good and things are flowing that you are in tune with source energy and in alignment with the universe. But what about when you feel bad? Of course you know you are feeling bad when you feel bad, but how do you care enough to want to change it? That one is easy. None of us want to feel bad, we just do. Things happen, emotions are felt, feelings are hurt, fears crop up and we can't process them so we internalize and try to swallow them whole. This makes us angry, depressed, frustrated and miserable. None of us want to feel this way. But the problem is that the negative energy you create from feeling this energy creates more negative energy, more negative circumstances and continues to attract exactly what you don't want in your life. So if you worry about motivation and having the energy to care or change, just ask yourself "do you want to continue to live in the cycle of negativity?" If your answer is no, then you must change your energy to get out of that cycle. Negative energy just creates and attracts more negativity. So even when you don't intend to create further problems in your life, you do simply by feeling and thinking negative things. Nobody is perfect and you will have bad days, that's for sure. We are all human and we can't avoid the hardships, challenges and obstacles of being human. Just make sure that when you do feel bad, that you sit with it, observe it, acknowledge it and then release it. Don't carry it around with you like a heavy piece of luggage day in and day out. You simply cannot afford to do that. You are messing up your future experience in doing that, so let it go.

When you are out of alignment you feel bad. When you are in alignment you feel good, but how can you get back into alignment once you are out? There are several things to consider here. The first is understanding how you feel and why, the second is in changing the vibration of your energy. Understanding how you feel is important for you to identify so that you can see beyond the problem itself and then release it. You can't release something that you don't understand. Changing your vibration is necessary to take you from a state of negativity, where you are creating a negative reality to a place of positivity where you can manifest positive things into your life. Changing your vibration will feel better.

Journaling and how it can help

I am a big advocate of creating conversation with the inner self. Journaling is a wonderful way to reflect on how you are feeling each day and to check in with your emotions. Sometimes we don't take the time to properly reflect on how we feel and why, so we end up being led by our emotions, not always fully understanding them. When we give ourselves the time and space to talk about how we feel we are able to fully appreciate our emotional state and release the energy of those emotions. Journaling helps us to realize things that we may not have previously noticed or allowed ourselves to feel. It also opens us to the possibility to have realizations or aha moments that give us the opportunity to grow spiritually and evolve from our current position. More than anything, journaling just feels good and makes you feel like you are in charged of your own life. But it is hard for most people to get into the habit of

journaling. Many people have gone through stages where they journaled, but then went away from it and they know it is good for them but they just didn't have time. If you worry about this in your life, then creating a designated time for your journaling is going to be important. Whenever you embark on something new, an addition to your existing routine, you have to clear the space and designate a time for it otherwise it is quite possible that it will fall off the schedule. Even the most unorganized people have routine in their lives. Whether it's waking up at the same time each day, brushing your teeth, getting dressed, driving to work, or making your breakfast. There is some element of routine in all of our lives, so there is no reason why we cannot introduce something new (and healthy) like journaling into our lives. We simply have to set ourselves up to succeed, and we do this by setting a time and space for it and doing it routinely at the same time.

I really like writing in the mornings. The morning is kind of a magical time. You are unaffected by the day's stress. Perhaps you have worked out some challenges in your dreams or just had a really good sleep. When you wake you are fresh to face the day and haven't yet been distracted by the myriad of responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities that each day presents. It helps to have a journal by your bed, this way you can record dreams that you would like to remember. By the time you get out of bed and brush your teeth, most of your memories of your dream will dissipate. Dreams help us uncover a lot of wonderful information about ourselves and can provide us with deep insight into how to address problems in our waking lives. It is important to note, however, that journaling is a very private activity. You don't want your husband, wife, or

kids looking over your shoulder while you have intimate conversations in the pages of your journal. So for this reason, I recommend creating a space for your journaling that is private. If your bedroom is private, fantastic, but if not, then perhaps choose another location in the house where you will be granted some privacy. Also ensure that you don't leave your journal out in plain view for others to read. You may want to hide your journal, lock it up or just keep it with you. The reason for this is that it will fully allow you to explore your emotions and feelings honestly without hurting anybody's feelings.

Sometimes we have off days with our friends or family and we question our lives and relationships, if we cannot say this honestly in our journal, then where can we say this and who can we talk to? Your journal is your journal and is for you to explore your inner emotions, desires, questions, thoughts, and realizations. There is no way that you will be able to do that openly and honestly if you are concerned about someone reading your journal. So ensure that you have a safe place for you to write and keep your journal.

Before you begin writing, do some deep breathing exercises. Allow yourself to feel relaxed and comfortable. You may wish to journal while you enjoy a warm mug of tea or a coffee. The key is to be relaxed and comfortable. If you are unsure what to write, simply write whatever comes to mind. Remember, no one is judging your writing and you aren't going to be graded on sentence structure and fluency. Just write whatever is in your mind, without judgment. Perhaps the first few times you write you will write for half a page about not knowing what to write. But after that half a page, you will say something important. And the more that you write, the more that you will say, the more

that you will notice and the more that you will grow. Ask yourself questions about how you feel. Ask yourself difficult questions about what to do in your life, even if those questions have no answer. The act of asking a question in your journal creates the possibility that you will receive an answer. Trust in this process. When you allow yourself to freely write without overthinking it, judging it or analyzing it – you create the opportunity to receive messages from spirit. This is the most important aspect of journaling. But it is also challenging to train yourself to not judge or criticize. We are so accustomed to receiving messages from our brain about what to do, how to act, think and behave that it can be difficult to turn it off sometimes. Gently remind yourself each time that you write that there is no outcome, no right or wrong, and that what you write isn't important. What is important is that you write. Visualize your hand being led by source energy guiding your hand on the page of your journal. You don't have to think about what comes out, analyze it, or make sure that it makes sense. Know and trust that whatever comes out is what is meant to come out. It is perfect and divine and doesn't need to be filtered. Resist the urge to edit your thoughts and look for the "right way" to say things. Speak freely, openly and without judgment.

It may take a bit of practice before you are comfortable writing how and what you feel completely unfiltered and without thought, but continue to do so even if nothing but nonsense comes out at first. We often rely heavily on our brain to help us sort through our feelings, so this type of writing can often feel foreign to us. Eventually, when you trust in the process and allow yourself to write freely, spirit will take over and you will write exactly what you need to write. This act of routine journaling will create deep and

meaningful conversations with your higher self as you connect to source energy and work through challenges in your life and release energetic blockages and emotions. You will discover that you have more joy, realizations, and happiness as you use your journal as a tool in daily life. Your journaling will bring you closer to understanding yourself and create a strong connection between you and the universe. You will feel as if your hand is being magically led at times by the energy of source and will often write pages without memory or knowledge of how you wrote and what you wrote. And when you go back and read what you wrote, you discover something about yourself. Something that previously went unnoticed, unspoken or ignored. You forgive yourself, you love yourself and you learn to accept yourself as you are. Journaling is so much more than writing thoughts down on a page, it is a divine conversation with the self.

