

Living Your Best Life

With Dr. Robert Kiltz

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INTRODUCTION

I am so happy that you found this book and have begun the journey of bringing your mind, body and spirit into balance and harmony. My goal is to positively impact your life and bring you to a place of inner peace and joy. I want you to wake up to the beautiful truth that you are a creator in this fantastic and amazing universe. You can (and do) create your own reality here on earth every single day with your thoughts, actions and energy. You are the one who decides what to do and how to feel each day, even though at times you may feel like you've been thrashed around by the waves of life. Sometimes all it takes to get your life back on course is to shed a little light on what you could be doing better. We don't always have 20/20 vision when we are in the middle of a life crisis or going through a difficult time in our lives. It can feel as if the weight of the world is on us and that we might never make it out in one piece. I know this feeling well because I have been there.

After the death of my sister Maria at age 52, I struggled to find meaning and purpose in my life. I was extremely challenged by her loss and had a hard time viewing anything in a positive light. To make matters worse, I also lost my best friend Dave who I went to medical school with, my marriage was failing, I was unfaithful to my wife, and I lost a relationship with my beautiful daughter. Life felt hopeless and smoldering. I carried an incredible amount of shame and anger on my shoulders. It was like my shadow; with me wherever I went. When you are in that type of negative headspace you tend to attract more of that energy; I can attest to that. It seemed that the more I stressed, worried, and became unhappy, the worse things got. I was in an unhappy place emotionally and spiritually and didn't know how to turn it around. The only thing I knew for sure was

that I had to turn it around. Eventually something inside of you nudges you into change. Suffering from depression can be absolutely paralyzing, making it impossible to get out and enjoy life. But once we flip the switch in our mind, we can turn the other way. I allowed myself to experience the pain that I was in for a certain amount of time, until I felt that I needed to move out of the dark and into the light. I decided that I had to take control of my life and make some serious changes if I was going to achieve my full potential. I began reading and attending workshops about the power of the mind and spirituality. I remember reading Andrew Newberg's book *How God Changes Your Brain* and being completely blown away. He inspired me to change my thinking and begin the daily practice of meditation and appreciation. I began seeking out better ways to grow and feel spiritually fulfilled inside, so that I could discover internal peace. A dear friend Craig Humphrey, who too was on a spiritual journey, began teaching and sharing thoughts and ideas that helped me to stand up tall and smile. Once again I began to walk with my head held high and a feeling of joy and happiness.

It was around 2006 that I began implementing these ideas and practices into my daily life. I had read many books, attended workshops, and started on my own deeply personal path towards a more spiritual life that involved gratitude and peacefulness. I studied the concept of motion and movement through Tai Chi, Yoga and walking and embraced positive thinking and mindfulness. I began incorporating daily intentions into my practice at work by posting positive and inspiring messages on the door in the entranceway, to spread the positive messages to my staff, so that their day would be filled with love and light too. I realized that I loved filling others with joy almost as much

as I loved feeling that way myself, so I started Mind, Body, Smile. My good friend Christine Briel and I were brainstorming ideas for an inspirational website where people could come to nurture their mind, body and spirit through a variety of uplifting content; the very type of content that it had taken me years to discover through my own personal journey through pain and difficulty. I wanted to inspire others and to help them feel better about their lives no matter what they might be going through and I wanted to help the patients in my fertility clinic by supporting them spiritually. We came up with the notion of Mind, Body, Smile and it fit perfectly; the mind (our thoughts), the body (our physical being) and the smile (our spiritual energy).

I began working with my patients in a different manner than I had before, by focusing collaboratively on their physical being as well as their emotional and spiritual being. In some cases I noticed that simply by shifting my clients thinking and helping to coach them to come into a more positive light it would impact their ability to conceive. Instead of stressing and fearing over the idea that they might not conceive a child, or that they would never be able to - I had them redirect their energy into abundant thinking by appreciating what they already had and not noticing a lack anywhere in their lives. In many cases, I saw what a profound difference this made in the lives of my patients and felt overjoyed for them. I saw many couples and individuals who embraced the practice of yoga and meditation, and who learned to let go and stop expecting that which they so desperately wanted. And only when they let go, did that thing show up in their lives.

Our thinking is the vibration of our present moment; which vibrates and creates our reality. If it's fear and worry you embrace, then you are creating that reality for yourself.

I learned this lesson for myself through a lot of soul-searching and self-improvement, and it is something that I have incorporated successfully into my practice ever since.

It's been an incredible journey filled with ups, downs, and surprises beyond belief, and I continue to work at it every single day. I never want to forget to be grateful, to smile, or to cherish every sacred day that I am lucky to experience on this beautiful planet. Every single day I am thankful for my family, my loved ones, and the people in my life who bring me profound joy. Focusing on this gratitude has been one of the most life-changing things I have ever done and something that I strongly encourage others to embrace. There is an instinctual part of us, a human part that causes us to act first without thinking at times. Our ego can often get in the way as we unconsciously act with our primitive-self leading the way. But what I have learned is that with daily practice, we can tame this beast. We can control our thoughts, our instincts, and become really good at managing our lives from a place of love and joy rather than stress and fear.

My hope is that this book will help you to ***live your best life*** and bring your mind, body and smile into balance. I want you to find true happiness and learn to practice love in everything you do. When you experience those moments in life that throw you off course or make you feel defeated, I want you to have the tools to know how to come back from that. I want you to know that those challenging moments in life are all par for the course and just a temporary state of being that is supporting the evolution and growth of who you are. Let your thoughts come and go and pass through you, know that it is not your thoughts that make up who you are, but the spirit that resides inside of

you; the eternal spirit. And when you find that true spirit, not only within yourself, but also within others, well that's how you know you've reached nirvana.

Namaste,

Dr. Rob

MIND

CHAPTER 1: THOUGHTS ARE THINGS

“Every thought of yours is a real thing – a force.”

– Prentiss Mulford

Imagine how your life would change if you knew the power you possessed with only your thoughts. Many of us overlook this important facet of our being and allow our thoughts to think us instead of the other way around. Our thoughts are extremely powerful and create our core belief systems. When we think something routinely, it then vibrates into our being and becomes a belief, which is the primary reason why we must choose our words & thoughts carefully.

Every thought, action, and intention you have creates a vibration; a ripple effect that extends out into the universe. Each vibration is like a signal indicating what it is that you are attracting to your life. The universe does not need to know the details of what we are thinking about and has no way of determining negative vibrations from positive ones. We simply get what we think about most. So when we have recurring thoughts about something, we give those thoughts power by increasing the vibrational frequency of those thoughts. By thinking something often, we set the wheels in motion to attract those thoughts to our reality and existence by continuing to feed into them. When we turn on a light in our home by flicking a switch, we don't need to have an intimate understanding of electrical currents and electricity to get the light to work. We simply know that switching that light switch on will provide us with the light that we need. This

is how we must think about the universe and thought. We do not need to understand everything about the workings of the universe. How we create our reality is simply based on our thoughts. When we believe that this is the case we begin to see evidence in our lives of this happening.

You've heard of the notion of self-fulfilling prophecies I am sure. This is often spoken about in negative terms because it represents the power of thought as it relates to someone who continues to feed themselves negative messages. For example, a woman (let's call her Debbie) wakes up every morning and looks in the mirror. When she looks in the mirror she becomes angry. Her face changes, she scowls at herself and looks at her reflection with hatred. She observes her body and feels awful about what she sees. Her subconscious feeds her feelings by telling her she looks like she has gained more weight today and that she is not beautiful. She goes about her day cringing at her own reflection, avoiding people because she thinks they will judge her, eating in private, covering her body, and feeling ashamed and embarrassed about herself. What Debbie doesn't realize, is that her (assumed) inability to lose weight in fact has nothing to do with her genes, her hormones, or anything else, and has everything to do with only one thing - her thoughts. Debbie continues to send out the vibration that she can't lose weight and will be overweight forever. The universe, unfortunately doesn't know that Debbie wants to lose weight. The universe simply attracts to us what we think about most. Debbie's focus on being overweight and unattractive is dominating her thoughts and therefore keeping her in the body she doesn't want. Her inability to lose weight is because she focuses on her inability to lose weight. We get what we think about,

regardless of whether it is good or bad. When we put enough thought into something it comes true and manifests into our life because we have created strong vibrations to support it. This is where the idea of self-fulfilling prophecies comes in. We can create a positive self-fulfilling prophecy by supporting it with good thoughts.

In contrast to this example, if Debbie would have woken up each morning, looked in the mirror, smiled and said I love you, while thinking positive thoughts about her body, her life and her image – her experience would have been much different. Every day she would feel good instead of bad, she would be thinking, “I feel thinner today” instead of “I look overweight and ugly”. She would hold her head higher, have stronger relationships with others, and feel better about herself. Because she feels better with these loving and positive thoughts, she would automatically (without even knowing it) treat her body better by consuming the foods that are best for her, and exercising more. “I am” is the vibration of the Universe: “I am beautiful, I am loving, I am kind” is what we want to send out. All things emit from loving ourselves and seeing everything as perfect right now.

Historically the notion of self-fulfilling prophecies have always been negative because they represent the extremes of these powerful truths at work. Positive miracles happen every single day when we utilize the power of thought. These positive instances should perhaps be called self-fulfilling miracles, because it is amazing how we are able to manifest things into our existence with the power of thought and belief. When we stop

to observe these miracle moments we can then truly grasp the power of thought and its effect on our being.

A little girl rings a dinner bell and declares out loud “I want a horse.” As a child who is in the now and unaffected by the feasibility of her statements, she simply thinks about the fact that she likes horses and would like to have them around her. A minute later she grabs a book that has been hiding under a stack of magazines; one of her books. On the cover are 3 pictures of different horses. This is an example of how the universe works.

We don’t always get what we ask for in the exact form that we expect, but we get what we think about and we manifest our thoughts. If the little girl had focused her thoughts daily on horses, she would likely continue to see pictures of horses in various formats until eventually she got to ride one or was signed up for horse riding lessons. We do this often ourselves in reverse. As adults, we are focused on the stressors of daily life; things such as finances, bills, problems at work, and family responsibility provide us with a multitude of worries and anxious thoughts. Just like the little girl who wanted horses, we often want our debts paid and our finances to improve. Where we go wrong, however is in noticing the absence of these things. So instead of using thought to visualize our debts being paid and our finances improving, we focus on the fact that we have too much debt and too little income. Our thoughts center around “solving the problem”, which in itself creates a problem. The only time we need to think about bills is when we are opening or paying them. The only time we need to think about finances is when we are budgeting, giving or receiving money. All of these extra thoughts create

anxiety, stress, and worry which attract more anxiety, stress and worry to our lives; the exact opposite of what we want.

When we start our day, we choose how to set the tone for our day with our thoughts.

We have all experienced those days where things just don't seem to be going our way.

We wake up late and jump out of bed, stub our toe, and then can't find anything to wear. This puts us in a state of stress and anxiety. Our energy changes dramatically as we put forth a negative vibration, telling the universe "nothing is going my way today."

And guess what happens? Nothing goes our way that day. We will continue to experience events that will support the idea of this "bad day" because this is the belief that we have set ourselves up for that day. This can be called negative displacement, because the events that unfold continue to send us on a path of negativity; moving us in the opposite direction that we wanted to go. The same happens when we are rushing out the door and misplace our keys. Our blood pressure rises as we stomp around the house shuffling papers, opening drawers, and looking under sofa cushions. The whole time we are searching we are thinking, "I am going to be late. I need to find these keys or I will be late." Because we are in this negative state, finding our keys becomes an incredible burden and an annoyance that takes us to the brink of stress and anxiety.

Eventually, we discover our keys and come to find that they were right in front of us the whole time. Had we been in a different mindset, we would have discovered them much sooner than we did and averted this whole stressful situation all together. Again, this is a common example of negative displacement working against us because of the nature of our own thoughts.

The next time this happens to you, instead of thinking “I am going to be late” or “I will never find my keys” (or whatever it is that you are looking for), try thinking positively. Disallow negative thoughts to enter your mind by replacing them with positive ones. This change in mindset will allow you to manifest the positivity that you put forth (i.e. – “I will find my keys. They must be on the counter.”) The only tricky part if this is foreign to you is actually believing the things you think and say. You can’t just say positive things out loud while internally thinking “this is a bunch of bull” because that creates discord in your beliefs and your vibration will still be negative. You have to believe that your thoughts will impact and change your reality. The good news is, belief can change with regular thought practice. So even if you are a highly cynical person that tends to view the glass as half empty, with some regular practice and attention, even you can change your beliefs to be more positive, thus affecting your reality for the better.

Belief is easiest for us when we have evidence. As human beings, we tend to want evidence and proof of everything before we believe in it. We do this because we believe that we are minimizing our risk. It is a defense mechanism that we perceive is helping us avoid future hurt and pain. This is a physiological response to something that is abstract and non-linear. The simplest way for us to prove that our thoughts impact our reality is to allow our thoughts to impact our reality in a positive way. If we have been allowing our negative thoughts to impact our reality up until now, it is unlikely that we will recognize this as being within our control and something we are solely responsible for. We must change our energy in order to see first hand what can be accomplished with positive thought, as apposed to negative thought. Most people, regardless of how

cynical or negative they are will be willing to at least try this for a short amount of time. And that is all you need.

Belief is very important to thoughts and vice versa. When you have recurring thoughts about the same thing, they begin to form your beliefs and when you believe in those thoughts, they create your reality. So belief is something that we must tune into when we practice positive thinking.

Imagine how different our world would be today if Einstein didn't believe in the Theory of Relativity, or Martin Luther King gave that incredible speech but didn't really "believe" in the dream of which he spoke. When Christopher Columbus set off to sail around the world, people thought he was crazy, citing that he was going to fall off the edge of the earth. But instead, Columbus (not believing in the negativity of that notion) discovered and proved that the world was in fact round as he successfully sailed around it. Belief causes us to create a world of possibility. Without belief in our thoughts we cannot truly create change. There are millions of examples of profoundly important people throughout history who had an idea that they believed in and changed our world because of it.

Belief can either work for us or against us, depending on the nature of our thoughts. If we choose positive thoughts and support them with beliefs, we will have the ability to manifest miracles in our daily life. If we, however choose negative thoughts and buy into those thoughts, we create negative beliefs that will negatively impact the direction of our life and cause us to experience unpleasant or unfortunate events, created by us. The

same way we see evidence of self-fulfilling prophecies. These are simply people who embraced negative thought, believed in those negative thoughts, and changed a false perception into reality by making it happen through thought. You don't want to be one of these people. We know they exist, perhaps this has happened to you at some time in your life. If you want to prove something to yourself, prove the power of positive thought by demonstrating self-fulfilling miracles instead.

Many of us don't choose to be negative or do it consciously, but have been wired this way through environment and upbringing. We embrace habitual negative thinking because it is comfortable and familiar, even when it doesn't work for us. To completely change our thinking and begin to embrace positivity would mean stepping outside of our comfort zone, and many of us fear that. Fear, unfortunately is a big problem for us physical beings. Fear is something that only exists in stress-based negative thought; when we live in the now fear does not exist. Fear is simply "fantasized events appearing real". We tell ourselves stories about what we "think" will happen and let our imaginations run wild with "what if's" until we are paralyzed into thinking the worst about something that hasn't even happened yet, and probably will never happen. Fear is a powerful emotion that keeps us from experiencing joy and happiness, sometimes even love. When you focus in on your fears, they become true and you attract to yourself exactly what you don't want. For this reason it is imperative that you not allow your mind to wander into the future of the unknown. **Faith Evolves And Restores** is the positive way of looking at the word fear. We are all consumed with fearful thoughts from time to time, but how you choose to look at that fear can mean all the difference.

Instead of running from it, challenge yourself. Choose to have faith in that which you are afraid of. Choose to believe that things will be fine and that you will come out the other side in one piece. You don't have to know the outcome of every situation or feel comfortable with it to be a success. You can still do something that you fear or that you are uncomfortable with and have it be a success, sometimes even more so. Have faith that the opportunities and challenges that you face are helping you evolve by providing you with valuable lessons and learning opportunities. Without fear, you wouldn't have these unique opportunities to grow.

Now is the only thing that exists. Yesterday has already happened and cannot be changed. Tomorrow hasn't arrived yet and isn't guaranteed. But we have now. And now we can choose how we want to feel, what we want to think about, and how we want to experience our present moment. Now is not scary, intimidating, stressful, or full of worry because we know we can handle it, and are. Whatever you are doing right now, you are in control of. You can manage your life right at this moment and take things as they come. Staying in the now brings an abundance of peace and clarity to our lives because we are not focusing on things that have already happened that we may resent or regret. And we are not focusing on future events that cause us stress or worry. We are simply enjoying the moment of now and allowing ourselves to be mindful and present with the moment we are in.

Staying present requires focus and attention. Our minds often like to lead us into the future in an attempt to be ready or prepare for what "might" happen. However, this does not serve us at all and in fact creates stress where it need not be. In order for us to

stay present we must concentrate on what we are doing and keep our thoughts present with that thing. If you are walking through a park, stop and look at the trees, notice the way the air smells that day and the sound the wind makes rustling through the trees. You can smile at a stranger, watch a child running through the grass laughing, and lay on the grass looking up at the sky. All of these things keep you present and take you away from the danger zone – fear-based future thinking. Similarly you can be doing the dishes and still be mindful. Notice how warm your hands feel, sing a song while you're scrubbing plates, and appreciate the ray of sunshine coming in through your kitchen window. There is always something for you to observe and appreciate about the present moment, you just have to look and see.

If you have children, watch how they play. Watch how present they are with what they are doing. If they are playing make believe, chances are they are not worrying about the following day at school or daycare. They are in the moment with pretending and enjoying the magic of the moment. As a parent, it is equally important for you to stay present with your children. Those are the moments they will remember most as they grow up and become adults. Things like sitting down with them and coloring, making paper airplanes, or flying a kite. Stay present with these things and your experience will be so much more joyful and rewarding.