Meditation

One of the best ways to connect to source energy is through the breath. Our human lives are filled with responsibility, stress, and circumstance. We often wander around each day taking shallow breaths and allowing the impact of stress to have negative effects on our bodies. We don't take the time to truly allow our being to rest, relax and breath purposefully and deeply. Meditation carves out this time and space and brings us to a deep place of relaxation. With some regular practice, we can tremendously reduce the amount of stress and discomfort in our lives. As with journaling, or anything else, it is just about creating the time and space in our lives to do it. The morning is still the best time of day. If you want to incorporate meditation and journaling into your life, the two

can work hand in hand beautifully, or you may choose to only make room for one. Whatever you feel is right for you, is right for you. Meditation requires a comfortable place free from distraction. Ensure that you have such a place in your home for successful practice. You may choose to purchase a meditation cushion, or use an existing one that you have in your home. You can also use a favorite chair or sofa to meditate. The key is that you are comfortable and relaxed. When you meditate don't worry too much about whether you are doing it right, whether you can shut your mind down, or whether you are breathing properly. Trust and know that what you are doing is helping you and that you are doing what you need to be doing in that moment. It is always best to close your eyes. This allows the visual distractions around you to disappear and helps you to clear the space in the mind for emptiness. Take some deep purposeful breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you breathe in, place your hands gently on your abdomen so that you can feel the depth of your breath. You may also exhale through the nose, but if you choose to do this, make sure that you breath out into your throat so that there is an echo in your throat upon each exhalation. Check in with your body to make sure that you are comfortable and allow yourself to feel still and peaceful. Take deep purposeful breaths with your eyes closed and push away any thoughts or annoyances that the mind may try to impose on you. Visualize yourself pushing those thoughts away, out into the universe while you allow your being to be completely still and at peace. The reason why we focus so intently on our breathing is that it helps us to stop thinking. When we are focusing on our breath, we are not thinking stressful thoughts or letting our minds go off on a tangent. So if you find

a that your thoughts are being pesky, simply redirect them by focusing upon your inhales and your exhales. This should gently steer your focus back to the present moment and help you push off any thoughts. Don't judge yourself harshly or become disappointed if thoughts do continue to invade your meditation, it happens. Just push them away and say "no thoughts, I will deal with you later", and bring your focus again to your breathing. The more that you meditate, the better you will become at staying present with your breath and allowing yourself stillness and peace.

Meditation creates a deep connection to source energy. You may notice that parts of your body become very warm during your meditation. This is simply energy emitting from your body. You may also feel things around you or have visions while in a meditative state. Try not to analyze this too much while in the moment of meditation and simply allow yourself to experience whatever it is that comes into your experience. It is all perfect and exactly as it should be. Meditation will allow you to feel at peace with who you are and manifest the things into your life that you truly desire. Negativity and judgment falls away from you as you see yourself for who and what you really are. You raise your vibrational frequency through meditation, which keeps you in alignment with source energy and allows you to experience greater joy and a deeper connection to all that is. With daily practice, you will notice your life unfold magically around you and that you are able to manifest things that you desire with such ease and simplicity. No longer will you be a slave to your negative thoughts or be defeated by self-doubt. Meditation helps you rise above that and become comfortable with the expansive

nature of who you are. Meditation brings you to a place of love, acceptance and positivity, which is where your connection to source resides. Meditation can be life changing and profound. There are no negative effects of meditation, no negative outcomes, risks, or potential dangers. It is all positive and all possible. You can do nothing other than grow, expand, and become happier and more peaceful through the act of regular meditation. And you can do it anywhere. You can do five minutes of meditative breathing in your office, your car, outside under a tree, or at home in your favorite space. It doesn't cost you anything to meditate; yet you stand to gain so much. I truly encourage everyone to open that connection to source energy by inviting meditation into their lives. Just watch what happens when you do. It is magical.

Line it up

Every thought you have, action you take or emotion you feel either brings you closer or further away from source energy. Know that when you act with ego, you are out of alignment and when you act with love you are in alignment. You cannot achieve the pinnacle of success or be peaceful and happy when you aren't connected to source energy. Things will be difficult and possibly miserable for you. Set your intention that you are going to connect with source energy and be aware of every thought, action, emotion, and intention that you have for the universe is listening at every moment in time. The universe cannot and will not distinguish between negative and positive, and will simply give you what you think about most. If you spend all of your time focusing on negativity and anger, you will continue to attract more of that energy into your life. But

when you allow yourself to feel love and peace, you will continue to attract more of that into your life. You can begin to line things up for yourself right now. Pay no attention to what happened yesterday or what might happen tomorrow. You are lining up your future right now at this very moment by your connection to source energy and at every moment in time you are either attracting or deflecting. You want to be in a position to manifest your desires, experience peace and true happiness – so allow yourself that beautiful luxury by giving yourself the opportunity. Before you speak or act, ask yourself “is what I am about to say or do in the light of love”? If the answer is no, then perhaps rethink your position and change the energy of that thought or action to be more in line with the energy of love. When we act with ego, we are acting from fear. Fear cannot help us and does not connect us to source energy. Instead it takes away from us and prevents us from living a happy life. Fear keeps us down, makes us unhappy, and untrusting of our lives and other people. Love does the opposite of that. We feel elated, like anything is possible and as a result our experiences are wondrous.

You get to choose how you face each day, and every day is a new day. So if you mess up one day and let anger or stress get the better of you, don't judge yourself harshly or come down on yourself, just start all over again the next day and make some changes. You can change right now by choosing better thoughts, allowing yourself to feel better, and doing things that bring you into a more positive mindset rather than a place of fear and negativity. Remember that you don't create your future with yesterday or tomorrow, but today, right now. So what better time to start than now? Check in with

yourself as often as you can. Ask yourself how well you are doing at lining up your future. Are you creating with intention while connected to source energy, or are you missing out on opportunities because of your fear and ego? You are the center of your own universe and can only create the life that you choose to create. Give yourself the power to create the life that you want, by connecting with source energy. Resist the urge to act from fear, anger or negativity. Those things don't help you and push you further away from the things you truly want to manifest in your life. Your connection to source is the single most important factor that will help you create the life that you have always wanted, beyond your wildest dreams. Why wouldn't you want to go after that? Remember that being negative today creates more negativity tomorrow, and more of what you don't want in your life. So do whatever you have to in order to get yourself out of a state of negativity. Pay attention to your emotions and your physical cues. Your body will tell you when you are feeling negative or uncomfortable. Observe this without judgment and take it as a gentle nudge from the universe, that you must redirect your energy into something more positive, for your own highest good.

Nobody can live your life for you. Each day, each moment is up to you and you alone. You get to decide how you live, how you feel and what you do. And each decision you make impacts your connection to source energy by either bringing you closer or further away. Decisions that are in the light of love and peace are always in alignment with source energy, whereas decisions that are in the light of fear and negativity are out of alignment. This doesn't mean you need to judge as being good and bad, or right and

wrong, it just means that your observation of your own decisions and actions will impact your ability to manifest what you desire in life. There is no need for judgment. The universe doesn't judge you and simply helps you manifest whatever it is that you are creating with your own energy. Source energy is a magical thing when we learn to tap into it. It just takes a little bit of intention and effort. The best indicator is your emotions. At every point in the day your emotions give you cues about how you are doing that day. When you feel yourself shift into negativity, gently guide yourself back without judgment by doing something you enjoy like talking to a friend, doing some meditation, or reading a book. Change your energy, and change your outcome. You create your tomorrow today.

Chapter Fifteen

Sustainable Living

Everything we do, touch, feel, think, and intend creates a vibrational frequency. Many people grasp this concept in terms of manifesting the life they desire and thinking positively, but it also extends into the way you live your life; the products you buy, the food you eat, and how responsible you are as a citizen of earth. When we think about the broader picture it can seem somewhat overwhelming, but eventually you will be able to identify what is not in accordance to source energy and what is. We have to be responsible in all areas of our lives because if we don't, then who will? There are companies who exist that are ingrained in our daily life, who only seek to profit and don't care about the environment or the citizens of earth. When we subscribe to these corporate machines, we give them power and we perpetuate the energy of their negative behaviors that damage the earth. By identifying the things in our society that don't work and don't help our planet, we can actively work to change them and influence others one by one, leading by example. We may not be able to change them completely, but we can radically reduce their impact they have upon our environment by not supporting them and encouraging others to do the same.

The big green marketing machine

Being green is almost a catch phrase these days and marketers are using it to dive deeper into your pockets. It's used on biodegradable shopping bags, on the front of

packaging, bottles and containers, on websites, t-shirts, and even in unexpected places to communicate products and services that are allegedly supporting a healthy planet. But why is there such a push to communicate these things? If we were all being responsible citizens of earth, selling healthy sustainable products and supporting the wellbeing of the planet these green marketing messages wouldn't be necessary. But the reality is that most of the companies that push out these messages are doing very little to support the planet and be good to our environment. There are some wonderful companies who are, but many are not and are simply making claims that are untrue. Or they are perhaps one small thing better than they were before, but still doing one hundred other things that hurt the planet. And it is some of the biggest and most powerful who are not doing anything to help our planet, which is why it is important to identify who these companies are and decide whether you want to support their products in your life or not. Every product that you buy, use and have in your home carries with it a unique vibrational energy and is a vote for supporting a healthier happier planet or for the continuation of planetary disregard. It is your responsibility to know and subscribe to positive companies who make the world a better place and not to support those companies who contribute to some of the massive problems on this planet. The reality is that we do in fact live in a society where people shop and buy things, and products need to be consumed, replaced and repurchased. This is the world that we live in and there is no getting around that, but we can make better choices for our families and ourselves. And making better choices not only makes you feel better inside, but the energy of those choices goes far deeper than you can imagine. Think

about the way you feel when you eat a hamburger that you picked up at a drive through window, that was made on an assembly line versus the way that you feel when you buy beef from your local butcher and make homemade burgers. Really tune into that energy and notice the difference. It isn't just because you made it yourself that it tastes better, it is a lot of things. You had a personal connection with the butcher perhaps, the cows were raised ethically and not fed an unnatural diet, and you chose exactly which ingredients went into the making of your burger.

We should never allow marketers to tell us what constitutes green living and what doesn't. Those decisions are for us to make with our families and community members, and they are usually pretty obvious and apparent. We may not be able to replace every single product in our home, but we can make better choices moving forward from this day on. We can choose not to support companies who pollute our planet, have unethical manufacturing processes and damage the earth's natural resources. We can choose to support local businesses that make their products by hand using all American ingredients and byproducts. If you even sense that there is something unethical about a product or the way it is being manufactured, trust in your intuition and inner guide and choose a different product that creates a better feeling inside of you.

The energy of things

Everything that came into existence, both human made and natural has a vibrational frequency based on its origin, purpose and surroundings. Have you ever been to a garage sale and picked something up and put it down immediately because it just didn't

“feel right”. You likely didn’t know why it didn’t feel right, but you just trusted in that feeling and put it down. Sometimes we are attracted to the idea of something, but it feels different once we have it within our grasp. Often this is because of the unique energy in which the item carries. Think of a Gold watch at a garage sale. A man who has passed on owned the gold watch. He wore that watch every single day, and his life was a struggle. He was an angry man who didn’t allow people into his life or emotional field; he spent most of his time alone in front of the television. His children felt neglected and uncared for, and he barely said two words to his neighbors. So now, his children decided to have a garage sale to clear out some of the items from his home. You wander over to the table where the watch is, initially attracted by its beauty. But when you pick it up you instantly feel off, negative and agitated. You are feeling the energy of the watch and the man who wore it for so many years. This is just one example of course of the ways in which we experience energy from things. The biggest way, however, is through our food supply and the products we buy and own in our home. Everything we have was made somewhere: in a factory, in a barn, in a home. Look around your home and think about how many things you have and where they all came from. Chances are, if your home is like most, your things (many of them) were made in a factory. This is true for most furniture, electronics, appliances and garments. But how much do we really know about the things we own? Where are these factories? What are their manufacturing principles? Who do they employ? What do they do with waste? How do they get the products over to us? These are the questions that we really must begin to ask when we vote for a product by purchasing it. If you wouldn’t support animal cruelty, then you

shouldn't purchase products that are tested on animals. If you don't agree with pollution, then don't buy products from companies who dump waste into our oceans. If you feel strongly about child labor, investigate the factories that make the products that you want to buy. We always have a choice. We don't have to buy a pair of sneakers that were made in a far away land at a company that has 24 hour revolving shifts and has been accused of hiring children. You can choose to buy a pair of sneakers that were made here in America, in a smaller facility with folks who have benefits, flexible working hours and pretty normal happy lives. Imagine how that sneaker is going to feel on your foot as apposed to the other sneaker.

Food is the biggest area that we can create change with the choices we make. The changes we make with food are even more important than other products or services that we pay for, because we take food into our bodies. Everything we ingest becomes a part of our body and cells. Think about where your food comes from. Care about it. If you eat meat, know how the animals you consume are treated because if you don't then you are ingesting the energy of the way that animal was treated. That means that you are potentially ingesting the energy of a mistreated animal if you buy meat that is unethically raised and killed. Perhaps you don't think that much about it when you are eating, but human beings are energetic beings. We receive, project, and transmit energy all the time from all sources. If you can quiet the mind long enough to actually listen to your inner voice, you will be able to detect and identify when something doesn't feel right. Have you ever noticed how wonderful and energized you feel after eating a

colorful and healthy meal? Now think about how you feel after eating a burger and fries combo with a soft drink. It is a completely different energetic vibration. The more natural state a food is left in, the higher the vibration of that food. When we take something and manipulate it into a completely different form to make it sweet, savory, salty or just fatty – we ruin the energy of that food in its natural state. Nature is intelligent by design and our bodies respond to natural whole foods because our body is also intelligent by design and knows that this is the food we need to thrive. We will get sick and possibly die sooner than we have to if we ignore these intelligent messages that come from our bodies on a daily basis. All you have to do to tune into this energy is simply observe how you feel when you eat healthy vs. unhealthy. Your body is screaming out for healthy natural foods that grow from mother earth. You receive and ingest the energy of everything that is when you eat food that grows from the soil of our earth. You have the benefit of sunlight, water, earth, wind and the energy of things that grow nearby. Teas sometimes taste different because of where they grow and what grows around them. When you eat food that is manufactured, over processed and then thrown in a box – what is that doing to your body and mind? The energy of that food is simply not in alignment with the universe and all that is. The energy of processed food is unhealthy and our bodies know this on an intrinsic level. Sometimes our bodies will attempt to warn us with physical cues like disruptive bowel movements, stomach illness, heartburn, or just feeling so full that we can't move. Other times these messages are subtler and are prevalent while we are eating. We have thoughts like "I really shouldn't be eating this" or "I wonder how many calories this is". When you eat healthy

natural food you don't have those thoughts because you know, and your body knows that whatever you are taking in is in energetic alignment. Other times your emotions communicate to you while eating. You feel rejuvenated and revitalized when you eat a gorgeous salad and you feel bad about yourself and possibly even guilty for eating a high fat meal that you know isn't good for you.

Before you put something into your mouth, or better yet, before you prepare something to eat or buy something at a restaurant – ask yourself “what is the energy of this choice?” Go inside yourself and your inner guide will give you an answer, you simply need to ask. Most times you will just know without having to ask, but asking confirms what you already know and will give you the confidence to make better food choices that create a more positive and successful energy for your body and life.