Staying present, however doesn't mean that you must avoid planning your future or thinking about things that haven't happened yet. It simply means not thinking about the things that cause you worry and stress. Visioning exercises involving your future can be quite powerful when positive. The general rule of thumb is less detail is better when

your thoughts are negative. So don't think them through. And more detail is better when your thoughts are positive. Do think those ones through.

I start each day with a daily intention. This sets me up to appreciate the day and expresses my gratitude for the things I have in my life and around me. I have made this a regular practice and have witnessed its effects on my life. Others do this daily and also find it helpful. Setting an intention for your day allows you to keep your thoughts positive and focused on the things you want to accomplish that day. When we focus ourselves, we can accomplish much more. If we go into our day scattered and unsure of where it will lead us with mixed energy about future stress and worry, our experience will likely not be peaceful or calm. But when we intentionally project our feelings for the day and tell ourselves "today I am going to focus on my work" or "today I am going to be nice to strangers". These things set us up to have a good day.

You may wish to keep a journal beside your bedside and use it as a gratitude and intention journal. Each morning wake up and express your gratitude for the things in your life. Who and what are you thankful for? Write the words and feel them as you say them aloud. What is your intention for that day? What would you like to accomplish? How are you going to approach the day? Tell yourself what your goals are and write them down. Intend to have a wonderful day every day. Your intentions will set the pace for the day and keep your thoughts positive. Once you have done this, begin your day and stay present and mindful with each thing you are focused on, as you are doing it. Enjoy and appreciate your morning tea and your breakfast. Smile at yourself in the mirror and say positive things about how you look. Appreciate a coworker who holds

open the door for you at work. Stay present and appreciate each and every day, moment by moment.

We can all find something in our life that is working, feels good, or that we can be thankful for. When life gets us down it is more important than ever to appreciate and express gratitude for those things. We can choose thoughts that feel better. Every thought we have is paving the way for our future. We are like magnets attracting thoughts to us on a moment-by-moment basis. Because our recurring thoughts become beliefs, it is important that we tell ourselves positive stories, notice good things around us and express appreciation for those things. Showing appreciation helps attract more of those things that we appreciate to our life. Start small if you need to or if you are having a hard time finding things to appreciate. We all have things in our life to appreciate no matter how hard or rough things get. There is always something that we can look at and be thankful for.

Sometimes we get so caught up in the daily motions of human life; work, bills, relationships – that we forget to stand in awe at the beauty around us. The universe is a beautiful abundant place filled with miracles and life. The energy of the universe alone is enough to make us thankful and appreciative. Sometimes a simple walk through a park or a garden is just what you need to ground you and reconnect you to the universe. We live an amazing existence where we can create the lives that we want and attract things to us using thought and applying the law of attraction. We attract what we think about. Period. Whatever we expect is what we get. Think about how amazingly beautiful and

powerful that is. We can control our own destiny and have the things that we want most in life simply by thinking about those things positively and often.

Some people say that positive thinking is unrealistic, or that you cannot go around living life with “rose colored glasses on”. The truth is you are going to have days where you have a hard time being “up”. Days where your thoughts want to drift into the future where fear and worry are. But when you practice positive thinking regularly, you minimize the instances of those times and can bounce back much quicker than if you didn’t practice positive thinking at all. Additionally, your life will inherently be less stressful with a positive outlook, because you will attract things to your life that support you, not hinder you.

The hallmark of all successful people is belief in oneself and belief in your vision. Belief in vision is the biggest hurdle of all. Without belief there would be no action. And action without belief is somebody else’s belief. You must know what you want for yourself, not what somebody else wants for you, or what you think someone else wants for you.

What do you want? Think about your life and your reality. Where is your heart? What makes you happy and connects you to your spirit. This is what you must focus on at all costs. When we are disconnected from self, we are no good to anybody. If you are unsure of what you want to do with your life, try some deep breathing and meditation exercises. Often we are unable to quiet our mind from the clutter of daily stressors.

Meditation can help bring clarity and vision to our life. With regular practice we begin to feel more connected and worthy and can accomplish anything we set our mind to.

At the end of each day when you are winding down and getting ready for bed, it is a good time to focus on thinking about the things that you want in your future. Because we go to sleep and dream in our sleep state, we can set up the mind to think about the things that we want in our lives even while sleeping. Imagine yourself living the life that you want, with the relationship that you want in the perfect place. See yourself happy and revel in the way that the vision feels. Allow those feelings of bliss to flood you and make you feel an overwhelming sense of confidence and joy. When doing visioning exercises more detail is better. Imagine how things smell, feel, and taste. Let your imagination take you on a sensory experience of your future, seeing and believing all that you will accomplish and achieve. As you lay in bed before sleep, close your eyes and focus on these things. Let your vision for your future be the thought that drifts you into sleep. Many of us go to bed in a state of stress thinking about the next day, anticipating worry and hardship. We cannot create positive dream experiences when we drift into sleep like this. It may cause our subconscious to think about unpleasant events, rather than things that will help us pave the road to our future.

If it helps you can use soothing music or meditation tracks to help you get into a peaceful state and allow your visions to come to you. Flush out your desires; even write them down if you want to. The key is to allow yourself to focus on that which you want because it is the end of the day, you are about to fall asleep, and you want those thoughts to follow you into your subconscious. Stay present with your thoughts as they relate to your future, even when you hear the worries of the day knocking at your door.

You have the power to choose the thoughts you want to have, and the power to dictate what thoughts occur most frequently in your subconscious.

Many people are resistant to change, even when they know it is good for them. I hear excuses all the time from people who know they need to embrace a more positive outlook on life, but who tell themselves the same excuses over and over again. We love to create excuses for why we cannot do things; we are creatures of resistance, which causes us to go against the grain of life sometimes. This does not serve us well because we cannot be in alignment with the universe when we are going against the grain of life. It is only when we are going with the grain, feeling good, enjoying the ride and feeling in flow – that we can create the things that we want for ourselves in life. One person in alignment with their life is more powerful than thousands or even millions who are not in alignment. There is unlimited potential when you are tuned in. You can do anything, be anything and have anything. Manifestation comes easily and readily and life is just easier.

If you find yourself saying “no” more than you say “yes”, giving people excuses about why you can’t do things, or doubting on a frequent basis – you, my friend, are not in flow. It is time for you to confront your excuses and recognize that they are irrational and have no validity. Your excuses are just explanations you tell yourself, which reinforce negative thought patterns. Your excuses hold you back, perpetuate fear, and keep you from experiencing a beautiful joyous life. Stop telling yourself you can’t and start telling yourself “I can and I will”. That difference alone will shift you tremendously.

By now you know the power of affirmations and positive thoughts. Excuses are the negative side of that. You are affirming and creating a negative reality for yourself each time you make an excuse for something. Instead of creating the life you want, you create and manifest the life you don't want by allowing your fears and negative thoughts to control your existence. You must choose to define yourself by the things that you want in life, not by the things you don't want.

When we are aware of the absence of things, they often do not come. As a fertility doctor I see many patients who desperately want to get pregnant and are so focused on the fact that they are not pregnant, that they cannot conceive. The mind is a powerful tool and plays a big part in our ability to manifest what we want, even with child conception. Obviously there are many women who need to undergo fertility treatments and are able to experience the joys of motherhood because they did so. But there are just as many women out there (seeking treatment or not) who have convinced themselves that they are running out of time, will never get pregnant or can't, and who worry "what if it doesn't happen" or "I waited too long." In my experience, when these women shift their focus from the absence of the pregnancy back to mindfulness and present moment thinking and just enjoying life; they feel much better and often become pregnant as a result of this. Fear has a physiological effect on our body and puts our body in a state of stress. Getting pregnant happens when we are in a state of harmony and relaxation. Think about how good it feels to share your body with your partner and experience intimacy. At that moment you are not thinking about getting pregnant or worrying about it. You are thinking about the closeness that you are sharing with your

partner, and how wonderful they feel. You are in the moment with your love making and experiencing the beauty of intimacy and connection.

Our bodies will believe whatever our mind tells us. There are a great deal of examples of (seemingly) unexplained medical mysteries; sick patients who make full recoveries from terminal illness or people who overcome extreme odds and survive tragedies. The one thing these people all seem to have in common is a positive state of mind. Just as a sick person can choose more positive constructive thoughts for their body to respond and thrive to, one can also choose to embrace the illness and let fear take over. And when that happens the body will respond to those thoughts by perpetuating the illness and continuing to feed into those negative thoughts with physical symptoms. Obviously positive thought cannot cure all illness, otherwise the world might be a different place; but it can have a tremendous and profound impact on recovery.

I want to come back to belief. If you take anything away from this chapter, remember the notion that you must believe in your positive thoughts. Only when you believe in your thoughts and ideas can you take action and create momentum towards them. The power to create and manifest lies in each and every one of us; however, it is up to us to tap into this ability and practice it daily. Every thought we have creates a swirling of energy around us. The more like thoughts we have, the greater that energy becomes. When we perpetuate negative thoughts we release that energy into the universe and get back what we don't want. Therefore we want to make sure that the swirling energy around us is positive and centers around what we want, not what we don't want.

Positive thought is something that we are all capable of no matter how we were brought up, how old we are, or what challenges we face in our lives. You can create change in your life. You can be who and what you want. You can have the things you desire and you can attract the things that you most want in life. The single biggest obstacle preventing these things from happening is you. You must drop your negative doubts, beliefs, and harmful self-chatter and embrace loving, constructive positive thoughts that support the life you want.

If positivity doesn't come natural to you, that's okay, you can get there. I promise you. Start small so that you won't be overwhelmed. You can prove to yourself the power of positive thought each day. Write a list of intentions for the day each morning. Tell yourself what you want to accomplish that day and see yourself successfully navigating the day achieving all that you set out to achieve. See yourself giving a successful presentation in front of your clients, see yourself having a great day with your children, see yourself getting all of your errands done for the day with time to spare. These are small pieces of the larger puzzle but they are an important part of the overall picture. Don't let your thoughts think you, know that you are responsible for your thoughts and you get to decide what you think about and how you feel.

The biggest indicator of whether you are in flow or not, is how you feel. When you feel good you are in flow with the universe and doing it right. You are exactly where you should be. Keep doing more of that. When you feel bad, stressed out, uncomfortable or depressed - you are out of alignment. Do whatever you can in the present moment to feel good. Take yourself out of worry and fear immediately. You never have to embrace

those feelings of hopelessness or anxiety in the present moment. Choose to focus on the now because you know you can handle that.

Never let anyone else's opinion of you shift your energy to negative either. Your biggest priority is on feeling good, thinking positively, staying present and creating your future.

No one else gets to do that for you and no one else gets to take that from you. Your future is your future and yours alone. You decide how it looks, how you will feel, and what you will be surrounded by. With intentions, positive thought, and mindfulness you will attract positive experiences to your existence and continue to feel the flow of the universe as you live the life you want to live.

In this chapter we have discussed a number of things that you can do to embrace positive thinking and the profound impact that it will have on your life.

Let's recap what some of those things are:

1. Stay in the moment and keep present with your thoughts
2. Look for things that feel good, choosing positive thoughts over negative ones
3. Appreciate things around you, even if they are small things
4. Express gratitude to people in your life
5. Believe that you can and you will

Remember there is one simple truth to all of this; our thoughts create the world around us. We attract what we put out. Tell yourself this every day and you will become more

mindful of the thoughts that you have on a daily basis, attracting more of what you want and less of what you don't want.

CHAPTER 2: THE POWER OF MEDITATION

“Meditation brings wisdom; lack of meditation leaves ignorance. Know well what leads you forward and what holds you back, and choose the path that leads to wisdom.”

- Buddha

Meditation is an altered state of consciousness that facilitates a sense of connection with oneself at our core. Meditation has been around for as long as anyone can remember and is a practice of mind focus that brings attention to the present moment, while observing thoughts and sensations as they are happening, but not allowing them to dominate. Meditation allows us to observe ourselves as we think from a calm and peaceful state. There are many different techniques and styles of meditation and the practice can result in a more positive mindset, a greater sense of wellbeing, and a deeper connection with ones self.

In 2007 a study conducted by the U.S. government stated that approximately 9.4% of 20,000 000 people practiced meditation. Today in 2011 that number is likely significantly higher with the rise in popularity of yoga and personal development.

There are references of meditation going back as far as 500BC, with the first written references occurring in Hindu and Vedantism in 1500BC. All throughout history it has been used as a spiritual practice to get closer to God. And here we are today in 2011, increasingly realizing it's potential and impact on our lives.

There are scientific studies available that demonstrate the positive impacts of meditation to our brain chemistry. It has been argued and proven that meditation can rewire our brains making us feel greater empathy towards others, a deeper

sense of calmness and peace, and overall a sense of happiness and wellbeing. Meditation takes us away from stress and fear based thinking and gives us the essential tools we require to handle our emotions with clarity. The practice of meditation releases endorphins into our brain, which are a great deal more powerful than any man made drug. Endorphins are a naturally occurring chemical found in the brain: responsible for happiness and wellbeing. When we are mentally and physically relaxed the brain triggers the release of endorphins and brings us to a state of peace, promoting an overall sense of wellbeing and happiness.

The practice of meditation has several health benefits and has been attributed to strengthening the immune system as well as lowering the heart rate & stress on the heart, decreasing blood pressure, lowering cholesterol levels, and promoting easier breathing. Aside from these obvious health benefits, meditation can trigger tremendous changes in our life due to the correlation of environment to biology (our mind and body) at the cellular level.

The environment in which we put ourselves as human beings is directly correlated to the biology and physiology of our bodies. Meditation changes the chemistry of our brains allowing us to become the person we want to be by taking control of our thoughts and environment. Meditation strengthens the brain circuits that are associated with happiness and positive behavior and enables us to better handle the flow of emotions and feelings. As we evolve as humans we are increasingly relying less on the primitive (fight or flight) brain and more on the higher intelligence brain, responsible for meditative states promoting peace and spirituality.

Meditation has traditionally been a hallmark of Eastern religions and spiritual practices, but has been around for thousands of years. There are no known negative effects of meditation, but many known (and proved) positive effects. It is interesting that as a society we are quick to trust manmade drugs and pharmaceutical solutions to things that could easily be solved with simple mindful meditation. Our bodies contain everything necessary to heal and recover us, from our physical to our mental wellbeing.

There is an abundant variety of different meditation techniques and styles; the key to successful meditation is discovering which style works best for you.

There are several elements that remain consistent among most forms of meditation (excluding movement meditation) and these things are:

1. Find a quiet space free from distraction and noise
2. Get yourself into a physically comfortable position
3. Wear comfortable clothing that you feel good in
4. Close your eyes and take deep purposeful breaths
5. Observe your present moment thoughts, then let them go

If you have never attempted meditation before or are not yet comfortable with it, the best place to start is in your home where you can feel relaxed. Find a quiet space that has good energy and sit in a comfortable position. Focus on your breathing and relaxing any tension you may feel in your body. Let your body and mind completely relax while you take deep purposeful breaths, inhaling wellbeing and exhaling negativity. At first you may find that your mind chatter is loud and intrusive. The mind will attempt to

control your meditations and force you to think about future events or other things that do not represent the here and now of your meditation. If this happens, simply guide your thoughts back to the present by focusing on your breathing and observing how your body feels. You can meditate for fifteen minutes or an hour. It is up to you how long you would like to dedicate to each meditation session. At first you may choose to do short sessions and then after some regular practice (and when it becomes a mainstay in your life) you may find that your sessions become longer and more powerful.

If you are an active person and have a hard time with the stillness of meditation, you may be interested in movement meditation. The same effects of meditation can be achieved through movement activities such as walking, yoga or dancing. With each of these styles the focus is on the way the body moves and the purposeful breaths taken with each movement. You can train your body to enter a trance like state, without interfering thoughts and chatter from your mind. You are solely focused on your breathing and movement, and are able to achieve enlightenment the same way you can with still mindfulness.

You may also choose to try sound-aided meditation using mantras, chants, or binaural and isochronic sounds. These sound waves put the mind into a state of resonance using vibrations that activate the chakras and use rhythm to purify the heart and mind. Sound meditation can be extremely powerful for thought control and learning to apply the laws of the universe to ones life. Many people today use intention meditation, positive thinking, and desire manifestation as way of impacting their day-to-day existence through meditational practices. The same way we are able to bring ourselves to a state

of calm and peace through meditation, changing the way we respond to emotion; we are also able to bring ourselves to positive thought and action, changing the way we manage our day-to-day lives.

Meditation doesn't have to be an unattainable eclectic thing intended only for religious people and new age spiritualists. Meditation is for everyone, can be practiced by everyone, and helps us individually as well as collectively. We are already comfortable with the notion that we can become good at something when we practice. We do this all the time in our every day lives. We continue to exercise so that we positively affect our body and aesthetic appearance. We hone our culinary skills so that we can become a master in the kitchen, and we practice other things to become good like photography, knitting, and painting. All of these things are wonderful and essential to our happiness; however, nothing is more important or essential than practicing mindfulness. Our mind is the key to everything. The practice of meditation makes us better at the one thing that is most important; being our authentic true self. It provides us with the necessary skills to successfully manage emotion and stress. We train the body. We must also train the mind. We must embrace and promote mindfulness as a part of daily living.

Approximately 95% of our daily activities are done on auto-pilot; meaning that we are going through the motions of life, responding and reacting to things without giving too much thought into why we are responding and reacting to those things. We give our bodies and primitive minds a lot of power over the way we live our lives. We falsely believe that we are in the drivers seat, steering our lives in the direction that we want to go. The only time we are truly in control of our lives is when we are able to tap into the

essence of our being through regular meditation and the practice of mindfulness. We must separate the ego-driven self from the true self. The ego-driven self represents the body and the true self represents the mind. The body responds to stimuli and environment without even thinking about why. Our bodily functions and systems operate like clockwork and lead us through life. The body and mind are different and respond differently to environment.