Self-Sufficiency

It is really quite amazing if you look at our society today compared to where we were just 100 years ago. Life expectancy has greatly increased, as has wages, expenses, and consumption. But we are far less self-sufficient than we once were. A hundred years ago there were no drive through windows to pick up dinner on your way home, and in fact only a small percentage of Americans even owned cars to drive around. There were less paved roads, States that hadn't been invented yet and people died from what we consider to be minor illnesses today. People had to work hard to run their homes and families with few people having electricity or indoor plumbing. Imagine bigger families

and less money, harder work and less career satisfaction. That is what people dealt with. Men often had dangerous jobs and most women worked tirelessly in the home baking, canning and mending clothes or upholstery for the family. There weren't as many services, products and choices as we have today. But even though our lives are easier today in many ways, we are less skilled at basic living than our society was a hundred years ago. Many of us don't know how to operate a sewing machine, chop wood, use a hammer and nails, grow our own vegetables and herbs, cook, or preserve food. We rely on the grocery store and service-based businesses to do everything for us. The problem with this is that it makes us feel inadequate, even if you don't consciously think so, a quick look inside yourself will provide you with the answer. When we give away all of our personal power, we feel somewhat helpless and embarrassed by our lack of basic life skills. Yet so many of us do this.

We could all stand to gain from a little bit of self-sufficiency. We are lucky to live in modern times so we don't need to revert to 1913 to learn how to live, we can still live a modern life and be responsible and self sufficient. Many people are starting to question their food sources and the food industry as a whole, so growing your own vegetables is one small thing that you can do to create positive change. The feeling that you get from growing your own crops and then plucking them from the garden to eat is like nothing else. What an empowering thing to do for yourself and your family. And even if you only do that one thing, it is a step towards self-sufficiency that you otherwise may not have taken. Sometimes it takes a powerful storm or a natural disaster to show us just how

helpless and dependent on the system we are. Ask yourself if you could survive for a week, a month or even a year if something were to happen tomorrow and you suddenly lost power in your home and had no option to move. Your refrigerator, stove, computer, lights, and heating would all be off and useless. How would you cope? What if grocery stores weren't an option? If you are self-sufficient and can grow and prepare your own meals, have alternative sources of energy or power, and perhaps even help others thrive with their own self-sufficiency.

But rather than viewing self-sufficiency as something that you may have to do if a crisis arose, I prefer to think of it as a rewarding way to be a responsible citizen of earth. It feels good to know how to do things for yourself and to not have to depend on stores and services around you to do them for you. Basic life skills are something we should all have, whether we need them or not. We should be responsible and know where our food comes from, how and when it grows, and respect the soil, rain, and sunshine for helping it along. When we are too far removed from the process we become disconnected from the source of our family's nutrition and become dependent on a system that doesn't care about respecting the elements of nature. A system that thinks more about the bottom line than about the quality and nutrition of ingredients to support a healthy society.

If you live in a condo or a high rise you may think "how can I grow anything"? I don't suggest starting a huge garden if you have never done that before or have limited space, but what about starting small. Start with an indoor herb garden. Pick two to three herbs

that you really enjoy and grow those to start. Focus on loving those plants and giving them daily attention. If you enjoy that and notice a change in the way you feel, perhaps try something else inside or rent a plot in a community garden. We can all grow something no matter where we live. We just have to want to. If gardening just isn't your thing, how about trying something creative with your hands? I love to work with ceramics and pottery. That is something tactile that I enjoy. It is very rewarding to work with your hands to create something from your imagination. If you like to work with your hands or have an interest, try woodworking, sewing or knitting, or even chopping wood for your fireplace instead of ordering it. These are just a couple of suggestions, but there is an endless supply of possibilities.

Ask yourself *"In which way would I like to become more self sufficient, or learn a new skill?"* Pay attention to the information that comes, even if it doesn't seem to make sense or is something you have absolutely no experience with. What is the first thing that came into your mind when you asked that question? Take that answer as divine guidance from the universe and use it as a means to become more connected to the world in which you live and to live a more sustainable life.

World Citizenship

Now that we live in a world that is much smaller and we have the benefit of knowledge on our side, it is our responsibility to ensure that the decisions that we make have a positive impact on the world and others who live in it. How does the toy you purchase

today for your child affect the country it was made in? Perhaps the place where it is made is contributing to poor air quality and pollution. Where do all of those plastic bottles of water end up? Think before you buy. Ask yourself if it is something you want or need. We have been trained to believe that we must consume and must have all of these wonderful things when some countries around the world struggle to find safe water for their poor. Here in North America we account for the worlds largest percentage of consumption while many other countries citizens have to survive on as little as \$2 per day. There is enough for all of us in this world, but we have to share and adopt a new system of equality. It may take decades or longer to do this, or perhaps it will never happen. But you have a choice today and every day when you stand at the checkout counter to support the companies who make this world a better place, or support the ones who support unethical trading and pillage from the land of the poor so that they can become rich. You can choose to buy fair trade products only with everything from sugar, to chocolate and coffee. Demand to know the ethical practices of the companies you support. If you have to be a consumer (and we do to live in this society), then at least we can become a responsible consumer and care about what happens in the rest of the world, especially when many of our products are being sourced from other countries.

Viewing yourself as a citizen of the world is much different than the old school mentality of identifying with the small town or city where you are from. World citizenship involves thinking and caring about people who you may never meet or know, but who live on

this planet like you do and who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Would you feel good drinking coffee that came from hard working farmers who barely receive anything for their beans, while a giant corporation becomes richer? Would you feel good consuming beverages from a company who depletes the natural groundwater from far away countries to make more product and money? If there is a product you buy routinely that you have never even thought about, what about just looking into their ethical practices? Especially when they are a large company that rakes in millions in profit each year. Just make sure that your money (which is also energy) is going to a company who creates a positive global energy with their business rather than a negative one. We as individuals have a responsibility to be good global citizens and so do corporations, but often we have to push to make these companies accountable if they aren't already doing so on their own accord.

Being a good global citizen means shifting your focus from yourself, your family and your community to the world at large. You have to be outraged at social injustices no matter where they happen and be willing to speak out against inequality. You must take responsibilities for your actions as an individual if they are rooted in something that could be happening outside of your country, like purchasing from companies who source products overseas in an unethical way. Think about where things are made, how they get here, what's in them, what the companies do with their waste, and how the things you buy impact your carbon footprint. It can be daunting to research each and every single product you buy, but start with a few – some of your usual products. How

and where are they made? Commit to finding out and if you discover something that you don't like, look for an alternative that makes you feel better about your contribution to global citizenship. Several cosmetic companies still engage in animal abuse and test their products on animals. Do you want the energy of that company on your body or in your energetic field? Even a few small steps towards being a good global citizen can create such a surge of positive energy that you will impact others around you to want to do the same thing. If you suddenly start talking to your friends and family about what you discovered in your research and why you switched products, they will likely feel compelled to do so as well. None of us intend to be irresponsible or support companies who are hugely unethical; it is almost always that we just don't have the information at our fingertips. The companies themselves aren't going to come and tell you that what they are doing is wrong, so you will have to uncover the information for yourself. And in doing that, you will take one small step towards environmental responsibility and a huge stride towards creating a better world.

Healthy habits

When there are kids in the home, they often look up to their parents and mimic the behavior that they see. So if they see their parents littering, throwing out recyclable products or needlessly making purchases and being wasteful, they too are going to exhibit the same behaviors. Healthy habits have to form and develop in the family and they will then extend outward into the community and the world at large. Since our planet is already going to be a very different place for our children and our children's

children, the least we can do is take responsibility for that now by helping them to develop healthy sustainable habits that will make them good global citizens. Children learn by watching and then mimicking. They also love to learn about responsibility and be involved in the decision making of the family. Perhaps your children are older and this no longer applies, or maybe they are still young enough to learn. Either way, we have a responsibility to our children, and our children's children to help them embrace sustainable living.

Recycling: Teach your children or your grandchildren about recycling. What is it and why do we do it? What kinds of things are recyclable? Have them sort and identify items that are recyclable and those that are not. Involve them in the process by having them throw things in the recycling bin each day and helping you find recyclable products in the grocery store while you are shopping.

Composting: Kids love to learn about plant life and where things come from. Teach them about composting by having them help you in the kitchen and separate your food waste for composting. If you have your own compost in the backyard, plant some vegetables or flowers with your soil so that your child can see the complete process from beginning to end. If your city has a food waste pick up service, explain to your child where it goes or ask if you can tour the facility to teach them.

Littering: Most schools teach kids about littering these days, but what about off of school property. Have your child look out for litter on the ground and help to pick it up. Save the recycling from the landfill by collecting that separately and putting garbage where it belongs. This will help your child feel connected to the community and feel like he or she is being of service.

Electricity: With all of our electronics, appliances, toys and the size of our homes – it's no wonder that lights get left on and electronics are left unattended. Teach your child about responsible electricity use in the home. Have them turn off lights in rooms that they are no longer in, unplug or turn off electronics that are not in use, and lead by example when it comes to laundry, heating and cooling.

Water: We take for granted the fact that we turn on a tap and water appears. It is important that your children understand that water is a precious resource and should be treated as such. Little things like not leaving the tap running while brushing your teeth, soaking dishes instead of rinsing them, taking shorter showers, and not doing laundry unless there is a full load will teach your child to be responsible with water. Have conversations about water and ask them what they think.

Healthy Eating: Most kids love cookies and candies, but when you talk about healthy organic food with them and why it is best for our bodies, they begin to think differently about what they eat. Teach them the importance of food from the earth and ask them

why they think food that grows from the earth is better for them than food that comes from a factory. Ask them how their bodies feel after eating a packaged food item versus how it feels when they eat a bowl of strawberries or a banana. This simple awareness is enough to teach them the importance of healthy sustainable foods over choosing foods that keep our system and society sick.

Creating healthy sustainable habits begin in the home. If we ourselves are not responsible with our buying decisions, behavior, and environmental considerations then our children (and possibly their children) will not be either. It is important to involve children in the decisions of the home when it comes to being a good global citizen and treating the earth with respect. Talk to them about what happens in the world, how things are made, the problems that exist in our society, and what small changes we can make that have an impact.

Transportation

Another area of our life that we can always choose to be more responsible is in the area of transportation. Many of us don't give a second thought to hopping in our car to drive down to the corner store. We don't consider the other options available to us and tend to think more about convenience and time than we do about the environment. If the store is only a two or three-minute drive, how long would it take to walk there? What about taking your bike? If you only have to pick up a couple of things you don't need the entire trunk of your car. Riding your bike or walking also makes us feel really good, not

just because we are being good to the earth but because we feel more connected to nature. We feel the gentle breeze blow through our hair, the sun warm on our face, or possibly the crunch of snow beneath our feet. Whatever the season or temperature, a walk or ride down to the store is a great way to connect with nature and feel alive. Have you ever noticed how good you feel when you come in from a good walk? If it is brisk out your cheeks are rosy, your eyes are bright and you feel good inside. Driving a car down the street never gives us that feeling because we are disconnected from nature. The closest we come is possibly opening our window, but our feet are not on the ground and it isn't the same feeling as being outside in (and a part of) nature. We are not separate from nature. We are nature. So the constant need to remain indoors, drive our cars and separate ourselves from that which we are is kind of crazy. Many of us would never even consider taking a bus, a streetcar or a subway because we think somehow that it is inconvenient, uncomfortable, or beneath us. Public transportation is way more environmentally friendly and communal than individual transportation. What if every passenger on the bus or subway decided to drive their car to work instead of taking public transportation, how much more pollution would that create in our atmosphere? Public transportation for some is not a choice, but for others it can be. What if you considered public transportation even once per week, you would save the atmosphere 52 days of pollution from your car. Another great option is car-pooling. A quick glance around you on the highway in the morning at rush hour demonstrates that most people travel to work alone in their cars. All of those cars with extra seats and only one person driving with no passengers. Talk to friends, family and coworkers who live nearby. Who

can you carpool with? Or maybe organize a local carpooling group for your town or city where others can opt in for carpooling. What a great way to meet new people in the community who also care about saving the environment.

Just because we have been given the ability to drive a car, own a car and can drive it anytime we wish, doesn't mean we should. Always consider your options before you jump in your car. Can you accomplish the same task via telephone or the Internet? Is walking or riding your bike an option? Can you share a ride with someone who is going the same direction? Or is public transportation an option? The energy that you create with responsible choices that support the environment will permeate through your life and inspire others to do the same. One small change can make a big difference.

Look at the big picture

Every time you do something that creates a carbon footprint, think about the bigger impact of your actions. Don't choose short-term gain for long-term pain. Many of the decisions that were made on our planet decades ago are now coming back to haunt us in a big way. Our system has become a burden to the planet and is headed for disaster unless we can think of ways to conserve power and water, respect the environment, and find alternative sources for fuel and energy. We are depleting the earth of her natural resources at an astonishing rate and consume more here in North America than all of the other countries in the world combined. That is a problem, a huge problem. We simply cannot sustain ourselves for much longer the way that we are living. Every day

we hear a new story about climate change, extinction, oil wars, the destruction of nature, and land being ruined. What will it take for us to finally realize that we must be responsible for our own lives and teach those around us to do the same? The best thing we can do is to connect with the energy of our beautiful mother earth and listen to her. Listen to the messages and warnings that she is providing to us, they are there if we simply open our hearts, eyes, ears and minds. The biggest crime is sitting back and doing nothing while all of this happens around us, waiting for something so catastrophic to happen that we are forced into change. We don't have to live like that, and we shouldn't. We are a part of nature and can choose a better path today. There are things you can choose to do right now that are better than the things you chose to do yesterday. We cannot change all of the problems in the world today, but throwing your hands up in defeat doesn't help the current situation. Change what you can and begin to take more care in how your actions affect the world at large, rather than just how it impacts your level of convenience and current lifestyle.

If there is one thing that most people agree on it is that our system needs to change and we need to feel a greater connection to our natural world. We have spent so many decades building structures that prevent us from interacting with nature that we have come to feel that we are separate from it. We are far less likely to make decisions that impact the environment negatively when we are connected to nature. Go for more walks, spend time outside, look around at the abundance and magic that exists in every day. It is a marvel to see just how beautiful mother nature is and how resilient she can

be in the face of all that we do. Taking one walk each day, if even for fifteen or twenty minutes can change your entire outlook on the way you live. Being in nature keeps you present and creates happiness. The reason we feel good when we are outside is because we suddenly remember who we really are. Our spirit resonates with the vibration of the natural world and tells us that we are on the right track by allowing us to feel connected, present, and happy about our lives. Nature is a wonderful healer and takes us away from all of the problems and stress that occur in our complicated modern lives. We can take this break anytime we choose, we simply need to set our intention to connect with nature and give ourselves the gift of connecting with that which we are.