Our lives are filled with a great deal of stress, and this is perhaps the most challenging time of all to be alive. Women are taking on more responsibility than ever before managing families, careers, finances, and relationships – while still trying to nurture the self. Men are trying to figure out how to be more receptive to emotion and spirituality and better relate to women, while still maintaining their masculinity and roles within the family. Kids face increased pressure at school and in social circles. The world is changing rapidly before our eyes and our minds are filled with clutter and noise. We receive millions of messages per day from our thoughts, advertising, the web, conversations, and other forms of media. We often go about our day unaware of just how much of this junk is unnecessary and detracting from the essence of what our true self needs to thrive. Meditation takes us away from all of this junk and filters it out for us, giving us only pure thought and leaving us with the things that resonate with our inner being.

Of course we all face pressure, deal with financial stress, and have daily worries rolling around in our heads. We wouldn't be human otherwise. But with regular practice of meditation we are able to take those worries from paralyzing fear to simple logic and **Forget Everything And Relax**. The stressed mind may lay in bed worrying about the bills

that have to be paid, one worried thought leading into another, until there are a dozen different stressful thoughts all feeding into each other. The calm mind would instead say, “It is midnight. I cannot pay any bills right now, so I will instead think about it tomorrow when I can address it.”

We often worry about things that we cannot do anything about at the time that we are worrying about them. We stress about things that haven’t happened yet, working through “what if” scenarios imagining the worst and fearing the circumstances that we have created in our heads. There are several problems with this type of thinking which prevent us from seeing solutions and overcoming obstacles.

Instead of creating the outcome that we desire, we in fact do the exact opposite by:

1. Attracting what we don’t want by focusing upon it
2. Putting ourselves into a state of stress and chaos
3. Paying too much attention to our mental clutter

Meditation helps us de-clutter the mind and get to the core of what’s important. At times it may seem that your finances are the most important thing, or the family crisis you are going through, but ask yourself “What would my inner self say about this?” If you think your inner self would respond in the same manner, then you may carry on with your actions and behaviors. However, if you believe that your inner self would not focus or be interested in these things that have you so stressed – let them go. Deal with things in the moment that they are occurring, and don’t stress about it otherwise.

Meditation will help you recognize which thoughts are hurtful and which ones are

helpful. With regular practice you will be able to keep your thoughts present and experience more joy in life. You will find that you are not in a constant state of reaction anymore because you are taking things as they come, enjoying each moment as it arrives, and thinking about the things that please you. You will be better equipped to handle the daily stressors of life.

Meditation is a deeply personal thing. It is something that you do by yourself, for yourself. You do not need to gain the approval of others, opinion of others, or ask for permission to do it. It is your body and mind and you can be living a wonderfully abundant and happy life through mindfulness. Why wouldn't you want to meditate?

All throughout history meditation has been a prevalent force for enlightenment and happiness. Buddhist Monks (or Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis) are able to put themselves into a meditative state almost instantly and can stay there as long as they choose. They practice mindfulness and experience a profound amount of peace and joy, and do not experience human suffering.

The cause of human suffering is often the inability to stay present with our thoughts. We drift into the future worrying about what hasn't happened yet and grip to the events of the past, unable to let go. We fret over what we could have done, should have done, and didn't do, all while we make ourselves feel worse in the process. When we jump ahead into the future with our thoughts, we unnecessarily predict (often incorrectly) the outcome of events that haven't happened yet. Meditation keeps us present and helps

us to avoid all of that unnecessary stress which can make us sick and severely affect the quality of our lives.

Meditation does not have to mean you sitting in the lotus position on the floor with a specific Buddhist hand gesture, or mudra. Meditation can be walking your dog, strumming a guitar, knitting, or even walking through a park. Often I tell my clients to spend 12 minutes per day in some form of meditation. You can choose how you'd like to meditate, depending on what works for you. I call this Dr. Rob's 12 Minute Meditation. On my website (Mind Body Smile) I offer a guide for your thoughts as you embark on your unique meditation. The focus is always on breathing in goodness and exhaling with a smile anything you don't want, need, or that hinders you in any way. Breathing is always important to your meditation, no matter which type of meditation you are concentrating on. Monitoring your breathing helps keep you present with your meditation and helps keep your mind focused on what you are doing, rather than on what you have to do later that day, what might happen at work tomorrow, or what happened yesterday. Listen to your breath as you breathe in deep and purposefully, follow the air as it flows through you and note how you feel. Stay present with your meditation.

Just as we "work-out" our bodies and train ourselves to be good at things in life, we must also "work-in" with our minds. Our minds can be trained to work for us rather than against us. Our reptilian brains (or our lower brains) are the least sophisticated part of our brain. It is comparable to that of modern day reptiles, and controls our autonomic responses, fight or flight mechanism, and our systematic bodily processes. Our reptilian

brain is concerned mostly with survival, instinct, mating, and physical maintenance. Complex rational thought does not occur in this lower part of the brain. It is only through evolution and millions of years that more sophisticated reasoning have been added to this foundation and our capacity to think on higher levels have increased our intellectual capacity and set us apart from the animal kingdom.

The reptilian brain often causes us to act out of instinct and fear, pushing us to do things that often aren't the most well thought out or the best thing for us. It is constantly trying to protect us and help us survive, but in ways that do not always serve us well. The mechanisms for survival are incredibly different today than they once were. Our brains today represent the culmination of millions of years of history and evolution. The primitive brain is not connected to higher more cognitive parts of the brain.

It has been proven that meditation actually alters the brain structure over time, so that our left pre-frontal cortex (the section of our brains responsible for positive emotions such as happiness) experiences enhanced activity, while the right prefrontal (responsible for negative emotions and anxiety) experiences significantly less activity. Regular meditation has also been proven to make people more compassionate towards others. Just like we train our muscles in exercise, we can too train and shape our brain to function the way we want it to, in a way that serves us best.

Meditation during stress

Often when life becomes too stressful, busy and chaotic for us, it is a message from the universe that we need to slow down and take some time for ourselves. When this

happens we can feel our energy shift. We may experience a continual feeling of anxiety, almost as if we can't keep up or manage the multitude of responsibilities that we have in our lives. When this happens, contrary to what you may believe, the most important thing to do is STOP. Take some time out. Find some quiet solitude and let yourself be at peace, if even only for twenty minutes. Close your eyes and let those stressful thoughts and nagging worries drift away from you for the moment. If a thought persists visualize yourself pushing it away gently and watch it float away and out of sight. Continue to visualize this any time you have an unwanted thought.

You can use this technique while meditating upright in the lotus position with your eyes closed, or while relaxing in the bath, while drinking a cup of tea, or by laying down. Choose the method that feels the best and most comfortable for you. Don't get too caught up in the technique or approach. Meditation is a very personal and uniquely individual activity. Many people place too much emphasis on the technique and report that they are unable to clear their minds, or prevent unwanted thoughts, or they feel that they are not "doing it right". The problem is the same – too much thought. The brain is taking over and trying to overthink the act of meditation. These thoughts are working against you. You must simplify and resist the urge to overthink or overanalyze. Just enjoy being in a state of peacefulness without expectation or worry.

Tea and meditation

Many people already drink tea in the mornings before the day starts. But did you know that the very act of preparing and enjoying a cup of tea has meditative qualities and is

something that can easily be incorporated into your life as a meditation technique. For centuries tea and meditation have been linked. In China it was introduced in association with Zen. The act of preparing and drinking tea was very much a spiritual practice, and one that brought the focus of mind to present, resulting in mindfulness. When we are focused on what we are doing and the practice of making the tea, we are present with that activity. Think about filling the kettle with water, waiting patiently for the water to boil, observing the steam coming out of the kettle, watching the water fill the cup, and allowing the tea to steep. While we are preparing tea, the process of doing so helps us concentrate on that activity, and makes it much easier for us to stay present with our thoughts. Many Buddhists begin their service with a tea meditation ceremony. This invites mindfulness and starts them off on the right foot. They also hold the teacup with two hands so that the act of bringing the teacup to the mouth is engaged with present-moment awareness.

We are starting to see a shift in Western culture today. Our focus on work, productivity, material wealth and coffee consumption is slowly transitioning to a desire and need for inner tranquility. People are increasingly looking to the harmony and peacefulness of tea and enjoying the experience of preparing and drinking tea to the contrast of rushing out the door or kick starting the day with coffee. Tea (while caffeinated) is viewed more as a means of relaxation and peacefulness than its counterpart coffee, which is often attributed to productivity and action. Tea allows us the opportunity to relax and enjoy what we are doing, and activates a natural sense of harmony within us. It is hard to rush

around drinking a tea, try it. Coffee lends itself well to “on the go” activities, but tea, by its very nature asks us to slow down, sit back and enjoy.

If you are interested in practicing meditation with tea, you may choose to use a loose tea, which has a more organic and earthy feel to it. Green tea may feel the best for this purpose and will lend itself well to the process. Green tea is easy to find and has a great deal of health benefits. Green tea also contains a rare amino acid (L-Theanine) that enhances your brain’s capacity while reducing stress and supporting your ability to focus. The Chinese attribute Green tea to immortality and have over time created some fascinating tea rituals involving Green tea. Green tea is available by bag or as loose-leaf tea. Use whichever feels best. You may also wish to experiment with other types of teas to find one that works best for you. Tea is like wine; there is a tea for everyone.

Once you have selected the tea that you want to use for your meditative practices, you can begin creating your ritual. Fill up the kettle with water. You may choose filtered water or water from the tap. Your water source must be one of purity and comfort. While you are filling the kettle with water and beginning the process of boiling the water, observe your actions and allow your senses to experience everything fully. Whenever I make a tea I always begin by breathing in the tea that I am about to prepare. I inhale the scent of the tea and that allows me to appreciate the tea and begin the practice of preparing it. While you are preparing the tea, stay present with it. Do not try to multi-task or do anything else. Simply focus on the act of preparing your tea. Observe the process and appreciate the steps involved.

Once your tea is ready for consumption, find a quiet place where you can relax and sip your tea in comfortable peace. Smile as you breathe in the steam from your cup. Note how it feels on your face, and the way the mug feels in your hands. Smell the tea and think about its origins and where it came from. Imagine the tea plant that the leaves grew on. Taste the environment of those leaves, the air, the weather, and the soil from which the plant grew. Tea connects us to our mother earth. As you sip your tea feel the warmth flow down from your throat to your toes. Appreciate the taste and savor each sip. Feel the warmth on your hands as you embrace the mug and close your eyes. When you have finished your tea, express your gratitude for the perfect cup of tea you have just experienced. You will notice after doing this a few times, that thoughts will come to you during this time. You may see visions or have ideas come to you while you are in a meditative state with your tea. Allow these thoughts to come. Tea is the second most consumed drink in the world, second only to water. Enjoy its effects on your wellbeing and practice of mind.

Music and meditation

Another way that you may wish to meditate is with music. There are many options here and a lot of music already on the market aimed at facilitating meditation. Go into any new age shop and you will likely find CDs for meditation; even yoga studios are beginning to carry music for meditation. Artists are now producing music specifically for meditation purposes. Your selection in music is key to being able to meditate with music. Music can either enhance or detract from your meditative experience. You want to make sure that the music is entering your subconscious and not making you think too much, interpret meaning, or making you want to sing. Because of this, you should choose music with no words. Words inherently make us think, or train us to remember them, so instrumental music that is calming and peaceful is best. You want to transcend your rational mind with meditation. If you aren't sure which music to select you can also talk to others about what they find effective. There are many choices and in the end it's simply what makes you feel comfortable and at ease. Make sure that the space you choose to meditate is free from distraction and noise. It helps to shut off the phone, television, and any other "noise making" devices that are nearby. The more relaxed you are, the more in tune you will be to the vibrations of the music, and the deeper you will be able to go with your meditation. Many people also choose to meditate with headphones. This is a good practice because it will shut out any noises such as dogs barking, refrigerator humming, or cars passing by – and completely allow you experience the tranquility of the meditation music. If you do choose to meditate with headphones, it is usually best to use the larger padded ones as apposed to the little ear

buds, the reason being that they are generally more comfortable and are great at cancelling out background noise.

Once you have your music selected, your place to meditate, and your headphones (if you've chosen to use them) – you are ready to begin the practice of meditating with music. Begin the music and get into a comfortable position. Focus on taking deep (but not forced) breaths in through the nostril. Focus on inhaling wellness and peace. You may choose to place your tongue on the roof of your mouth to get a deeper breath in. Exhale the breath through slightly parted lips and feel the fall of the abdomen as you embrace the sounds of the music. Focus on the sounds that you hear. Let the music take you where it wants to, without regard to thoughts or worries. If thoughts persist, simply push them away gently and re-focus your attention to the music. You can select a specific tone or instrument if it helps bring you back. Let your breathing be purposeful, deep and natural while you close your eyes and take in the music. Give yourself freely to the music, mind, body and spirit, allowing it to take you on a spiritual journey. Allow the vibrations of the music to stimulate your chakras and absorb you. Eventually your breathing and heart beat will become synchronized with the music and bring you to a state referred to as “entrainment”. It is when you reach this state that you are in a perfect meditative harmony with the music. This is where you may experience visualizations or imagery.

Stay in this state of harmony with the music as long as you wish. Some meditation music will have chimes at the end to snap you out of your meditation and “wake you up”. You

may choose to utilize that, or if you are using an iPhone or mobile device to listen to the music, set yourself an alarm so that you can stop after a desired amount of time.

Once you've experimented with different types of music, you may wish to also experiment with brainwave entrainment and explore binaural beats and isochronic tones. These special types of sound frequencies are a technology aid to bring your brain to the stage of entrainment, where you will experience a deep state of meditation and tap into your higher state of self. Binaural beats have been around longer than isochronic tones, but many meditation apps and software programs now use them both interchangeably for maximum effectiveness. The great thing about brainwave entrainment through sound is that you can achieve altered states of consciousness that you may not otherwise be able to achieve on your own. Even the most inexperienced novice can tap into the unlimited potential of the mind by using brainwave entrainment. Music can be a great meditation aid and help alter your consciousness in ways that will deepen your meditation and create a wonderful sense of peace within you.

Once you have completed your music meditation, it is important, however not to jump up and go back to your mode of productivity. Take some time to stretch, sit quietly after the music has stopped, and get up slowly. This is important, not only with music meditation, but with all meditation. You never want to just jump quickly out of a meditation, because your brain is still in a state of heightened consciousness. Allot time for a smooth transition.

Creating a sacred space

Once meditation becomes a part of your daily experience, you will find an increasing need to create a sacred place in your home in which to practice. A sacred place is just a place where you go to routinely to meditate. It can be a part of a room, an entire room, or even just a corner where you have a cushion and some incense. You get to choose how you set up your sacred space and what types of things to put in the space. Many people like to have meditation cushions or cushiony chairs in their meditation space. Incense, Buddha statues, and other iconic figurines may also be used if you find them inspirational and beautiful to look at. Select things for your meditation space carefully, things that support your inner peace and provide you with a sense of wellbeing. You may use chakra stones or crystals, candles, pictures, books, and even ambient lighting to decorate your meditation space. This is your space, away from the world to meditate when you need to. If you cannot devote a section of your home strictly for this purpose, it sometimes helps to have a “meditation box” containing a few of the items mentioned above that you can use in your chosen space. That way your sacred space is portable and can go with you wherever you’d like whether it be somewhere in your home, outside, or in someone else’s home. The point with any sacred space is to allow yourself to designate some rituals that support your practice of meditation and provide you with a sense of wellbeing in your home, so that you may go to them at any point during the day.

Be yourself

Often when people first begin the practice of meditation they worry needlessly about technique, how they look, or whether they are “doing it right”. Unfortunately this takes us further away from where we need to be and does the opposite of what we are intending. It is extremely important with meditation to ensure that you are comfortable and that you are doing what works for you personally. Just because your yoga master friend tells you how she meditates and tries to instruct you on what you should be doing, does not mean that it is the approach that is best for you. Meditation is deeply personal; only you can determine what works best, as you will know by the depth of your meditation. Stay flexible and open to options. There are so many different meditation guides, aids, and techniques available that you will have no trouble at all finding one that works for you. Trust in your higher self and in knowing that you will connect to the source when you achieve an altered state of consciousness. Trust that meditation is for your highest good and that you will experience profound levels of peace and tranquility through its practice. Sometimes we like to over-educate ourselves when trying something new. We go out and buy all of the books, read articles and blogs, listen to people speak about it, all before trying it ourselves. Knowledge is a powerful tool, but the act of experiencing it can far outweigh anything we read, hear, or see. Our soul craves meditation, and only through meditation can our soul speak.

Meditation brings us closer to the essence of who we really are and connects us to its source. Through meditation we are able to experience peace, happiness, and live in the now. We can bring our bodies and minds into balance and harmony by warding off

stress, physical ailments, and negativity. Our bodies will respond to meditation by embracing wellness and our minds will respond with happiness. Whatever issues you face in your life, however hard things have been up to this point, you can change these things now and you can do it through the practice of meditation. Remember, as I stated in the beginning of this chapter, there are no known negative side effects of meditation, and a staggering array of scientifically proven positive effects and advantages. We all possess the power to meditate and tap into our higher self through altering our consciousness. We can invite peace, harmony and balance into our lives through regular meditation. There is nothing to lose in making meditation a part of your every day life, and a great deal to gain. Quite simply, it is one of life's greatest secrets.

CHAPTER 3: SLEEP AND THE BRAIN

“Sleep is the best meditation.”

– Dalai Lama

Each night we drift into sleep and let our bodies become still-while our minds continue to work. We sleep and refresh ourselves, ready for the next day, so that we may face it with a positive outlook and an overall feeling of wellbeing. But when we drift off to sleep do we really know what is happening? Have you stopped to think about how amazing the simple act of sleep is? Surely there must be a reason why Mother Nature gave us this amazing ability to rejuvenate our bodies and minds, while at the same time running magical stories through our heads. I believe there is indeed a reason why we were given this ability, and it has to do with our dreams. Before we dive into dreams, however, let's take a closer look at sleep.