Chapter Sixteen

Life In Tune

Every day when we wake up we have a choice as to how we will live that day. Each day is a new 24-hour cycle and we are gifted with the opportunity to create each day brand new from the one before it. This gives us the freedom to rise above our mistakes, negative patterns, habits and thoughts. The nature of modern life can be somewhat stressful with all that we have to think about and do, but the beauty is that we can find peace and solace simply by going within ourselves and tapping into our own divine power. None of us are separate from the universe, nature and all that is. We are energetic beings who sometimes forget just how incredible we are. Part of this magical journey through physical life is discovering the true self, beyond the skin, bones, thoughts, circumstances and daily stressors of modern human life. We can find peace and healing when we look inwards and begin to embrace the loving, expansive being that we already are. Life feels good when we are connected to source energy and able to live openly without baggage, pain, or fear. It is only when we view our lives from a limiting perspective that we encounter obstacles that are seemingly insurmountable.

Releasing Fear

Fear stops us from doing so many wonderful things and learning lessons that we could truly benefit and grow from. Fear (or “Fantasized Events Appearing Real” as I like to call it), is the one and only thing that we should fear. There is a saying that goes “the only

thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Well Franklin Roosevelt was a brilliant man because he was absolutely right. Fear prevents growth. We become stagnant and rigid in our ways of thinking and become unable to change when we allow our old patterns to remain the same and resist change. Fear creates so much negative energy and attracts more fear to our lives. We continue to see (fantasized) evidence that we should be afraid when we continue to live in the light of fear. If we were instead to challenge our primitive beliefs and allow ourselves to entertain the possibility that there might be something wonderful on the other side of our fear, we would change and evolve at a much faster rate.

The only place that fear is really useful is when we are in some kind of physical danger or our lives are at risk. Well I don't know about you (but speaking for myself and most others that I know), life just isn't like that. So when I observe a fear coming up in my energetic field, I ask myself what it really is. Because I know that my life isn't in danger and I am not going to get hurt, so it must be something else. And what I have concluded is that 99.9% of the time, the fear is absolutely irrational and is simply based on the fact that something is unfamiliar. But why is unfamiliar scary? It shouldn't be. Unfamiliar is wonderful and where true experience and growth lives. Imagine how boring your life would be if nothing ever changed and you woke up every single day and did exactly the same things over and over again. Sadly many of us do this without even thinking about it. We have minor variances in our interactions with others and circumstances that we cannot control of course, but many of us are so set in our ways of doing things that we don't ever allow ourselves to explore another way. Humans can be stubborn creatures

of habit. We get stuck in usual ways of thinking and doing and then become accustomed to that way, without even exploring other possibilities. We even get stuck doing things in ways that are unhealthy or negative, because they are comfortable and familiar. Fear is such a killer and can cause us to become completely immobilized by our own perceived and false sense of danger. Our primitive brains have little use in today's modern world. Our society (for the most part) is pretty civilized compared to how life once was here on earth. There is no reason to fear your neighbors, people on the street, your coworkers or friends. The worst they will probably do to you is shoot you a dirty look or make an insensitive comment. We are lucky that we live in such a safe society actually, especially because there are parts of the world that are significantly less safe. The next time you choose not to do something because you are afraid, recognize what you are doing. You may not make a change the first time, but even bringing your awareness to the fact that you fear something that is likely irrational, will create change and make you choose differently the next time. Creating awareness about irrational fear is the first step in working to change your brain. We have to be willing to challenge our thoughts because our thoughts are not really who we are, they are just things that pass by; things that we can observe and act on, or observe and discard. Just because you have a thought about something, doesn't mean that it is destined to happen or become a part of your life. It just means that it is a thought. But the more power you give to that thought, the more likely the possibility becomes of that thought manifesting. So fear must be tossed out like yesterdays garbage. Acknowledge your fear, then tell yourself that your life is not in danger, and there is no physical threat. Therefore your fear is

rooted in the fact that you have never experienced this particular thing before. And guess what? That is okay. In fact that is glorious. Because we evolve, grow and expand when we push ourselves beyond our comfort zone and embrace new ideas, ways of doing things, and perspectives on life.

It begins with you

We talked a lot about the self in the first part of this book, about our inner dialog, how to eliminate stress and worry, and how to have a great relationship with the self. Everything you do in life begins with you. You manifest things with thoughts, intentions, and feelings about things. You would never do anything without having first had a thought or an emotion about that thing. In the same way, healing has to come first from within. We cannot look outside of ourselves to heal something that is an energetic or emotional blockage within us. The change and healing that must occur has to come from within. This is the reason that so many people fail when they are looking to make changes in their lives such as quitting smoking, losing weight, being more positive or becoming more organized. We will buy books, listen to the stories of others, take courses, read articles, and go to therapy to listen to the council of others. But notice how all of those things are external. Much of the help that is out there will tell you the same thing about how to lose weight, quit smoking, change your relationships etc. You have to first look within. It begins with you. You have to be the change that you want to see in your life. Lightning is not going to suddenly strike you with an incredible surge of motivation and resolve. You are going to have to take that first uncomfortable and

uncertain step, and then take another and another and another. Eventually those steps will become wider and longer and you will feel better about yourself and not feel the need to buy all those books, spend all that money on talk therapy or self-improvement courses. Because you will be the change. You will finally realize that change comes from within and nowhere else. Healing, shifting, growing, evolving is all an inner and personal journey that we embark on in our own due time. Some of us change before others, or at a different pace, but eventually we all become triggered by something so strong and powerful inside of us that we have no choice but to change. Our inner guide is fantastic at helping us with those messages. Sometimes it takes a while for us to listen, but eventually the whispers become audible until we become so good at listening to our intuition that what used to be a faint whisper is now a hammer over the head. We are all so powerful and expansive. Never doubt that you have everything you need already within you to make the changes that you want to see in your life. Never doubt that you are eternally creative, resourceful, intelligent and divine. You can be the person who you want to be, change in the ways you want to see yourself change, and grow into a healthier better version of yourself. Looking externally just creates the vibration of “I am not good enough to change” or “I am not strong enough to create change on my own, I need help”. None of this is true, but nothing will change unless you first believe it can. And in order to that, you must believe in SELF. You are the most important piece to the puzzle of life. If you can figure out how to tap into your inner self and listen to your intuition and trust and love yourself, you will be able to accomplish absolutely anything that you set your mind to.

I have said it before and I will say it again, journaling is one of the best ways you can open a conversation with yourself so that you can begin to hear those whispers from your intuition. Those whispers are what hold the key to your healing. When you are in a bad relationship that is crushing your soul, you don't immediately recognize the need to get out of it. If you are like most, you are hopeful at first. You think that the other person can and will change. You think that you are just going through a rough patch and that things will get better. And while sometimes this is true, it isn't always. And it is through self-discovery and looking inward that you will hear the prompts and messages that will tell you the truths you need to hear to create change in your life. Sometimes we can't heal a situation unless we change it by changing ourselves first. Healing always comes from within. We learn to forgive and move forward in relationships, we learn to let go of past hurts and traumas, we learn to love ourselves and treat ourselves with great respect and adoration instead of harming ourselves with negative messages and limiting beliefs. The reason why so many of us prolong our pain is that we look to be healed externally. Instead of healing ourselves we look to our wife, husband, partner or children to change. We falsely think when they change, that we will become happy and healed. Most of the time it is in fact not they who need to change, but we ourselves. We must evolve our viewpoint and change our position, finding the peace within. People are always going to be who they are going to be. We have to allow people to be who they are without placing expectation, assumptions, and rules on them. Other people can't make us unhappy, we are the cause of that. And if we have a relationship with someone that isn't what it could be, we have to look inwards to see first how we might change to

create a change in the relationship. Simply forcing someone else to act or think differently will rarely work out. We always have to be the change first in order to see the change that we would like to see.

Think of your life as your own private universe. Everything you see, do and interact with is a manifestation of your thoughts, desires, actions, and intentions. You have chosen and created everything that you have in your life, both positive and negative.

Sometimes we choose hard paths because there are lessons we can stand to learn from.

It isn't evident at first why we chose that path and it can often seem impossible to overcome, but eventually when we come out at the other side we can look back and see the situation in a new light and understand how it changed us for the better. Often

when we repeat negative patterns in our life it is because we haven't learned an important lesson that we need to learn in order to move forward. For example, if you

keep fighting with your spouse about the same thing. Every time you fight it feels like the same fight happening all over again. But that's because it is the same fight. You

haven't changed your viewpoint and neither has your partner. Neither of you see things

the same way and refuse to see things from the others perspective, so each of you

continues to try to argue your point to the other. The frustrating part about this is that

neither person is going to back down because you each have a different belief. But the

reason why the fight continues is not that neither of you will change your belief, but

rather you refuse to accept each other as you are. If you were to each respect each

others belief and agree that it's okay to be different, you could then begin to work on a

compromise to figure out a solution that works for both people. But when you are too

busy trying to change someone and unwilling to change yourself, you are going to spin around in circles until you get dizzy and fall down. You are the center of your own universe, it is up to you to interact with that universe in a way that allows you to grow, evolve and find peace. If you do things the way you always do them, where is the growth in that? How do you evolve beyond where you currently are in life if you are unwilling to change yourself? The simple answer is that you cant.

The next time you are faced with a challenge, a decision, an obstacle or a seemingly impossible situation – ask yourself what you can do to create change from within. How can you approach the issue differently than you normally would? That is the first step to creating real lasting and rewarding change.

Accepting others as they are

People come into your life for all sorts of reasons. Some of them are chosen long ago when we were in spirit form and others are chosen throughout our physical lives at various ages and experience levels. We choose our friends, our lovers, our business partners, and other important relationships. Although we are all connected to each other, we are still all very unique. No two people will ever be exactly alike. We are unique like snowflakes, yet still connected like a body of water. The biggest obstacle for many of us to overcome in this life is in learning to let others be who they are going to be without the need to change or influence them. Often the source of disruption in relationships is in not accepting someone as they are and desiring them to be different

in some way, or in many cases more like us. When we push another person to make decisions more like us, to behave or think more like us, or to embrace characteristics that aren't typically consistent with who they are – it can make the other person feel bad about who they are. If they have even a shadow of low self-esteem, it will be worsened when they receive the not so subtle message that the way they are isn't good enough and they should perhaps be more like "x". Of course none of us intentionally do this to others or wish to cause any upset, but it happens when we are not conscious of our own thoughts and actions. When we focus so much on another person instead of on our very own actions, we create discord in the relationship. The greatest gift you can give to another person, be it a friend, a spouse or a lover is to allow them to be exactly who they are and love them for being that person. After all it was those traits that attracted you to their field of energy in the first place. It can be challenging when someone close to you makes a decision that you wouldn't have made and don't agree with, or when you watch them doing something that is destructive or ineffective. Resist the urge to judge your loved ones when they do this. They may have a reason that you don't understand, be dealing with a karmic lesson, or simply just be doing something the way they would like to do it. When you bulldoze them with your opinions, judgments and criticisms you are not coming from a place of love and acceptance. Not only is that bad for the person you are judging, but it is bad for you – the critic. The reason why is that it creates a tremendous amount of negative energy in your life and relationship with that person. And we know that negative energy creates more of the same by attracting further negative thoughts, actions, intentions, and conversations. So

what started off as a simple disagreement could escalate into a total breakdown of the relationship if it isn't managed carefully. The best thing to do is to allow others to be who they are going to be. If you think you can help them in some way, ask if they would like the help first before you go firing opinions their way. If you want to comment on something they are doing, ask if they mind if you tell them something. And before you say anything, ask yourself, is what I am about to say coming from a place of love and acceptance, or anger and judgment? If the latter, don't pursue the conversation and simply meditate on why you are feeling angry and judgmental. Instead focus on what you can do to change your energy, rather than changing the other person.

Don't fight the flow

The universe, our lives and everything around us, have a natural ebb and flow. Things happen on a daily basis that either put us in tune with that energy flow or take us out of tune with it when we go against the grain of what's natural. Things don't always happen the way we expect or want them to, but we must learn to trust in the universe and not fight the natural flow of our lives. Think about a beautiful flowing river. There are rocks in the river, but they don't stop the river from flowing. The river runs around or over the rocks. When you try to fight the natural flow of your life, it is the same as attempting to push the water the other way in a river. It will be a challenge. Life becomes much more peaceful and enjoyable when you stop expecting the river to flow the way you want it to, and just let it happen. If an obstacle appears before you, simply go around it, but don't let it stop you or turn you around. We cannot always anticipate the obstacles that

we will be faced with. We are dealing with so many variables on a daily basis that things are bound to happen that we weren't expecting once in a while. Just go with it and don't fight whatever comes. Trust that the universe has a grander plan for you and that you might not be able to see that plan from your limited perspective. Think of yourself as standing in a forest and everywhere you look you see majestic trees, but beyond those trees are these incredible mountains. You just can't see them yet because you aren't out of the forest. Most of us can think back to a time in our lives when something happened that really threw us for a loop. Usually it's something like the breakup of a relationship, the loss of a job, or a financial hardship. But behind those hard lessons was something much grander. We had the opportunity to experience something that we wouldn't have, had we stayed where we were. Perhaps it renewed your faith in family, or gave you a chance to chase after a dream, or allowed you to meet the love of your life. Hard lessons always carry with them a silver lining, we just cannot see that lining when we are in the moment of pain and it is only when we can step back from that, that we are able to see the gift that each hard life experience provided us with.

The art of healing

Learning to heal ourselves is as much of an art form as learning to paint or sculpt. It takes years and sometimes decades for us to learn to heal old wounds and move past pain. We have different reasons for holding onto pain. Some feel that life is a sacrifice and that we must remember the sacrifices we have faced and wear them like a badge of honor. They believe that life is hard and harsh and doesn't give any breaks to anyone.

But the truth is that they created that reality for themselves by believing that life is harsh and hard and doesn't give any breaks to anyone. Other people believe that they have incredibly poor luck and carry around a victim mentality that says, "why do bad things always happen to me?" Well because you continue to ask that question and believe that they have bad luck. Being a victim of life doesn't put you in your power or make you feel confident about yourself. Others are just angry and can't seem to snap out of feeling angry. They walk around scowling, playing negative messages in their mind like a broken record. Their anger infects all of their relationships and they continually find new reasons to be angry. No matter what the struggle, it is often the same thing manifesting in different ways; and that is not allowing the power of who you are to shine through the experience of life. When you allow what happens to you or what other people say to define you, life is going to be hard. Only when you sit in the power of who you are and tune into what's inside of you, will you be able to find peace. We are all capable of healing ourselves in wondrous ways. Sadly many of us don't believe we possess the power or know how to do this. We seek out the advice of therapists, friends, doctors, medication and support groups before we look inside. These things are all wonderful resources for support, but you must first be able to look in the mirror at the person staring back at you and be okay with that person. Tell that person that you love and support him or her. Close your eyes and know yourself. Really tune into who you are on the inside. Not the job you have, the family you are in, or what your bank account says. Strip all of that away and look at what is left. You are a unique spirit, a light from within. You are more powerful and expansive than you could ever imagine

and once you strip away the veil of illusion you will face the world with new resolve and know on an intrinsic level that everything that happens in your life has purpose, and even the negative events that occur aren't really negative. They are just things, all a part of life and the experience of being human. Sure there will be challenges and obstacles, but think about how boring life would be without those challenges. You would never be able to truly appreciate life or happiness if there was no contrast to demonstrate the meaning of those things. Hardship and emotional pain teaches us an important lesson about life. It teaches us to appreciate what we have when we have it and to stay in the moment of life.