What is sleep?

Sleep is something we all must do in order to function effectively as human beings; it is essential to our overall health and wellbeing. It is defined as a period of reduced consciousness (when compared with wakefulness) in which our bodies become relatively inactive, as do our sensory abilities. During sleep our body cycles through 5 stages of sleep; 4 periods of NREM (or non-rapid eye movement) and 1 period of REM (or rapid eye movement), which is where we experience our dream state. REM sleep temporarily paralyzes our muscles to prevent us from acting out our dreams, which is really pretty amazing if you stop to think about it.

How much sleep do we need?

Adults typically need about 8 hours of sleep per night, with approximately 20 - 25% of that time spent in REM sleep in order to feel refreshed and be in good health. When we sleep longer than 8 hours we run the risk of feeling overtired, lazy, or depressed. Our bodies operate in rhythmic conjunction with the circadian clock, so a good rule of thumb is to be awake when it's light out and wind down for sleep when it gets dark out. When we get the right amount of sleep our bodies function seamlessly, our immune system is strong, our metabolism is high, and we feel happy and healthy. By contrast, when we do not get enough sleep we begin to build sleep debt. The more nights we go without getting a full night of sleep, the greater this debt becomes, and the harder it is for us to catch up to. We feel out of sorts when we don't get enough sleep, sluggish, tired, low on energy, and our metabolism slows down while our appetite increases, making it harder for us to maintain a healthy weight. We may also feel depressed or experience anxiety when we do not get enough sleep. Our body does not respond well to lack of sleep and it begins experiencing all sorts of systematic problems. Sleep is essential to our wellbeing, happiness and functions of the mind.

You should be able to tell if you are getting enough sleep by taking cues from your body. Tune into your energy and analyze how you are feeling. Write down what time you are going to bed and waking. Notice any patterns and note how much sleep you are getting on average per night. If you notice yourself feeling "off" try increasing the amount of sleep you get if you feel you may not be getting enough, or try decreasing the amount of

sleep you are getting if you feel that you are getting too much sleep. Getting too much sleep can be just as much of a problem as not getting enough. We are unable to function at our highest capacity when we sleep too much and become lethargic and unmotivated. More than 8 hours is essential for children and animals, but as adults we typically do not require any more than 6 - 8 hours per night.

Preparing for sleep

Often when we have problems sleeping it is due to the events that take place before sleep. Preparing for sleep must be a ritual that we practice in winding down and relaxing. It is important to avoid stimulants and activities that cause an adrenaline rush. Things like exercise, caffeine, sugar and television should be avoided, as they are not conducive to a good night's sleep. Another thing to look at is the time of night at which you eat dinner. If dinner is eaten too late, it may prevent you from going to bed at a reasonable time. It is best to eat dinner between 5 and 7 o'clock; this gives the body proper time to digest before preparing for a good night's sleep. When we eat too late, we don't give our bodies time to digest and we are unable to move around enough to burn off any of the calories we consumed.

Preparing a pre-sleep ritual can be a rewarding experience and something to look forward to each night. You can modify your ritual according to how much time and flexibility you have in your life. If you have very little time, your ritual may only consist of washing your face, brushing your teeth, and putting your pajamas on. If you have more time, you may like to add in some soothing activities such as reading, taking a warm

bath, or enjoying a cup of non-caffeinated herbal tea before bed. These are all things that cause the body to wind down, moving you into a peaceful state of relaxation. You may also choose to do some meditation or deep breathing exercises, as these things also bring you into a deep state of relaxation.

Another part of preparing for sleep is of course your surroundings. Ensure that your room is relaxing, dark, and that your bed is comfortable. We spend one third of our lives sleeping, so investing in a good mattress is just as important as the home you live in, the car you drive, and the other furnishings you have in your home. Often we overlook this, and don't give enough consideration to the mattress that we sleep on. Your mattress should be a supportive and comfortable mattress that gives you a restful sleep. If you find that you wake up a lot, have back pain in the mornings, or are tossing and turning a lot – it might be time to invest in a new mattress. You should also replace your mattress every ten years or so.

Many people like to have televisions in their bedroom; however, this isn't really a good idea because if they are there, we will most likely watch them. And when we watch them, we get stimulated and overactive with our imaginations. Many of us then begin to rely on the television to help us drift off to sleep, which can result in poor quality of sleep. Television should never be used as a means of relaxation before bed. Instead of watching television, try reading a magazine or a book instead. You can place a selection of literature on your bedside, spend a few moments reading and you will find that you become relaxed and prepared for sleep much quicker than you would if you were to watch television. Another important factor in your bedroom is the room itself. Is it free

from clutter? Are there too many knick-knacks and decorations in the room? Is there laundry all over the place? These things are important to your level of relaxation. When we enter our bedroom it should be a peaceful sanctuary. A place for us to escape the world, close our eyes and drift off to sleep. This becomes very difficult if there is laundry and clutter all over the bedroom. It raises our anxiety and makes us feel bad about ourselves because it is a subconscious representation of stress in our life. Keep your bedroom simple and clear of clutter.

Stressed sleep

Often when we finally collapse into our bed and get ready to sleep, we close our eyes and are bombarded with a barrage of stressful thoughts. These thoughts range from anxiety and worry about work to financial difficulties and problems with our loved ones. These thoughts put us into a state of stress and make it extremely difficult to drift off to sleep. When we do finally fall asleep it is from exhaustion and the quality of our sleep suffers from these stressful thoughts. These racing thoughts that we experience perpetuate themselves and multiply, all while we lay in bed attempting to sleep. Many who suffer from insomnia are actually suffering from anxiety before bedtime. It is this exact problem that is causing them to lay awake each night worrying and stressing about their life. While we cannot escape the events of our life, we can do things to avoid putting ourselves into such a stressful state of being.

If you find yourself stressing or worrying about things when you are lying in bed, practice these few important steps:

1. Repeat, "It is now time for sleep. I will deal with my situations as they arise and will be in a better position to handle them tomorrow, when I am well rested. Right now I am going to sleep."
2. If your thoughts persist, gently visualize your palm hand out pushing them away from you as you think about something more peaceful and pleasurable. Picture yourself on a beautiful beach with the waves crashing against the shore while the sun warms your face.
3. Practice some deep purposeful breaths. Think about nothing except the deep breaths that you take. Allow each breath to push you deeper into relaxation.

Following some or all of these techniques will allow you to move from a state of stress to a state of relaxation. We cannot accomplish anything while lying in bed; our worries must be handled during wakefulness. The only thing we must focus on while in bed is relaxing and allowing peacefulness. When our body and mind is in a state of relaxation, we experience a restful nights sleep that leaves us feeling hopeful, energetic, and intelligent the following day. Notice how on the ball you feel at work when you experience a good nights sleep. You accomplish your tasks with ease and handle situations that arise without concern or worry. You are more confident and capable with a proper nights sleep. Think about this the next time you are laying in bed worrying.

What are dreams?

Our dreams are like stories or movies that play in our minds; they are comprised of a series of thoughts, images, ideas, sounds, emotions, and experiences that occur during sleep. While the exact meaning of why we dream and what our dreams purpose is remains a mystery and is a subject of great debate, there has been a tremendous amount of psychological and cultural study in the area of dreaming. Many cultures believe that our dreams contain messages from the divine and are intended to guide our waking lives in some way.

When we enter REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, this is when we most commonly begin to experience dreams. We cycle through 4 stages of sleep and may enter into REM 4-7 times per night. REM sleep accounts for 15-20% of our total sleep time. From the time we fall asleep it takes approximately 30 to 90 minutes before we can begin dreaming. We experience systematic changes in our bodies while we sleep such as an increase in adrenaline, sexual excitement, lower blood pressure, and an accelerated heart rate. During REM our body becomes paralyzed, our muscles relax and we are unable to move from our bed; this state is known as REM Paralysis.

Countless inventions and ideas have been born and materialized from dreams. We spend on average about six years of our lives dreaming and forget most of what we dreamt about within ten minutes of waking. Dreaming is something that we all do regardless of age, race or religion. Even animals dream. Dreams have been known to predict future events as well. Because dreams are so hard to study however, it is

unknown whether this phenomenon is due to coincidence, the piecing together of known information, faulty memory, or if it is an act of clairvoyance.

Most people who study and pay attention to dreams find that their dreams are incredibly meaningful, relevant and related to their waking life. They often contain messages and imagery that help them manage their lives or resolve conflict in some way. At first dreams may seem strange or too abstract to mean anything, but upon closer observation, you may discover that they are loaded with meaning. But because we dream in metaphor, we must become good at deciphering meaning from abstract images and symbolism in order to understand the nature of our dreams.

Learning from our dreams

The challenge with dreams is that they aren't easy to remember and it requires some training and practice to be able to record and interpret them. We forget 90% of our dreams within ten minutes of waking up. We often have a prolific dream and we are certain we will remember it, but then shortly after waking it has disappeared from our memory. This is because our linear mind is different from our intuitive mind, so the information we have processed during sleep is replaced during wakefulness with less-abstract thought. Our brains are not trying to remember our dreams (since they are not memories), so we are unable to remember them unless we really have the motivation and interest to do so within the first few moments of waking.

Our dreams often contain intuitive prompts for things that we are dealing with in our waking life. Many people believe that our dreams contain information or answers to

problems or issues we may have faced that very day or the day prior. Our dreams can provide us with answers to questions we may have, help us face our fears, bring clarity to problems or help us understand things that may elude us during wakefulness. Our dreams are helping us problem solve every night; it is just up to us to interpret those solutions. The messages contained in our dreams are very abstract and metaphorical because they simply have to be. The experiences we have in waking life that cause us to remember situations and encounters are stored in our memory banks, dreams tap into those memory banks in order to help us draw upon those experiences, but we cannot store dreams in our memory banks as well because we would then confuse them with actual life occurrences. So as such, they must remain metaphorical in nature and serve as a pictorial guide to helping us understand and make sense of our world.

Remembering and interpreting your dreams

Forgetting 90% of our dreams within ten minutes of waking makes it a challenge to interpret and remember our dreams. We must be committed and motivated to doing this if we wish to analyze our dreams and draw meaning from them. Most people who regularly practice dream interpretation find that they recall their dreams for longer periods and with more ease simply due to the fact that they are interested in remembering them. When we intend to remember our dreams and express an interest in doing so, it becomes easier for us. There are things that we can do to help assist us in remembering our dreams. These methods are really quite foolproof and work wonderfully if you are in fact interested in studying the meaning of your dreams.

Follow these few steps and you will be well on your way to understanding the meaning of your dreams:

1. Keep a dream pad near your bed

This should be a little notebook or scratch pad of some kind that is used solely for recording the events of your dreams. Don't use notebooks that are used for writing grocery lists and phone numbers. This notebook should only serve one purpose; recording your dreams as you wake.

If you don't want to write when you wake up or feel that you may be too groggy or out of it to do it, you can also use a personal recording device or an application on a mobile phone that records voice notes.

2. Don't jump out of bed before you record your dream

It is essential that you record your dream as soon as you wake up. If you go to the bathroom and brush your teeth first, you may lose a tremendous amount of your dream or worse, not remember it at all.

3. Record key information

Spend a few minutes thinking about your dream and pulling out images, symbols or themes that you remember. You don't need to write the entire stream of your dream down. You are certainly welcome to if you'd like, but most times there are images or themes that are prevalent in your dream. It is those images that are most important.

Writing in point form may also help you recover the information quickly before it is gone.

4. Analyzing your dream

After you have captured everything that you remember happening in your dream you can begin analyzing. Before you run to your dream dictionary, try using your intuition to help you begin the process of understanding. Ask yourself how you felt in your dream, what types of emotions come to mind when you think about it? These are key to understanding the nature of your dream. You may choose to circle words or themes that you have recorded that have some sort of association or link as well. Analyzing a dream is almost like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It is up to you to piece it together.

5. What did you learn & how can you apply it?

After you have recorded and analyzed your dream, write down (preferably on the same page) what your interpretation is of the dream you just had. Write down the meaning that you think your dream holds, and why you believe you had it. You may wish to use point form notes here to record the lessons or undertones of your dream. Also look at how you can apply this dream to your waking life. You've recorded your dream; you've analyzed it, now how can you apply it? Write down some notes about how you might apply the lessons learned in your dream to your waking life. This entire process from start to finish need take no longer than ten or fifteen minutes.

As you begin to record and analyze your dreams, you will notice that you become very good at trusting your intuition as you practice. You will be able to quickly record your dreams upon waking and will know almost immediately why you had that dream. Your dream book or notepad will also greatly serve you as a tool to look back upon and refer to. Your dreams hold the key to insights about your fears, hopes, dreams, and daily ambitions. Writing down your dreams and analyzing them provides you with a deeper connection to your subconscious mind and will help you make better decisions as you navigate life.

Dream incubation

Dream Incubation is the act of intending to dream about a particular situation, problem, person or thing. We put forth energy to think about that which we'd like to dream about and our dreams center around the requested topic. This takes some practice but is a very valuable tool for us to draw upon. We are essentially planting a seed in our mind and our dream is the technique in which we are able to watch the seed grow. How amazing that we can choose the things we'd like to dream about.

Many people use dream incubation as a means of solving problems or receiving answers to things that evade them in their waking lives. This is a valuable tool for problem solving, however you can also choose to dream about things that you simply want to think about such as a deceased loved one, the future, or some new creative idea. You can choose to dream about whatever you'd like.

In order for a dream incubation to be successful, follow these simple few steps:

1. Have a clear picture in your mind of the problem, thing, person or situation that you would like to dream about. If you have something physical (a photo or object) that represents this, place it near your bed. Touch it and look at it before you close your eyes.
2. Think about what you want to dream about. If it is a problem, see the problem. Look at it and visualize it as clearly as you can. Whether it is a person, problem, thing or situation – visualize it clearly and have a vision burned into your mind.
3. When you close your eyes hold this image in your mind and ask (either out loud or in your mind) to dream about this. You can say things like “please help me solve the problem of _____” or “what should I do about _____”. Or you can say something more basic like “I would like to dream about _____ tonight.”
4. When you awake the following morning don’t jump straight out of bed, instead lay there for a few moments recalling your dream. Think about how you felt first. The details should piece together once you start thinking about your dream. If you have a dream book, write down as many details as you can. Did you find a solution? Did you get what you were looking for?
5. If you have a hard time remembering or did not achieve the results that you were looking for, continue to do this for an entire week. Focus on your vision before bed time and ensure that the FIRST thing you do when you wake up is recalling your dream. Write it down if you can.

Will analyzing my dreams really change my life that much?

Our dreams can unlock many mysteries and bring us closer to self-awareness and understanding our inner desires and motives. Remembering our dreams does indeed take work and practice, and with a bit of attention it becomes rewarding and provides us with a deeper sense of purpose. Often we go through life unsure of how we really think and feel about things because we are affected by external stimuli and society's opinions of what we should think and feel. Dreams can give us insight into our true nature and undiscovered feelings about things. This leads to greater awareness, acceptance of self, and enlightenment. When we live in the light of who we really are we are able to accomplish almost anything we set our minds to. Stumbling blocks occur when we self-doubt, try to live up to the expectations of others, and don't listen to our own intuition. Our dreams serve as a reminder to things we need to remember and lessons we need to learn in order to move forward, grow and evolve. By taking the time to analyze the metaphors in our dreams we unlock the secrets of our psyche and subconscious, becoming more in tune with ourselves and the world around us. Our dreams are pure and unbiased representations of our inner desires and feelings. They are a direct result of the life we lead and our daily experiences. Ever notice how the people in our dreams all tend to be people you've met or people that are currently in your life? This is because the mind goes to what is familiar. Faces are familiar, so we use those familiar faces to play out scenarios in our dreams that will help us think about things in new ways. We can't always experiment with situations in real life and must make decisions and choices that impact the direction of our life, so our dreams are a

way for us to test things and think them through abstractly from the standpoint of our spirit. Our dreams help us process information and events so that we can learn, grow and evolve in ways that are far beyond the capacity of our waking lives.

Sleep problems

Some people have a tremendously hard time going to bed at night either due to too much mind activity and stress, too much stimulation, or just because they fear not being able to go to sleep. Many of these sleep problems can be avoided by healthy sleep practices and rituals. Analyze your pre-sleep rituals and make sure that you are not doing anything that could potentially sabotage a good nights sleep.

Sleep aids can be used if you have tried to go to sleep unsuccessfully for more than 3 hours. However, take caution in the type of sleep aid that you use. Sleeping pills and other pharmaceutical based sleep aids may not provide you with a good quality of sleep and may potentially be habit forming or cause undesirable side effects. While there are some newer sleeping pills on the market that are less problematic, you should always try to solve your insomnia as naturally as possible before turning to medication. In Japan, a popular way to treat insomnia is with Oatmeal. If you find that you are having trouble sleeping at night or keep waking up, try making yourself a bowl of oatmeal before bed. Oats contain a mild sedative that gently helps people sleep; they are also rich in vitamins and minerals.

If insomnia is a problem in your life, try a few natural solutions such as adjusting your bedroom to be more comfortable and dark, eliminating caffeine in the evenings and

removing any stimulating activities such as exercise or television 2 hours before bed. If you still have problems after doing these things first and are considering sleep aids such as sleeping pills or herbal supplements, you should first discuss it with your doctor so that you can find out all of the options available to you.