The art of healing is very simple, almost too simple. The reason why we endure such long-term emotional pain and trauma as humans is because we continually relive the past and fear the future. When we are truly present in our lives, there is no pain, no hardship, no fear, and nothing to worry about. Because we know that if it is happening right now then we must be able to handle it because we are handling it right at this very moment. There is no stress or worry right now; there is only this moment. And really this moment of life is what we are here to learn. This moment is what healing is about. There is nothing more powerful than learning to live in the moment. Think about how you feel when you are doing something exhilarating like windsurfing, mountain biking, or skiing. You aren't thinking about what happened yesterday or worrying about what is going to happen tomorrow, you are enjoying the experience of being alive. And isn't that what life is all about. But it is much harder for us to capture the essence of that

feeling when we are sitting behind our desk trying to finish a project that is late, or our kids are being awful, or we are fighting with our spouse. These are all tests in life and our lesson is to learn to stay in the moment even when our instincts want us to think about something that has already happened or worry about something that hasn't yet happened, and might never happen. Our primitive brain can be very destructive to our modern lives. We have little need for fight or flight when we are dealing with every day obstacles and challenges, but our brain sometimes tells us otherwise and causes us to use negative emotions to handle situations that simply need love and understanding. When we remove the ego from a situation and use love and acceptance as our guiding force, we can communicate much more effectively and solve problems with ease. Whenever you are about to speak to someone in an attempt to discuss or resolve a problem, ask yourself if you are coming from a place of love. If the answer is no, then step back and do some deep breathing. Don't come at the situation until you are able to do so from a place of love and understanding. Avoid dredging up the past and restating things that have already happened and are no longer relevant. Those things rarely help. People will be much more receptive and loving towards you when you are loving towards them, regardless of what has happened in the past.

Staying present

The most important lesson of our lives is to stay present in this moment of life. It sounds easy, but try observing yourself for a few moments. Watch your thoughts and see what happens. Your thoughts drift back to things that have already happened or plunge you

into things that are future possibilities. But look around you. What about right now? What is around you? What do you sense, smell, and feel? Observe your surroundings whenever you need to snap back into reality. Have you ever noticed people using their iPhones to record a precious moment in time? They are holding up their screens in front of them so that they can remember an important day, but just the act of doing that takes them away from the present moment because they are thinking about capturing it so they can look at it later. Meanwhile they are missing the sights, the smells, the subtleties like facial expressions and the way the heart feels. While trying to capture the moment in their phone to look at later, they have missed the real magic of the moment by not being fully present. Staying in the present moment, however, does not come easy for most. It is something that we must continually commit to and practice; otherwise our primitive brains will take over and attempt to manage us.

Here are some helpful things you can do to stay in the present moment when you find your thoughts drifting to the past or future:

1. Meditation

Meditation is something that you can do anywhere and for any amount of time.

It simply involves closing your eyes and clearing your thoughts away. Focus on deep breathing by slowly filling your lungs and then releasing your breath with purpose. Picture your thoughts like wispy clouds that just float away and disintegrate into the air. Allow nothing other than your silence and breathing to

be maintained in the moment of meditation. If you find your thoughts trying to take over, simply re-focus and center yourself on your breath. The act of consciously focusing on your breath will automatically snap you into the present moment and relinquish your past or future-based thoughts. Meditation is something that anyone can do for any amount of time. You can do it at your desk at work, in your car in a parking lot, at home on your couch, or outside under a tree. You can meditate for five minutes, thirty minutes, or an hour or more. There is no right and wrong way and no limitations. Meditation is simply about being present and staying present.

2. Observe your surroundings

When we observe what's around us right now in this moment, we are staying present with our lives and acknowledging the now. Use your brain and your senses to take in all that is around you. Notice sounds that you hear, look at color and light and where things are. Notice what catches your eye. Observe how things feel and sound. Think about when you go for a walk. Because you are walking, which is a meditative and healing you aren't thinking about stress or worry. But you notice things like the way a squirrel scurries up a tree, or the way the wind blows through the trees, how the sun feels warming your face, and the crisp sound of leaves under your footing. Walking is a great way to observe your surroundings, because we tend to do that anyway when we walk. For that reason it is a great practice. But the true test of observing your surroundings to

stay present is in doing it while at work, at home, or on the highway stuck in traffic. These are normal every day occurrences that we all must deal with, and they can be stressful experiences if we don't learn to practice mindfulness and stay present with our thoughts. While sitting in traffic observe your surroundings. Look at how blue the sky is, notice the song that is playing on the radio, the smell in your car, and the natural beauty of the landscape beside the highway. There are always things to observe around you and doing so, will keep you present and make life far more enjoyable and peaceful. You don't have to think about the past because it has already happened and tomorrow isn't here yet so all you have is now. Focus on now.

3. Try something new

When we get stuck in old patterns of living it is very easy to slip into autopilot and be a passenger in our own lives. Think about when you are driving to a place that you routinely drive to and you suddenly realize that you have been driving for fifteen minutes but you weren't paying attention. While your brain was off somewhere else, your subconscious was driving the car and you were in autopilot. Because you have done this so many times, that it isn't new or different. It isn't keeping you alert or present and so your mind just slipped off somewhere else. Trying new things is a great way for us to practice present-moment living. When you are learning to play tennis, to play a musical instrument or some other new skill you don't give yourself the option of slipping

off into autopilot because you need your whole self when you are embarking on something new. You need to be fully present. When we continually do the same things the same way in our lives, we become rigid and inflexible and we stop learning and stop staying present. New experiences and opportunities help us feel exhilarated, alive and keep us in the moment of life. Try something new every day, even if it something small like going for a walk in a new direction, trying a new recipe, or signing up for a class. The experience of new activities will keep you focused on what matters in your life, right now.

By turning inwards and connecting with our inner self, we impact the relationships around us in a positive way. Our relationships become deeper and more meaningful. We don't look to others for salvation or to create our happiness, because we create it ourselves by being in tune with the essence of who we are on the inside. This relationship with self and healthy attitude with others expands into the places we find ourselves, injecting our atmosphere with love and peace. No matter where we are in this world, we can find true peace and happiness when we have it on the inside. That is the first piece of the puzzle. Being okay with who we are on and loving ourselves for all that we are is the first step towards healing. We simply cannot feel good about our relationships and lives until we are happy with who we truly are on the inside when you strip away the job, the bank account, the appearance, the social stature and all of the other illusions that people falsely think make up the essence of who they are. These things are illusions and they aren't what truly matter. We are expansive human beings

that are primarily made up of energy and light. These bodies are vessels in which to carry our spirit, but unless we nurture our spirit it will be sick just like our bodies are when we don't nurture them. Think about how you feel when you don't eat or drink water. Your spirit feels the same way when you don't love yourself and focus on the present moment. Your spirit soars when you take the time to acknowledge the true source of who you are. The spirit is the true essence of who you are, the part of you that will continue to exist even after your body has expired. So take the time to nurture your spirit by connecting with who you are on the inside. Breathe deeply and purposefully and release what doesn't feel good. Breathe in what does feel good. You can always choose a better thought. Release the ones that don't serve you and reach for ones that love and support you.

I hope that this book has been a gift to you and your inner spirit. My hope is that you have come away from this with a better understanding of how to create true and lasting happiness and inner peace in your life. Remember, no one can do this for you except you yourself. Never doubt that you can heal your own life and find lasting happiness.

Thank you for having the courage and love to take this journey with me.

Namaste

Dr Rob