Adjusting your sleep routine to fit your lifestyle

Although aligning with the rhythm of the circadian clock is the best way for all of us to experience sleep, this doesn't always work for everyone. Some of us may find that we can only sleep 5 or 6 hours at night and then we have to get up. Listen to your body and trust in the intuition of what your body tells you, but also take into account that just because you've been doing it one way, doesn't necessarily mean it's the right way. Test out a few scenarios. Try sleeping 8 hours at night. Notice what happens the next day. Make a point of analyzing how your body feels when you give it more sleep. You may also try taking two twenty minute naps during the day; one mid-morning and one mid-afternoon. How do you feel after a few days of doing that? Listen to your body, it will tell you what it prefers and how it wants to be treated. Not being able to sleep more than 5 or 6 hours at night may also be a symptom of an uncomfortable room or bed. Look at every angle and make minor modifications, then test those modifications and note how you feel. How you feel is the biggest indicator for how well or not well something is working in your life, sleep is no exception to that.

If you work shift work, going to bed at 11 and waking up at 7 isn't going to be possible for you every night. This is where you will need to pay extra attention to the things

around you and your sleep environment. Pay particular attention to your room. Make sure that it is dark enough. Get a roller shade if you have to in order to block out the daylight. This will help relax your body and mind for sleep and give the illusion of evening. Also make sure you are not stimulating yourself before you go to sleep. Because your clock is different than everyone else's, it may be tempting to watch TV, drink coffee or engage in other activities that stimulate adrenaline. Avoid these types of activities. Drink herbal tea if you need a warm beverage and ensure that you do not have a TV in your bedroom. Try to go to sleep at the same time when you are on nights, and the same time when you are on days. This way your body will adjust to two bed times; the one you have when you work days and the one you have when you work nights. Sticking to these times and practicing healthy sleep rituals will ensure that you get a good nights sleep and feel refreshed no matter when you have to sleep.

Sleep meditation

Another great way to assist with a good nights sleep is engaging in sleep meditation. You can do this whether you are having trouble sleeping, or simply if you just want to meditate before bed. Meditation helps to bring you to a deeper level of relaxation and increases the production of serotonin, which will eliminate stressful thoughts that are sometimes associated with insomnia and depression. Sleep meditation allows your body to prepare for sleep by becoming deeply relaxed and peaceful. Doing this regularly will ensure that you routinely sleep well, and your restlessness and insomnia will be a thing of the past.

When we are unable to sleep our bodies become tense, our minds get agitated.

Especially when we continue to look at the clock and fear that we are not going to feel good the next day because we can't get to sleep. Restlessness kicks in when we can't sleep and we often toss and turn until we eventually give in and fall asleep due to sheer exhaustion. This is not conducive to a good night's rest. Sleep meditation avoids all of that by bringing us naturally into a peaceful and relaxed state, making it easy to enjoy a good night of sleep.

You can adjust your sleep meditation technique according to the way that you prefer to meditate. Some of us choose to use sound to meditate, such as the sounds of nature, chanting, Tibetan singing bowls, or other meditative music. Many stores carry meditation CDs or you can even find meditation music online. Sometimes background noise such as the sound of a ceiling fan is all we need and helps to rhythmically carry us into sleep. If you don't wish to use music you can simply focus on your breathing and relaxing your body. Visualize each part of your body from your toes to your crown relaxing and surrendering to peacefulness. Go up and down the body checking that each part of your body feels comfortable and relaxed. If you need to shift your body to become more comfortable, make the necessary adjustments. Next take deep purposeful breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Make each breath slow and deliberate. If you place your hands on your lower abdomen with the tips of your fingers touching, your fingers should separate when you breathe in. This tells you that you are breathing deeply from your abdomen. Avoid shallow breaths, as they stress your body and cannot bring you into a deep state of relaxation.

As you lay there in your bed with your eyes closed breathing deep, relaxing your body and listening to soothing sounds (if you've chosen to do that) – know that your body is getting exactly what it needs and wants. Gently push away any distracting thoughts or worries that may arise and tell yourself you will deal with them tomorrow. Remind yourself that “now is the time for sleep.” If your thoughts persist and you have a hard time clearing your mind (which is normal and happens) bring your focus back to your breathing. Think about each deep breath that you take in and visualize yourself exhaling stress. Inhale peacefulness and exhale stress and worrisome thoughts. With every breath that you exhale imagine yourself sinking deeper and deeper into your state of peaceful relaxation. Visualize your body surrendering and drifting off peacefully into a wonderful perfect sleep.

The most important thing we do

Sleep is one of the most important things we do in life. We spend one third of our lives sleeping and an average of six years dreaming. Sleep assists us with memory function, creativity, health, and learning. When we get enough sleep our bodies operate at their maximum potential and make things easier for us. Getting enough sleep puts us in flow with our universe and daily lives, we are happier and more capable beings when we get enough sleep. Trust in the natural intuition of your body and what it tells you. Your body knows inherently what is best for you, how much sleep you need and when you are ready for sleep. Everybody is different and may find different approaches that work uniquely for them. Listen to what your body tells you and don't be afraid to try different schedules and adjust your sleep rituals to see what works best. Things like moving the

position of your bed, getting rid of the TV in your room, or eliminating coffee in the evenings could be crucial to your ability to sleep.

Think about how you sleep now. Are you getting enough sleep? Do you wake easily? Or do you feel groggy and unrested each morning when you get up. Analyze the way you are currently preparing for sleep in the evenings, and compare against the way you feel in the mornings when you wake up. If this is new to you, you may wish to invest in a journal that you can use to observe yourself for a week or two. For each day record the time that you went to bed (or approximate if you are unsure) as well as the time you awoke. Make note of any physical symptoms like headaches, grogginess or confusion.

After you've observed your current sleep habits for a week or two, start making minor modifications. Perhaps introduce sleep meditation, or start going to bed earlier, or make your room more comfortable. Trust in your intuition to guide you on the right path.

Sleep is the most important thing we do and absolutely essential to living a happy and well-balanced life full of potential. Don't let anybody or anything come in between you and a good nights sleep. Your body and mind will thank you, and your life will flourish.

CHAPTER 4: HEALTHY SELF-TALK

“If you think about disaster, you will get it. Brood about death and you hasten your demise. Think positively and masterfully, with confidence and faith, and life becomes more secure, more fraught with action, richer in achievement and experience.”

– Swami Vivekananda

We all have core beliefs about ourselves that we carry around with us each day. Some of these beliefs are positive in nature and contribute to a healthy image of self, while others are detrimental to our health and wellbeing. Having a healthy relationship with ourselves is the one thing that impacts our happiness the most. The way we think about ourselves affects our sense of self-worth. When we have a strong sense of self we are undeterred by negativity and other people’s opinions and are able to remain grounded and confident no matter what the situation. When we have a fragile sense of self we tend to believe negative things that others say about us, get easily upset by criticism, and place our self-worth in the things we do rather than who we are inside.

Whether you are aware of it or not, as you go through life there are messages that play in your mind, like tapes. Some of these tapes have been with you a long time, sometimes since birth, while others are picked up along the way. There are good tapes and bad tapes. Good tapes are the ones that reinforce your sense of self by reminding you of the things you do well, the way you make people feel; helping you see and appreciate the good things in your life. Sometimes our tapes are subconscious and

beneath the surface. They are playing and we don't even know that they are playing.

This is why it is extremely important to analyze core beliefs and self esteem.

Healthy self-talk is like having a good tape on auto play all the time – it gives us a strong sense of self and is important to our happiness and wellbeing. Healthy mind chatter tells us that mistakes are learning opportunities, other people's opinions of us don't matter, and that we are loving and kind and have a lot to offer. When we have healthy conversations with ourselves, it makes the tougher times in life a lot easier to bear. Our self-esteem affects everything we do in life. It impacts our thoughts and behaviours and often dictates whether we will fail or succeed. Unfortunately many people confuse self-esteem with confidence. You can be a very confident person with no self-esteem, or by contrast you can have a good sense of self-esteem but no confidence.

The difference between self-esteem and confidence

There is a very distinct difference between self-esteem and self-confidence. The difference is simple; self-esteem is your image of self and self-confidence is your image of your abilities. Self-esteem is rooted internally and is your overall attitude and belief about who you are as a person. Self-esteem represents the core beliefs that we carry about ourselves. Self-confidence is the belief that we have in our abilities and talents and is external, focused on what we can do rather than who we are. When we are good at something and receive feedback about our abilities or validation from others, this boosts our self-confidence and gives us healthy tapes to play about those abilities.

Both self-esteem and self-confidence are important to our mental health, but self-esteem is crucial to our overall sense of happiness and wellbeing. The reason for this is that self-esteem is our internal dialogue and is with us all the time no matter where we are and what we are doing. Self-esteem has longevity and is lasting, where as we can experience fleeting moments of confidence. Our internal dialogue impacts our thoughts, behaviours and attitudes towards life. When we feel good inside about who we are and what we represent, we are able to live a successful happy life and be undeterred by external influence and negativity. We can learn from our mistakes when we have a positive relationship with ourselves because we don't let the bumps in the road sink us like a submarine. Our self-esteem props us up when we are down, helping us through difficult times and reminding us that we are human and sometimes make mistakes, but that it is okay. We are constantly learning, growing, and evolving as humans – we are bound to make a few mistakes along the way. The important thing is that we don't root our self-esteem externally in the things that we do, and that we love ourselves regardless of the circumstances in our life. Because they will inevitably change; we will have periods of tremendous success and periods of great difficulty. When our self-esteem is solid and we love ourselves regardless, the ups downs and curves of life don't impact us as harshly because we take life as it comes.

Self-confidence comes to us in life when we get good at things and have a knowing or awareness that we are successful in those things. This can be a hobby, an art, your job, relationships, parenting, cooking or just keeping a clean house. Whatever we are good at propels us to feel good, especially when other people provide us with positive

reinforcement about those things. With self-confidence we sometimes need the validation of others to know that we are good at something, especially when self-esteem is not present. When we have both self-esteem and self-confidence, we don't need others to tell us that we are good at something because we will feel good about what we do regardless. We can appreciate the validation of others and feel gratitude towards those people, but when we have healthy self-talk we don't need that feedback. When we are confident but have no self-esteem we tend to sink like a submarine when we fail, make a mistake or do not accomplish something that we set out to achieve. The reason why this happens is because our sense of self rests solely in what others think, rather than inside ourselves. This is dangerous and detrimental to our life.

We are always going to meet people in life who make us feel good inside, and others who take from us and leave us feeling bad or empty inside. When we are happy with who we are inside, what others say or do to us doesn't matter as much and we are able to shrug them off a lot faster. Sometimes having no self-esteem can also make it harder to feel confident in our abilities, and even more detrimental - we may have no self-esteem or self-confidence. When this happens it is imperative that we do some inner work to find ourselves and come into alignment with who we are.

The root of self-esteem

If your self-esteem is nowhere to be found, getting it back (or finding it for the first time) is perhaps the single most important thing you will do in your life. The root of

self-esteem lays in our thoughts. Our mind and thoughts dictate the tapes that we play and build the foundation for our self-esteem. When the tapes are faulty we may say things to ourselves like “I look so fat”, “I will never find a relationship” or “I am a failure”. These are beliefs that we build out of fear and unhappiness. We perpetuate negative messages about ourselves, which furthers our negative experience and adds to the growing list of unhealthy beliefs that we hold about who we are. What we must realize, however, is that these are just thoughts. They are not premonitions or facts, and they will only bring about and attract more thoughts just like them if we continue to allow them. Realize that your self-esteem lays completely in your thoughts. When our thoughts are healthy, we are healthy. And when our thoughts are unhealthy, so is our perception of self. Thoughts are things, but they are not truths unless we believe them and allow them to be so.

Unwanted thoughts

Sometimes people say, “It feels as if my thoughts are thinking me”. It is common to hear this. The good thing is, you are in control of what you think about and can choose to continue to think about things that make you feel happy and stop thoughts that make you feel hurt, stressed or worried. We can be the master of our domain or our own worst enemy, all based on how we think about ourselves.

When unwanted thoughts occur it is important to realize that they are just that: unwanted thoughts. Recognize that these thoughts have no basis in reality, are not fact, and are always based on fear. The problem with fear is that it almost always represents

a false interpretation of perceived events – **Fantasized Events Appearing Real**. We create scenarios in our mind that are triggered by what we think happened or might happen. This keeps us in a state of stress and is a very primitive way to think. When we assume things, we invite fear into our life willingly, which lends itself well to providing us with a plethora of unwanted thoughts. Our unwanted thoughts distract us from enjoying our lives because we are preoccupied about something that either hasn't happened (and probably won't) or something that we perceive happened (and probably didn't). These thoughts are detrimental to our self-esteem and can make us feel worthless, sad, angry, and hurt. The hardest part about catching unwanted thoughts is actually becoming aware of them. Some of us have been carrying around unwanted thoughts for so long that they are with us every day and are a part of who we are. When we are so used to having unwanted thoughts that we are unaware that we are even doing that, we are in a dangerous place. Self-esteem cannot thrive in this type of mentality and you will sabotage any chance of feeling good about yourself if you allow these thoughts to continue.

It is normal to experience stressful, worrisome or fearful thoughts from time to time, we wouldn't be human otherwise, but the difference lies in how we handle those thoughts. A healthy mind recognizes those thoughts and attempts to replace them with something more positive or constructive, while the unhealthy mind dwells and obsesses over the thoughts and continues to add to them. Unwanted thoughts are like magnets, they allow other negative thoughts to stick to them if they are perpetuated. If you allow unwanted thoughts to continue and you obsess over them long enough, you will find

that you go from perhaps just one unwanted thought to three or four. Your thoughts will continue to multiply until you are in a state of stress and anxiety. It then becomes harder to pull yourself out. For this reason, we have to catch ourselves before we are in too deep.

Stopping unwanted thoughts

We all have them, but how do we stop unwanted thoughts from invading our mind when they occur? There are many things that help, but the first thing we must do in order to be able to do this is recognize when our thoughts are harmful to our health. The best way to do this is by analyzing how we feel. Our emotions are an incredible indicator to whether something is healthy or unhealthy for us. When we have positive and healthy thoughts we feel good inside; content, peaceful, and happy. When we have negative or stressful thoughts we feel on edge, worried, angry or fearful. We may even experience physiological symptoms such as headaches, nausea, or shortness of breath. Our thoughts are paramount to how we feel inside.

When you notice that you are feeling off or unhappy, try to get to the root of it, become an observer of your thoughts. Ask yourself “Why am I suddenly feeling angry” or “Why do I feel sad at this moment”. When you stop to ask yourself this, you will find that the answer lies in what you are thinking about. We can go from happy to sad in an instant with a persistent unwanted thought. If we are unaware of our unwanted thoughts, we are unable to stop them. This is why we must become good at observing our thoughts

and the best way to do that is by observing our moods, since they dictate how we are doing inside.

Once you have identified an unwanted thought and have recognized that it is unhealthy and putting you in a state of stress, you must tell yourself (either out loud or in your mind) that the thought is harmful to you. Think of a few key statements that you can use when this occurs.

Here are some examples that you may wish to use or modify to help you:

1. "This thought does not serve me well."
2. "This thought is really just a fear. It is not fact."
3. "I cannot afford to think about this right now."
4. "STOP! You are not welcome in my mind."
5. "This is not a healthy or productive thought for me."

These identifying statements help you recognize and affirm that the thoughts are in fact thoughts based on fear, and that they are unwanted and unwelcome. How you choose to identify and recognize this is up to you, as long as you have a system to call out your thoughts and say, "I know what you're trying to do and it's not going to work."

After you've identified the thought and said (either out loud or in your mind) that you do not wish to think the thought any further, you have now put yourself in a position of control. You have successfully observed a thought, identified it, and told it that it wasn't

welcome because it is harmful to you. Now comes the challenging part. Staying on top of it.

Usually unwanted thoughts are persistent little things. They come out of nowhere and attempt to continue and multiply, making us feel worse and worse about ourselves in the process. It is our job to stay on top of these thoughts and disallow them to perpetuate. Visualize yourself pushing them away with your hand or shout STOP as loud as you can in your mind. You can also say it out loud if you feel comfortable. Every time your unwanted thought tries to pop up again shout STOP! Use the identifying statement to reaffirm to yourself that the thought is unhealthy and harmful, then shout STOP each time it crops up. This will help you recognize each time your thoughts attempt to sabotage you. Another helpful tactic is to do something that makes you feel good. Often when we have unwanted thoughts we are doing something mundane or repetitive like housework, mindless net surfing, or walking. Keep something with you like a crossword puzzle or a Sudoku book so that you can give your mind something else to do. If it isn't convenient for you to start doing a crossword or Sudoku puzzle, try thinking about something else that makes you happy or call a friend or a loved one. The point of thought stopping is to take yourself out of a stressful state and replace the thoughts with nicer things in essence creating a diversion for yourself: consciously thinking about nicer things, or simply do things that make you happy. Unwanted thoughts will control you if you let them, but you are very capable of controlling your own thoughts and deciding what type of relationship you want to have with yourself.

Change your thoughts. Change your mood.

Our thoughts play a very large role in how we feel; our emotions fluctuate based on various thoughts we have throughout the day. Start your day in a positive way by looking in the mirror every morning and saying to yourself, “I love you, you’re an awesome and amazing human being.” And believe it!

Due to the nature of life, it is unrealistic to think that we will never have a stressful thought again. But we can certainly become good at changing our thoughts and reduce the instances of unwanted thoughts in our lives. Now that we know how large a role our thoughts play in developing our self-esteem and confidence, we are ready to begin paying greater attention to our thoughts so that we can build a healthy attitude towards self.

The best way for us to develop a healthy mind is through practicing positive thought. Positive thought helps us keep our head above water so that we don’t sink every time something unexpected or stressful happens. Positive thinking gives us the life tools we need to effectively manage stress and change. The messages we tell ourselves with positive thought create healthy tapes that play in our mind. These healthy thoughts eventually lead to beliefs and manifest into your life in positive ways, by helping you experience abundance and happiness.

At first, if we are not used to thinking positively, it may feel unnatural or weird to us. We may have a hard time with the belief part of positive thinking, but that can be solved. If you’ve heard of the saying “Fake it till you make it” then try applying this to your

situation. We have to keep practicing positive thinking in order for us to prove to ourselves that it works. If you are hesitant about this, you may choose to focus on small realistic positive statements instead of tackling larger ones that require a bigger leap of faith. Start small and work your way up. You don't have to go from cynical and unhappy to Mr. or Mrs. Positivity over night. Building self-esteem and confidence through positive thinking is like climbing a ladder. You must take one step at a time and go slowly. If you try to go from the bottom rung to the top, you will fall and it will hurt. But when you deliberately move from step to step, you build confidence with each step you take until you finally reach the top.

When you start replacing harmful thoughts with positive thoughts, you can begin by analyzing the facts and using those to build on. Perhaps your boss made a comment to you at work that you are coming in late too frequently. You can choose to either run with this comment and let it create stress by worrying about losing your job or damaging your relationship with your boss, or you can choose to take it for what it is. Avoid thinking about what else your boss may think, or what will happen if you are late again. Simply tell yourself that you will leave the house ten minutes earlier. Adjusting your morning routine to accommodate an earlier arrival time at work will not only make you feel better, but will help keep you from experiencing worrisome or stressful thoughts about being late. You may also choose to tell your boss your plans so that your boss is aware of the proactive steps you are taking to ensure that you arrive to work on time. Not being late anymore would change your thoughts about being fired or your

boss secretly thinking that you are a screw up, which will impact your mood. When you are on time and not running late, your mood will be more relaxed and happy.

Triggers

Changing our thoughts from negative to positive involves practice and we can only begin the process by experimenting. When you notice that your mood changes quickly or dramatically from happy or peaceful to angry, sad or irritable – ask yourself why and try to determine what the trigger was. For example, perhaps when you talk to a certain person your energy changes and you become visibly agitated and angry. Then when your conversation with that person finishes, you are still left with the energy from that exchange. This energy carries with you and continues to perpetuate into other thoughts. Before you had the conversation you were fine, smiling even. So why did your energy suddenly change so drastically? Perhaps this person is a toxic person who does not represent a positive impact in your life or leave you feeling happy inside, or perhaps this person mirrors something that you don't like about yourself. There are many reasons why our relationships with people are strained and can cause us stress.

Of course the person in this situational example is not to blame, because these are your thoughts and you are responsible for those thoughts. Using this example, you can handle it in one of two ways. You can either consciously choose not to let the person's comments or energy affect you and your mood (which is sometimes hard), or you can choose to limit or eliminate the person's presence in your life if you do not yet feel strong enough to be unaffected by the person. Sometimes we just need to take a break

from people like this, so that we can re-center and focus ourselves. This is just one example of an external trigger that can cause you to experience unwanted thoughts.

Identifying your triggers is key to becoming free from them. We have learned how to identify an unwanted thought, how to stop it, and now how to identify a trigger. We must constantly be aware of our thoughts and be ready to change them or change the external circumstances that cause them. Our self-esteem is too important not to pay attention to this. Triggers will vary in their nature. Sometimes they will be people, sometimes they will be events or social activities, and sometimes they will be memories that keep us in a painful place. Knowing what triggers your unwanted thoughts will help you avoid those triggers. If you know that a relationship with a certain person causes you stress and pain, you can take steps to change your life and be free from that person or the thoughts that you experience by the relationship. When we don't know what the triggers are we feel out of control and unable to change our thoughts. We may be able to stop them temporarily, but if we do not identify the trigger, they may keep recurring. Identifying our triggers is a key piece to the overall puzzle. Our sole focus must be on feeling good and being happy at all costs. Our livelihood, health and self-esteem depend on it.

Eventually, when you are in such a positive place that you are feeling confident and you have great self-esteem, you will find that you don't have triggers anymore, or the instances of situations where external influences affect you seem to be drastically reduced. Self-esteem comes from practice in positive thinking and self love, so the things that make us angry or hurt become less of an issue when we feel good inside,

because no one can “make” use feel any particular way. We choose how we want to feel every single day, and the more in control we are of our thoughts, the more we are able to feel good and positive. Our thoughts are a direct result of the level of happiness and peace we experience in our daily lives.

Practicing being positive

When you don't feel good inside, being positive is sometimes hard. We have to dig deep to find things about ourselves that we can feel positive about. With a little bit of focus, however we can all discover things about ourselves that we like and we can begin to build a positive dialogue that supports a healthy mind. This will take time and be a process and it is different for everyone, depending on how far you need to come.

There are techniques that will help bring you to a place of positivity and help you perpetuate positive experiences in your life, rather than negative ones. These techniques are things that are easy to employ and make a big difference in how you feel.

Surround yourself with love

Sometimes when we feel down it is simply because we feel alone. Think about the people that you have in your life who love you. They can be friends, family members, or even neighbours. These are the people who make a difference to you. When they talk, you listen and when you feel down they pick up on it. You are in tune with these people and they impact your life in a positive manner.

Making time for loving people in your life is imperative to your happiness. If you work too much or spend too much time alone, you will begin to feel isolated from love. We often tell ourselves that we need a relationship to feel love, but this isn't the case.

Relationships are a great way for us to share and grow with someone by our side, but we need to redefine the word relationship. A relationship can be with a friend, a family member or a loved one. You don't have to be married or living with someone to experience love and acceptance. You can just as easily feel that love and acceptance from your best friend who you have coffee with.

The point here is to surround yourself with people who love and accept you – as is. These are the people who matter most in your life, and these are the ones whose opinions matter most. Even when life gets busy and you don't have time for fun, make time for these people, if even in small increments. Our loved ones help us feel positive and happy.

Focus on your strengths

Our positive feelings peak when people notice our talents and abilities and point them out or give us credit for them. By contrast we hit a valley when people criticize us or say negative things about our talents and abilities. We must know internally what we are good at, so that these peaks and valleys are not as dramatic and impactful. It is always nice when people recognize us for our talents and strengths, but if we were confident and positive about ourselves, we would already feel good about it. When we know what

we are good at, the credit, criticism, or recognition we receive from others just becomes feedback and has little to do with how we feel inside.

Find what you are good at and do it at all costs. What do you love? What inspires and motivates you? What do you feel you truly need to do inside? We often think that we are good at things because they are habits. But when we are truly good at something that is a natural talent, we feel exhilarated doing it. We feel good inside and feel optimistic about it. If there is no passion there, it probably isn't what you need to focus on. You need to think about what lights you up. What do you love to talk about with others? What do you spend hours upon hours researching, learning about, or doing?

If you are in a place of low self-esteem, identifying what you are good at may be difficult for you. Start small. Write down things that other people have told you that you are good at, or even things that you think you are good at but aren't totally sure. Don't worry about the belief part if you aren't 100% there yet. Identifying these things is the most important part, even if you just think you are good at something but still struggle with the belief. Once you have identified a few things that you are good at and that make you happy, make time to focus on those things, even if it's only for a couple of hours per week. This will invite positivity into your life.

Expressing gratitude

One of the best things we can do to feel optimistic in life is to feel gratitude towards the people, things and luxuries that we are lucky to have. Look around you and think about the people you have attracted into your life, the job you have, the talents and abilities

you have, and even the looks and physical qualities you possess. Feel gratitude towards the things that you have and say thank you. Tell people that you appreciate their presence in your life. Even though your job may not be perfect, feel grateful that you have a job and earn an income to provide for yourself or your family.

Look for small things to feel gratitude towards like the front row parking spots and sunny days. Those things are just as important and are easy to recognize. They will also lay the foundation for you to feel good about the bigger more personal things.

Sometimes connecting with your surroundings helps you to appreciate them. Go for a walk in your neighbourhood, sit on your porch, or visit a neighbour for coffee. All of these things help you to appreciate the little things in life that make you feel happy and put a smile on your face.

Another helpful technique is to keep a gratitude journal. Write down the things that you feel gratitude towards. Every day take a few minutes and write down what you feel thankful for in your journal. You can just list things in point form, or you can get more detailed and talk about why you feel gratitude towards these things. With regular practice you won't have to look for things to feel gratitude towards anymore, you will just immediately feel thankful.

Treat your body right

We are energy beings experiencing a physical reality. It is important to remind ourselves of this sometimes, so that we don't get too caught up in the physical side of life and the ego mind. But because we have these bodies and are lucky enough to have been given

the gift of human life, we must cherish our bodies and treat them with love and respect. If we do not treat our bodies right we will struggle in our daily life and will lack in motivation, happiness, and energy. Our bodies and minds thrive when we are in good physical shape and eat nutritious foods.

Sometimes we use time as an excuse for not being good to our bodies. We say things like “I don’t have time to cook” or “I don’t have time to go to the gym”. The irony of these statements is that we are taking away from the very thing we claim we don’t have enough of. By not looking after our body and eating unhealthy food on a regular basis, we invite dis-ease into our life and may potentially shorten the amount of time we spend on this planet. We can live longer happier lives when we look after our bodies and eat healthy. So saying that you don’t have time to eat healthy or exercise is counterproductive and keeps you from thriving and experiencing the life that you could be experiencing. Life might be pretty good even though you don’t eat right or exercise, but imagine how much better it could be if you did. Your energy would increase, your sex life would improve, you would look better, have healthier skin, and have more confidence. Are these things worth it to you? Do you want to live a longer life and spend more time with those who are important to you? For most of us, the answer is yes.

For many of us, there is no doubt about the fact that our lives would improve if we were to introduce a healthy diet and exercise, but it is the motivation that is the problem. The key to overcoming this is to not try to bite off more than you can chew. We get distracted and discouraged when we try to dramatically change our life overnight. And then we may feel depressed when we are unsuccessful. A better way to introduce

healthy changes into your life is one step at a time. Set realistic achievable goals for yourself that you know you can keep. It's no use starting a new diet that you are not looking forward to and that you know you aren't going to enjoy. You will simply put back on the weight that you lost.

Think about ways in which you can introduce small effective changes into your life, you can add to them as you feel better and more confident. Don't put time limits or restrictions on yourself either. Just allow yourself to experiment with small sustainable changes and feel good about those changes as you make them.

To start you might try walking three times per week. Maybe you aren't ready to join a gym or run a 5K and that is okay. Just commit to walking for now and choose a realistic goal that you know you can keep. Notice how you feel when you begin introducing this exercise to your life. After a month or two of this new life change, you may decide to increase the frequency or add another healthy change to your life, such as making a modification to your diet.

When you decide to make a modification to your diet, make sure that it is something that you can stick with and sustain. If you don't allow yourself any wiggle room there is a great chance that you will either grow discouraged and unhappy, or that you will simply go back to the way things were. This is not a sustainable way to modify your diet, especially when you have been doing things the same way for so long. Change is hard but it's not impossible, and doing it one step at a time increases your confidence and gives you something that you can sustain for a long time.

Some people find the best way to introduce change into their diet is by drinking more water each day and taking a multi-vitamin. This simple addition to your routine will help you feel better and will begin to lay the groundwork for future greater change.

Healthy living & self-esteem

Good self-esteem is a byproduct of a healthy life. When we are loving and kind to ourselves, treat our bodies and minds well, and surround ourselves with wonderful people we are able to thrive and experience a positive self-image. We must continually focus on that which makes us feel good. Being aware of our emotions at all times allows us to make shifts and changes where necessary so that we can change our mood and energy. When we move from a position of not providing ourselves with basic needs in life to paying attention to what we need and embracing those things, we greatly improve our sense of self-worth and motivation.

Healthy living doesn't just refer to treating our bodies well and eating nutritious foods, it also encompasses things like feeling safe and secure and feeling a sense of purpose in life. We must examine our lives fully and identify where we are lacking in order to bring about change. If you feel that something is lacking in your life or that you could be doing something differently, experiment with it. Trust your intuition to guide you and tell you what you need. Your inner self is highly intuitive and intelligent. Perhaps you might try some meditation exercises, ask yourself what you can do or change in your life to be more positive, feel happier and a greater sense of self.

It is in the quietest moments with ourselves that we intrinsically know what we need to thrive in life. It is just a matter of listening to those thoughts and applying them to our life. Stop comparing yourself to others and engaging in negative self-chatter when something goes wrong. You are a perfect beautiful human being. You will make mistakes in life, you will have regrets or failures, but you will also do amazing things, make excellent decisions, and experience great success. It doesn't matter what anybody else says, thinks or believes about you unless you believe it to be true. It isn't of concern to you what other people think when you are living in your light. Don't dwell on the negatives; your spirit cannot soar there. Embrace your being and feel happy inside. Think about all of the wonderful things in your life you have to be thankful for. Your life is not a mistake, you are here for a reason and it is our job as humans to discover our purpose. We can only do this through practice, trial and error. Pat yourself on the back for being willing to try things, regardless of the outcome. Be yourself at all costs because at the end of the day it is you who will be staring back at you in the mirror, nobody else.

CHAPTER 5: ELIMINATING STRESS

“Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.”

- Chinese Proverb

Stress can wreak havoc in our lives if we are not careful. It is something we must constantly be aware of, as it can have a huge impact on our physical and emotional wellbeing and cause us to be very unhealthy and unhappy. Most stress has a root cause that is often within us. The root cause can be a belief we hold, a fear, or a worry triggered by a real life event. Life is stressful, and while we can't eliminate all stress, we can certainly eliminate the quantity of stress in our lives by paying attention to the things that make us feel uneasy. Our emotions are the best indicator of this and tell us how we are feeling as we navigate our days. When we feel peaceful, happy, elated or content – we are doing well and not being affected by stress. By contrast, when we are feeling scared, worried, angry, depressed, or agitated – we are likely feeling the effects of stress. When we allow too much stress into our lives, we run the risk of those stressful feelings manifesting into physical symptoms. We can become physically sick when we experience stress and allow stressful thoughts to dominate our day.

Causes of stress

There are several things that cause stress that we can eliminate or reduce if we pay attention to them. Sometimes these things are easy to solve, while other times they require a little more inner work. The first step to understanding the cause of stress in

our lives is doing a little soul searching and turning the mirror on ourselves so we have an understanding of the behaviors, beliefs, and actions that may be causing us unnecessary stress. When we bring awareness to these things, we can then begin to find solutions and feel better about them. Sometimes we fear thinking about them because we think that it will only invite more stress into our lives, but when we avoid thinking about the things that cause us stress, we only become more stressed in the process.

Procrastination

Many of us are self-described procrastinators but are unmotivated to do something about it. Procrastination is a stressful form of mental paralysis that makes us feel worse and worse about ourselves the more that we do it. We usually build up an event or activity in our minds to be something larger and more complicated than what it actually is. This stewing creates fear within us that makes tackling the activity even more terrifying. With procrastination, the longer we put things off, the more difficult it becomes and as each day passes, we build up a mountain of stress and guilt about not performing the task. Procrastination is usually rooted in the fact that we do not like doing the particular task, feel overwhelmed by it, or that we are disorganized.

Procrastination can be extremely disruptive to our social lives, our personal development, careers and sense of self-worth. We may laugh it off in front of others or shrug our shoulders, but somewhere inside of us lay feelings of inadequacy.

One of the first steps to overcoming procrastination is to recognize when it's happening so that we can address it on the spot, before it's too late.

The signs of procrastination are easy to recognize; some of them include:

1. Completing low-priority tasks first when larger more important ones are looming.
2. Talking on the phone or making coffee as soon as you sit down to begin a project or task that needs to be completed.
3. Waiting to be in the right mood or for certain conditions to be just right before embarking on the project or task.
4. Convincing yourself that you have more time than you actually do.

When you recognize yourself doing any of these things, allow yourself to identify the behavior as procrastination. This is important because we cannot change something that we do not recognize. Therefore we must catch ourselves in the act of procrastination and then identify it, so that we can begin the process of change.

Once we've identified that we are indeed procrastinating, it is important to address how we are feeling and what we are thinking about the task or activity. Understanding why we are putting it off will help us understand how to solve the problem.

We can generally fit procrastination into one of three categories:

1. Disinterest
2. Fear
3. Disorganization

When we are disinterested, we are not looking forward to completing the task or project because it is unpleasant, hard, or uninteresting. Therefore we become disinterested in the activity and put it off, telling ourselves that we will get to it when we get to it. The problem with this is that it never becomes a priority because we are disinterested, so these types of procrastinations always lead to high stress. We end up completing the tasks when we are forced to.

By contrast, when we fear an activity it may be something that we find enjoyable, are good at, or are even excited about. The task could be something we feel is a big deal, but we fear failure or success. Surprisingly procrastinators can often be perfectionists who have a hard time completing projects unless the conditions are just right. This lends itself to putting things off until the timing is right. Unfortunately, the fear grows and becomes more disruptive to our lives. Fear becomes the reason why we procrastinate whether it is fear of success, fear of failure, or fear of the task itself.

Disorganization is another huge trigger for procrastination. Many highly intelligent and creative people are disorganized and messy. Disorganization causes us to lose things, forget to do things, and have poor prioritization skills. When we are disorganized, we often get lost in thought or jump into other unimportant tasks or projects, even when more important ones are looming. Disorganization can create a lot of stress in our personal and professional lives.

The good news is that procrastination can be solved. You are not doomed for a life of stress and misery if you happen to be a procrastinator. Admitting that you procrastinate

is step one, recognizing it when it happens is step two, and identifying why you might procrastinate is step three. Once you have done these three steps you will be more self-aware with your behaviors and be in a good position to introduce some anti-procrastination strategies to your life. These coping strategies will help you manage your time, tasks and projects effectively, and ultimately result in less stress in your life. We all procrastinate from time to time, but when we do it often it can be very disruptive and cause us a lot of undue stress.

Here are some effective strategies for combatting procrastination, so that you are less likely to have the urge to procrastinate:

1. Make time for fun

If all you do is work and focus on daily responsibilities, then is it really surprising that you find yourself putting these things off? Make sure that you allow yourself an hour each day to do something enjoyable and fun. This can be anything from hanging out with friends, to working on a craft or a hobby, to exercising and getting outside.

2. Find your passion

Assess your life and ask yourself if you are following your passion. Your cause for procrastination could be due to a lack of motivation and desire to continue in your line of work. If you are doing a job you are disinterested in, then it is

extremely important to find passion outside of your work until you are able to find a more inspiring and rewarding career.

3. Quiet the mind

When we are overwhelmed or fearful of a task our mind can sometimes create stress by perpetuating fearful thoughts. When we have thoughts that are counterproductive to us completing a task, we must recognize them as such and know that we are not our thoughts. Quiet the mind by doing some deep breathing or meditation – and then attempt the task or activity with a clear, quiet mind. The trick is not to overthink it.

Escapism

Sometimes when life gets us down we turn in the wrong direction for salvation. We may drink too much alcohol, pop prescription pills, or start taking street drugs. Often when this happens it is because we feel our life has become out of control and we feel that there is no way out. Rather than think about our problems logically and formulate solutions, we turn to escapism, because it is more comfortable and we avoid having to deal with stressful thoughts about our situation while we are in the moment with our vice of choice. The thing that we don't realize is that escaping from our problems through drugs, alcohol or any other addiction or dependency will only invite further problems and additional stress into our lives. Escapism catches up with us eventually

until we are faced with a problem that is sometimes larger than what we are trying to escape from.

If you are dealing with insurmountable stress in your life due to financial challenges, relationship problems, career stress, or any other area – avoid the urge to escape from your thoughts through substance. Instead, practice regular meditation, deep breathing and keep yourself in the now by not letting your fearful thoughts run wild and paralyze you with fear. When we stay in the moment we cannot be ruled by stress, worry or fear because we are already living the moment that we are experiencing, and we know that we can handle it because we are.

EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique)

If you spend time with people who hang out in spiritual circles you may have heard the buzz surrounding EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique). It is an alternative therapy that involves the tapping on specific meridian points in the body to relieve symptoms of stress, dis-ease, and anxiety. EFT is based on the discovery that emotional trauma contributes greatly to disease and that negative emotions are caused by disruptions in the body's energy system. EFT is sometimes referred to as emotional acupuncture because it is a combination of gentle tapping on key acupuncture points while bringing your focus to painful memories, thoughts, pain or difficult emotions. The trauma is rated on a scale of 0-10 and continually assessed after the completion of a tapping sequence. By focusing on the source of trauma and allowing ourselves to express our thoughts and feelings about that which causes us pain, we discover the blockage and

arrive at the core of the matter. By finding the source of the emotional blockage, we can clear it and heal ourselves to accelerate feelings of wellbeing and happiness. EFT helps us let go of emotional pain and baggage that we carry around with us.

The places that we tap during EFT are the body's invisible energy pathways and help us correct the flow of energy releasing feelings of emotional discomfort. Many people have experienced instant success with EFT, while others may take a few sessions to notice results. How long it takes depends largely on what the emotional issue is and how complicated it is. EFT can be done with the assistance of a certified practitioner who will guide the process of tapping through emotional distress, or you can do it on your own in the comfort of your home, or anywhere else you feel comfortable.

How to do EFT

To do EFT you must first have some kind of emotional trauma, stress, fear or pain that you would like to clear. This is easy because we ALL have something. This trauma can be anything from recurring negative memories, depression, fear, unidentified pain, stress or worry. It can be something very painful and distressing, or something that's just been bothering you. You may not immediately know the exact reason why you have these traumatic feelings, thoughts or pain, but you will likely have a rough idea about what triggers it. When we carry negative emotions around with us and are impacted by fear or depression, it usually stems from a past memory or event; something that "happened" and affected the balance of our emotions by making us feel out of sorts. Our emotions are an excellent indicator of how something makes us feel. When we

think about past events or traumatic experiences it can heighten our anxiety, bring about depression, or feelings of hopelessness. EFT can greatly help in these situations.

Here is how you can use EFT on yourself to clear an emotional blockage:

1. Think about something that you struggle with

Perhaps you have a social problem at work, are in trouble financially, or get extremely frightened driving on the highway. Identify something obvious that you need to clear.

2. Rate your emotional trauma on a scale of 0 to 10

How does this event or activity make you feel? Is your anxiety extremely high (affecting you physically – your breathing, heart rate and other physiological symptoms)? That would be a 10. Or is it something you are a little uncomfortable with, that perhaps just makes you nervous or cautious. That would be a 2 or a 3.

3. Set Up Your Session with your Defining Statement

To begin the EFT session you must set yourself up first with a defining statement to neutralize the emotional trauma. What you want to do here is recognize that which is causing you distress and state your self-acceptance despite the existence of a problem. This creates a layer of separation between you and your problem. A defining statement should look something like this:

“Even though I continue to obsess over what went wrong in my relationship, I still deeply love, accept and forgive myself.”

or

“Even though I feel that I might not be good enough, I still deeply love, accept and forgive myself.”

Once you decide on the defining statement, you will want to tap the tips of your fingers on the fleshy outer part of your hand (on the side), beneath the baby finger. While you are tapping here, repeat your defining statement out loud three times. If you are right handed, you will want to tap the fingers of your right hand on the fleshy side of your left hand. Always try to use the dominant hand for tapping when you are setting up your problem.

4. Tapping the sequence points

Now that you have set up your EFT session, you are ready to begin tapping away your emotional trauma, freeing yourself from energy blockages. There are 7 different meridian points that you will want to tap during your session, while thinking about your problem and allowing yourself to feel and say what comes to mind. If you are uncomfortable speaking out loud about how you feel, you can simply think about your problem. Let thoughts enter your mind and tap while focusing on your problem.

The sequence of meridian points will be tapped in this order:

1. Inner Eyebrow: The beginning of the eyebrow close to the nose.
2. Side of Eye: On the bone at the corner outside of the eye.
3. Underneath Eye: On the bone underneath the eye.

4. Underneath Nose: The area between the bottom of the nose and the upper lip.
5. Chin: Middle of your chin between the point and the bottom lip.
6. Collarbone: Just beneath base of neck in center where first rib starts.
7. Underarm: A few inches below the armpit

The tapping begins at the top of the body and proceeds down, ending the sequence under the arm. Each meridian should be tapped approximately seven times to be effective, that way when you are speaking out loud about your problem (and not counting) you will have tapped enough to release the energy blockages. You will always want to do your tapping with the dominant hand. So if you are right handed, use your right hand for tapping. Each meridian point is on either side of the body, so you can choose to tap on the right side or left side of your body.

After each sequential round of EFT take a deep purposeful breath and assess your stress scale to find out where your level of emotional trauma is. Many people discover that after one round of EFT, their stress reduces. Some people feel instant relief, while others need a few sessions over a period of time. The key is to focus on the problem while you are tapping, let yourself think and feel what is natural. If you feel skeptical about EFT working for you, you can even tap on that. You can tap on absolutely anything, it won't do you any harm and the only thing that can happen is relief. If you have a serious medical condition or physical ailment, please ensure that you seek the advice of a physician even if EFT makes you feel better.

EFT helps you get to the core of your issues, allowing you to love and accept yourself and separate from the problem. This releases the energy blockages and allows you to let go of emotional trauma and pain that you have been carrying around with you. Negative emotions cause stress and dis-ease. We must pay just as much attention to our emotional health as we do to our physical health.

Observing our thoughts

Have you ever heard someone say, “Nobody can MAKE you feel anything”? This is a very true statement. When we feel a certain way about something it is always because we have chosen to feel this way. When our feelings get hurt or we feel that we are not good enough, the thoughts almost always stem from an internal issue with the way we perceive ourselves. For this reason, it is extremely important to remember that we must observe our thoughts and correct our negative self-talk so that we love and encourage ourselves instead of criticize and judge.

We have thousands of thoughts in our mind throughout the day. Some are conscious and many are subconscious. Things like EFT can help with subconscious beliefs and blockages, but what about those ones that manifest into recurring inner dialogue. You know those thoughts, the ones like “I look so fat today” or “I will never find a relationship. Who would want to be with me?” These harmful thoughts roll around in our brains day after day and perpetuate causing us an incredible amount of stress. Whenever a negative event occurs, we tend to use that event as evidence of our limiting beliefs about ourselves. This is a bad habit to get into and a cycle that can be hard to

break. We can, however free ourselves from this cycle of negativity by becoming more mindful of our thoughts and inner dialogue.

When something negative or unfortunate happens pay close attention to what you tell yourself. Listen to the dialogue that goes on inside your mind. If you hear yourself saying harmful and negative things to yourself, correct them and replace them with more positive and supportive messages. You cannot free yourself from stress or feel better when you are your own worst enemy.

We can always choose to tell ourselves a better story. Every situation can be viewed in a more optimistic light if we allow ourselves to view it from that perspective. Alternatively every situation can also be viewed in a negative light if we choose to see it from that perspective. Which perspective do you think is healthier and will bring us to a place of happiness and self-acceptance? When we focus on being loving and accepting of self, we open up more doors in life. We attract loving people into our lives and positive experiences because we are open to that reality. By contrast, when we are negative, we are more receptive to noticing negative experiences and tend to attract more of that into our lives. Our thoughts create our reality, and therefore we must be diligent in ensuring that we don't let our thoughts think us. We are separate from our thoughts and can choose to have the type of thoughts that best serve us in our day-to-day lives. Positive thoughts and loving self-talk will always make us feel better and bring us the type of experiences that support a healthy well-balanced life.

The best way to observe our thoughts is to begin with our feelings. When we are walking around feeling negative about ourselves we tend to feel depressed or angry inside. Look in the mirror and observe your appearance. Are your eyebrows furrowed, eyes squinted, lips pursed? These are key indicators that you are not feeling good inside and are probably harboring negative harmful thoughts about yourself and/or your circumstances. When we have healthy positive thoughts, we feel lighter inside. We know that we are not our problems and we are not our thoughts. Optimism makes us feel hopeful, content and at peace with ourselves. It feels a lot better than cynicism and if we were to look in the mirror we would see that we even look content.

If your thoughts are out of control and causing you a great deal of stress, get them under control by telling yourself a better story. Here is an example of how you might change your negative thoughts to positive thoughts when faced with a challenging situation.

Instead of thinking *"I am such a loser for getting fired. Nobody will want to hire me now. I am a failure and can't do anything right."*

Think: *"Maybe losing my job was a sign from the universe that I need to be doing something different with my life. At least now I have the opportunity to really think about what I want."*

Notice how both stories center around losing a job. Story number one is negative in nature and brings about feelings of worthlessness and shame. These thoughts do not support feelings of happiness and wellbeing and are very harmful. Story number two is

about the same issue (losing a job) but is viewed in an entirely different light. The thoughts attributed to story number two are much healthier and nurturing and will bring about feelings of hope and possibility, rather than shame and guilt.

Exercise helps the mind

Did you know that physical exercise is an amazing way to release stress and is one of the best physical stress reduction techniques available? Getting active has a number of benefits to your emotional wellbeing. Exercise releases endorphins into the bloodstream, which increase your feelings of happiness. People who exercise more frequently tend to experience less physical ailments and handle stress much better than those who get little exercise. It has long been known that a well functioning body results in a well functioning mind. When we are lazy, lethargic and unmotivated we have less blood flow to the brain, which results in seemingly slower brain functions. When we do less we become less motivated, making it easy to slip into depression. If we are not careful, we can get caught up into a negative pattern of feeling bad about doing nothing, but not being able to motivate ourselves to change. This pattern is damaging and harmful because the less we do, the worse we feel. We have to work extra hard to snap ourselves out of this negative cycle. When we become unmotivated not only do we pass up on exercise, but we also pass up opportunities to do things that we might enjoy.

Introducing exercise to your life does not have to be an extreme upset to the way that you currently live. You can embrace the idea of accidental exercise. This is when you get out and do things you enjoy, but the main point of the activity is not the exercise itself. Some examples of this include; walking along a hiking path, bike riding to the store or a friends house, taking your dog for longer walks, flying a kite with your kids, or taking up dance lessons. Being active doesn't mean that you have to sit in a gym every day for an hour running on a treadmill or lifting weights. Keeping active can be fun if we look for things we enjoy and engage in activities that make us feel good. It doesn't take much to get active, but the impact that it will have on your life is profound. Don't worry about exercise in the gym, running or yoga if that isn't your thing. Look for something that interests you. Try a class, or do something that you've always wanted to try. Experiment with different groups, activities, and classes until you find something that feels right for you. Not only will you enjoy the benefits of a healthy body and mind, you may also find a new hobby that makes you feel really good about yourself.

Daily relaxation

Life can be pretty stressful with the pressures of career, finances, family, and relationships on our plate. More and more women work outside of the home and must balance the demands of motherhood with careers, and men are increasingly taking on more roles in the family and household. Many of us work insane hours during the week and have little time for family or self. This is a tremendous problem because it makes us feel disconnected. When we work too much we feel exhausted, depressed, and stressed

out. It is important that we create our life routines so that they support a healthy mind.

Think about your life routine. Do you make enough time for family and relaxation?

Here are some tips to help you with your daily relaxation:

1. Peaceful dinner

When you eat dinner don't rush through it, read emails while you eat, or watch TV.

Create a quiet comfortable setting for your dinnertime and sit down to enjoy your meal.

Chew your food properly before swallowing (it takes 20 minutes for your stomach to know when you are full). Chewing more slowly will also help you taste your food and appreciate it more. If you are sitting with your family talk to them about their day and use this time to connect with them on a personal level. Try to make sure that no one at the table brings their mobile phone or computer to the table. Make dinnertime sacred and peaceful.

2. Give yourself a stop time

If you are the type that works at home or brings your work home with you, give yourself a stop time. A time when you agree that you will let go of anything else that has to be done and pick it up again the next day. This hard stop is when you will transition from work to relaxation. Try to select a time that you will stick to and make it a habit. To make sure that you are not tempted to work during your relaxation time, turn off your mobile phone, shut your email program, and avoid work-related Internet surfing.

Removing all of your work related triggers will help you to stay focused on being at home and enjoying time to connect with self and relax.

3. Meditation

Set some quiet time aside to do some meditation. This can be first thing in the morning before work, during the early evening, or even before bed. Choose a time that you feel you would best benefit from meditation. This is a time of quiet reflection, for you to quiet the mind and connect with the present moment. You can use guided meditation CDs or simple meditative breathing in a comfortable quiet space. Make sure that wherever you meditate, you are free from distractions and external noise. Your meditation space should be peaceful and somewhere you feel relaxed. Trying to meditate in a busy living room with phones ringing, kids yelling, and a TV blaring wouldn't be very relaxing.

Spend 15 to 20 minutes per day meditating at first, increasing the time as you become more comfortable with it. You will notice the impact that regular meditation has on your life. You will be better equipped to handle stress and will find that you worry less and enjoy more. Meditation has a number of health benefits and is an important part of daily relaxation.

4. Connecting with family (and pets)

Our family and loved ones keep us grounded. They are always there for us no matter what and help to take our minds away from the stressful activities in our lives.

Sometimes all we need is a cup of tea and a chat with a family member to shift us from a negative to a positive mindset. Our relationships with family and loved ones are important to our health and wellbeing. It is important to set time aside to spend with

our family members, even when we are busy at work and don't seem to have time for anything.

Decide how much time you can set aside each day for family. Perhaps between 6 and 8 every night works for your family. This allows you to eat a meal together, talk about the day's events, and play a game or watch a movie together. If you have less time than that, just make it count. Perhaps you can walk the dog together or visit friends. Getting out of the house will take your mind away from responsibilities and work and enable you to focus your time on your family so that you spend quality time with them and stay present with your experiences. If your family is far away, try scheduling a weekly Skype chat so that you can connect and see each other. Or even a good old-fashioned phone call.

5. Get outside

When we go from the house to the car to work, we sometimes lose our connection to the earth. We spend less time outside because we are so busy inside of our homes and businesses that we forget about what awaits us outside of the front door. Getting outdoors and enjoying our beautiful mother earth is a wonderful way to feel connected and relaxed. Hearing the wind rustle through the trees, feeling the sun warm on our face and using our senses to enjoy all that mother nature has to offer reduces stress and makes us feel connected to the earth. We forget about time and stress when we are outside because when we look up at the sky, we are reminded that there are bigger things at work in our universe.

Schedule some time every day to get outside and enjoy nature. You can go for a daily walk to the coffee shop or even just around your block, or get outside and tend to your garden. There are a number of outdoors activities that you can engage in no matter where you live or how much time you have. Pick an outdoor activity that works best for you and get outside. Remember to stay present with what you are doing. Enjoy every moment, take in the sights, sounds and smells and feel gratitude towards mother earth. Take deep purposeful breaths and exhale slowly. When you return from being outdoors, you will feel relaxed and happy.

Knowing your triggers

Part of being self-aware is understanding what makes us who we are. Knowing what causes us stress is an important piece of this puzzle. We all have triggers that cause us to feel stressed out and uneasy in our lives. Perhaps you have a touchy relationship with your mother because she nags you about your life decisions, and every time you talk to her you feel irritated and on edge. Instead of saying anything to her you just bite your tongue and dread taking her calls. You resist the urge to tell her how she makes you feel because you worry that it will affect your relationship with her. But what you aren't considering is that you already have affected your relationship with her by not talking with her honestly about how she makes you feel. If you were to instead talk to her about how she makes you feel when she passes judgment on you, she would be able to be more careful with her words in the future, and your relationship would improve.

Sometimes our triggers are internal triggers and are more based on emotion. If something happened in our childhood that caused us to feel insecure and unloved, those feelings could reappear in adulthood and cause us a tremendous amount of stress. The key is recognizing the trigger so that we can address it. When we are aware of what our triggers are, only then can we begin to address them and make changes that bring us from stress to peace. Think about your triggers. What makes you feel stressed out? Make a list of the triggers in your life that cause you stress and a possible solution to combat that stress. Try implementing a couple of your own solutions and see how it impacts your life for the better.

Life is too short. Be happy.

Stress can take many forms in life, and we can't avoid ALL stress in life but we can certainly manage it better and find things that make us feel happy. Take stock in your life and analyze the people, activities, work, and environments around you. Assess how you feel about things and keep in tune with your emotions. If you need to make alterations, do it. Always consider your health. Stress can cause so many problems, so if something is causing us stress we must address the root cause of that stress and reduce or eliminate it in every way we can.

Life is supposed to be fun! There are so many inspiring, wonderful and amazing things to see and do in this world. Don't get caught up in the day-to-day drudgery of life. You are more than that and deserve to feel happy and inspired. Find a friend or a group to help you if you need a life overhaul.

BODY

CHAPTER 6: YOGA

"You cannot do yoga. Yoga is your natural state. What you can do are yoga exercises, which may reveal to you where you are resisting your natural state."

- Sharon Gannon

While yoga is a form of exercise to keep the body fit and strengthen the core, it is also very much a spiritual practice that reduces our stress and creates inner peace. Yoga brings us closer to our inner being and allows us the space to breathe and maintain mindfulness. This multi-faceted dynamic makes yoga a powerful way for us to keep our bodies healthy while maintaining the connection with spirit. Yoga is about mindfulness, we create separation between the ego self and the spirit self by focusing on our breath and moving between poses. When we are in the moment with yoga, we are not worried about our finances, our jobs, relationships or personal stress. We are simply being. We are connecting with our body, mind and spirit.

Many people believe that Yoga is just about stretching. While stretching is certainly a component, the goal of the movements and poses is not to stretch the muscles but rather to bring about balance in the body by strengthening, opening and creating flexibility. There is no other exercise that combines the balancing of body, mind, strength and relaxation quite like yoga does. It is uniquely well rounded and is a great choice for all levels of activity and experience.

Origins and history of yoga

Sanskrit is an ancient language of India, which is the original birthplace of Yoga. The word “yoga” is a Sanskrit word meaning “union”. Because yoga is an ancient health system that balances the mind, body and spirit, the word union makes a lot of sense. We are connecting with divine source through the practice of yoga. When we talk specifically about yoga poses and movements, we are referring to another Sanskrit word “asana” which references the physical side of yoga.

There are eight “limbs” of yoga according to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali – the ancient texts where classical yoga philosophy was first formed. These sacred texts were written in the second century. The word “limbs” is also known as “Ashtanga” in Sanskrit, which you will often hear reference to within the yoga community. The Eight Limbs of Yoga are a series of steps that bring one closer to peace and harmony with self and the greater whole. Each limb is dependent on the others, and you may be surprised to know that yoga poses only represent one of these limbs, with the other seven relating to our energy in relation to the external world, our inner self, spirit and our breathing.

The eight limbs of yoga are as follows:

1. Yama : Universal morality

Yama teaches us that the core of our being is genuine, loving, compassionate and peaceful. The Yamas are broken down into five characteristics, which describe the attributes of our fundamental nature, highlighting the behaviors we

must embrace to become moral towards others. These five characteristics are: Ahimsa (Compassion of all living things), Satya (Commitment to truthfulness), Asteya (Non-Stealing), Brahmacharya (nonlust), and Aparigraha (Noncovetousness). Each of these things teaches us to love others by acting with morality and respect.

2. **Niyama** : Personal observation

Yama outlines the attributes of moral behaviour towards the outward world and others whereas Niyama looks inward. The word Niyama means “rules” or “laws”. These rules are the ones that govern our inner being and relate to who we are and how we conduct ourselves internally. Niyama speaks to our intimate beliefs and how good we are to ourselves.

Similar to the Yamas, Niyama also contains five characteristics or attributes, they are as follows; Sauca (purity / inner and outer cleanliness), Santosa (contentment), Tapas (disciplined use of our energy), Svadhyaya (self study and examination), and Isvarapranidhana (celebration of the spiritual and surrender to “God”).

3. **Asanas** : Physical Body postures

Asanas are what we commonly refer to as yoga when we are unfamiliar with the other seven limbs of the Yoga Sutra. The word *Asana* means, “staying or “abiding” and is a Sanskrit word. The Asanas are the physical poses and

movements that we work through during our practice. Asanas help us balance the body and mind by keeping us concentrated on breath and posture. This mindfulness allows us to harmonize our mind, body and spirit.

4. **Pranayama** : Regulation of breath and energy

The fourth limb of the Yoga Sutra and another commonly known area of focus is on breathing and breath control. Breathing technique goes hand in hand with Asanas and helps us relax into our pose. Controlled breath and slow deep breathing strengthens the respiratory system and calms our nervous system. Pranayama is the control of energy, or “prana”. This controlled rhythm takes us deeper into relaxation while increasing and purifying health benefits.

5. **Pratyahara** : Controlling the senses

Pratyahara means to draw back or retreat. In yoga Pratyahara means to withdraw from our senses, external attachments, objects, and distractions that may be present during practice. When we release the connection between our mind and senses, we are able to connect with our inner peace without being led astray. When we meditate, Pratyahara occurs with ease because we are so focused on the meditation that we do not become distracted by our senses. This is the ultimate goal of Pratyahara.

6. **Dharana** : Concentration of the mind

The sixth limb of the Yoga Sutra is Dharana, which means, immovable concentration of the mind. Dharana is the stage where our mind achieves complete concentration. We have moved through the other limbs of yoga and have gained control of our breathing, senses, body, and morality – Now we move into the deep concentration of the mind where we condition ourselves to be free from the ego. Dharana is singularly focused on one particular direction, allowing us to engross ourselves in the task at hand. There is no “I” or “me” in Dharana – we separate from the ego-centric self. Dharana prepares us for great potential and soulful healing.

7. **Dhyana** : Divine Meditation & Moksha

Dhyana is the seventh limb of the Yoga Sutra and means worship. It is the stage that brings us to a profound state of spiritual divinity facilitated by concentrated meditation. During Dhyana our consciousness evolves by allowing us to lift the veil on our perceptions of reality. We are able to see separateness and make a distinction between our true nature and the nature of that around us. We become one with the universe and feel free from fear and unhappiness, with the knowing that we have about the nature of things. We reach a state of freedom with Dhyana, this freedom can also be called Moksha, and is the ultimate goal of yoga.

8. **Samadhi** : One with the Divine

The final stage in the eight limbs of yoga is Samadhi. This stage builds on Dhyana and is when we have transcended the self and become one with the universe and the divine nature of our being. Samadhi means, “to bring together”. During the state of Samadhi we go beyond consciousness and are able to transcend the “self” by allowing our mind and intellect to shut off and our true abundantly joyful self to emerge.

These eight limbs of yoga are all profoundly important to each other and will heighten your enjoyment of yoga practice, while creating inner peace and harmony within you. These eight steps bring us to a point of total health and purity in every facet of our being by providing us with a logical path to enlightenment.

The Yoga Sutra is widely considered to be one of the best complete representations and descriptions of yoga in existence. The Eight Limbs of Yoga remind us of the influence that Buddhism had on the discipline with “The Noble Eightfold Path”, one of the principal teachings of Buddha.

The history of Yoga can be divided into four eras; the Vedic Period, Pre-Classical Yoga, the Classical Period, and Post-Classical Yoga. The Vedic Period is based on early hymns and rituals, which formed the basis of divine living and spirituality, teaching one to transcend the limits of the mind. The Sanskrit word Veda means knowledge. The

Pre-Classical Period Yoga covers a large span of time and is marked by a body of work known as the Upanishads; a collection of over two hundred scriptures which talk about cycles and cause and effect. It was later during this period that the well-known Bhagavad-Gita was created; a beautiful story that hails as one of the oldest known Yoga scriptures. It teaches about karma and valuable life lessons about acting with compassion and being selfless through our actions. The Classical Period comes next with the introduction of another creation; The Yoga Sutra by Patanjali, which we have already discussed as being of major importance to Yoga. The Yoga Sutra helped form the framework and structure of Classical Yoga through the teachings of The Eight Limbs of Yoga and was dominant for centuries. Patanjali believed in the idea of separation of mind and body, something that was not prevalent in earlier periods. Finally we have the Post-Classical Period, which brings a greater focus back to the body, where previous periods focused a great deal on the mind and meditation of Yoga practice. Post-Classical Yoga also teaches us to accept and embrace the present moment rather than attempting to transcend reality.

Types of yoga

There are a lot of options available today to anyone who wishes to practice Yoga. Literally dozens of styles of yoga have been developed over the years, some more recent than others. You can find the right style for you with a little bit of open mindedness. The best thing to do is to try out a few different styles of classes, get a feel

for the concept and decide which style resonates best with you, or you can just start with a more basic practice and move on from there.

Here are some popular types of Yoga that you may find available in your community:

Hatha Yoga

Hatha Yoga concentrates on the physical poses and movements of yoga and is one of the most commonly known forms practiced in the West. Hatha can encompass many different styles and variations but is generally a comfortably paced yoga with easy movements that can be practiced by the beginner or novice. The term “Hatha” is used interchangeably with other styles of yoga where the focus is on the physical poses rather than other more spiritual attributes. Many Hatha style classes are comfortable for people of all levels and include seated meditative positions as well as simpler poses that can be modified depending on level of skill.

Vinyasa Yoga

Just as Hatha Yoga is a general term describing a physical style of yoga, Vinyasa too is a general term used to describe a variety of classes, which concentrate on breath-focused yoga movements and Sun Salutations; a series of poses that flow into each other.

Vinyasa yoga tends to be more challenging than Hatha and is usually faster paced. There are a variety of styles of Vinyasa, some more challenging than others.

Kundalini Yoga

The focus on breath and movement is a hallmark of Kundalini yoga. When practicing Kundalini we are focused on moving prana (energy) up from base of the spine and upwards through the body. This opens our chakras. Some Kundalini classes begin with a chant or mantra and end with a class meditation. The focus of Kundalini is on a series of poses referred to as Kriyas, which are a sequence of fast paced and repetitive movements that are designed to release energy. Kundalini is also considered to be Hatha style and would be a great class for those interested in introducing a more spiritual element to their practice. The pace of a Kundalini class, however will not be as comfortable as it would be in a typical Hatha-style yoga class. The movements can be quite challenging. Kundalini may be best for those already familiar with yoga that are looking for more of a mental and physical challenge.

Hot Yoga & Bikram

Hot yoga is a generic term for a unique form of yoga that is practiced in a room that is heated anywhere from 85 degrees to as high as 120 degrees. The heat from the room and having warm muscles induces sweating and increases flexibility, while reducing the risk of injury. The heat also promotes the body's natural detoxification process and makes us feel cleansed afterwards. Bikram Yoga is a form of hot yoga pioneered by a man named Bikram Choudhury, who had a major influence on the practice of hot yoga. His method is to complete a series of 26 poses in succession. Bikram is a very specific type of yoga that an instructor must be licensed and certified to teach. It works to

stretch the muscles and ligaments in a very specific order by following the sequence of poses created by Bikram.

Ashtanga Yoga

Ashtanga, which is Sanskrit for “Eight Limbs” is a Vinyasa-style series of rapid yoga poses that are completed in sequence or flow. These poses are done one immediately after the other and can be quite physically demanding. Many Ashtanga students know the poses well and need little instruction or help from their yoga instructor. There are 75 Ashtanga poses and it takes an hour and a half to get through them all. For this reason, Ashtanga is a more advanced form of yoga that would not be suitable for beginners. Many studios offer Power Yoga classes, which take some concepts from Ashtanga but do not follow the complete sequence of poses. Both Ashtanga and Power yoga are athletically demanding forms of yoga.

These are just a few of the popular types of yoga that you may hear about in your community and local gyms. There are dozens of styles of yoga and further variations within a particular style. Many students start with a Hatha style yoga and move into more challenging styles as they become used to the breathing techniques and poses.

Yoga for Sex & Relationships

Aside from the many incredible spiritual and physical health benefits, yoga can also greatly benefit your sex life. Because yoga brings us to a place of such deep relaxation, the blood flow in our bodies gives way to sexual energy and directs the blood flow to our root chakras. Yoga also strengthens our pelvic floor muscles, which helps lengthen orgasms in males and females. Men may experience better ejaculatory control, while both men and women will be able to extend orgasm and experience heightened levels of sexual pleasure. Yoga increases the connection you have with your partner and allows you to feel more empathetic towards each other, bringing greater levels of understanding into the relationship. Because yoga is relaxing and relieves tension couples experience deeper levels of sensuality and intimacy, making sexual activity more enjoyable and long lasting. Yoga facilitates weight loss and flexibility, which opens the door to a variety of new positions that would be too challenging with unfit or out of shape bodies.

Often couples are busy thinking about the end result of sex or are too worried about how their body appears to the other. This distracts from the experience of sex and makes it more challenging to connect on a deep intimate level. Yoga helps to bring awareness into our lives about our true nature and who we really are, this allows us to form a more intimate bond with our partner and connect on a spiritual level. Yoga helps us to enjoy the adventure of sex by not rushing through it or feeling anxiety. When your body and mind are relaxed you feel better and are more in tune with your own sexual nature. Feeling relaxed and sensual is key to experiencing wonderful sex with your partner. Yoga will also improve the relationship outside of the bedroom by bringing

greater awareness and understanding to each other. When we are connected spiritually to our partner, we can understand their point of view more easily and act with compassion and love. Yoga deepens the emotional bond and communication with your partner.

Partner & Couples Yoga

Many yoga centers are now offering Partner Yoga. This is a form of yoga that concentrates on joint poses that build trust, concentration and deepen the relationship between two students. The poses can be done with a romantic partner, spouse, or even a close friend or loved one. The poses are designed to deepen the posture and stretch by relying on the support of a partner. Partner Yoga is as much spiritual as it is physical, since trust and communication are key factors. We focus on our partner and our partner focuses on us. This deepens the bond and opens our heart chakras making us feel alive and connected to our partner through the practice of supporting each other through touch and stretch. With Partner Yoga we feel connected through eye contact, touch, communication and spirit. We are reminded of our connection to the universe and everything in it. Our feelings of separateness and being an individual are countered by profound feelings of oneness with our partner, which makes way for a healthier life and the balance of mind, body and spirit.

How and where to practice

When we are first starting our yoga practice, we will likely find great benefit in practicing with a group at a structured class. The reason for this is that there are a variety of poses to remember, so the regularity of a class environment will help us remember proper form, technique, and poses. A hatha-style yoga class is great for starting out, with poses that are less challenging and easy to remember than some of the more advanced forms of yoga.

Most communities have a yoga center or a fitness center that offers yoga classes and instruction. To find out which class is best for you go in and speak to an instructor to find out about their unique teaching style. Ask what they recommend, or simply look at their website and discover the classes that are available to you. Most yoga classes will have a description about what to expect in terms of difficulty.

When you are first starting out you do not need anything to be able to practice yoga. Most studios offer yoga mats for students to use, and all you need in the way of equipment is comfortable flexible clothing. Many people own stretchy yoga pants already, which are perfect for working out and practicing yoga. Make sure that your clothes are comfortable, breathable and have some stretch. Many people prefer to wear looser fitting yoga pants, which provide room to move.

Look for a yoga class that is good for beginners if you are just starting out, or find something that is more challenging if you are familiar with the poses and are already in good physical shape. Once you begin classes, don't be afraid to ask your yoga instructor or your peers for help with a pose if you aren't sure about body posture or position.

Your instructor will sometimes walk the room and correct posture to ensure that you are getting the most out of each movement. They also want to ensure that you are performing the poses safely to avoid injury. Yoga often requires us to push our bodies in ways that we aren't typically used to, which is why we must practice gentle progressions that strengthen and elongate us. If we move too quickly or push too far when we are not ready, we can put a great deal of strain on our muscles and ligaments and potentially cause ourselves a lot of pain.

Once you have been going to a class for a while and are familiar with the poses, you may start feeling the need to practice at home. If you choose to do this, make sure that you have a safe place to practice, a good yoga mat, and that you focus on the poses that are comfortable and familiar to you. It is best if you have a style of yoga that you are knowledgeable with, rather than attempting anything new. This way you can get the most out of your poses and gradually increase your stretch and flexibility with the Asanas that you are already familiar with. The hardest part about practicing your yoga at home will be self-discipline. Having the regularity of a routine and a time of day will greatly help your motivation. If you change the time that you practice every day it will be more challenging for you to settle into a routine. Schedule your yoga sessions in your calendar or set an alert on your mobile phone so that you can train yourself to be ready at the same time every day. The routine will help you be successful. Try to stick to the same poses as well, this way you can work on your form and flexibility and measure

your progress. It also ensures that you stick to a routine that works and gives you a greater likelihood of succeeding.

The other thing you should consider when practicing at home is whether you want to use an assisted program (a DVD or video game guide) or whether you want to completely do it on your own. Sometimes a DVD can be helpful if you aren't sure which Asanas to practice or if you like the comfort and security of having a yoga instructor help you along the way. Instructional videos are normally pretty easy to follow along and can be used daily for regularity.

Outdoor yoga

Many people find a great deal of satisfaction in practicing their yoga outdoors. This can be a great alternative to the monotony of indoor yoga studios, which often don't even have windows. Being outside will make you feel alive during your Asanas and connect you to the elements. The smell of fresh air, the feel of the breeze on your face, and the presence of nature around you will invigorate you in new ways. If you haven't practiced outdoors before, pick somewhere private and comfortable. Make sure that the ground is somewhat smooth or you may have a hard time keeping the balance with your poses. Many people find a beach to practice on and enjoy the sound of the water nearby.

Others prefer the serenity of a soft field of grass or under a big Oak tree. Whatever your choice, just make sure that you have the room to practice and that you won't be too distracted by traffic noises or otherwise busy pedestrian areas. Be prepared for onlookers though, as you will undoubtedly attract some attention if you are practicing in

an open public area. If you are uncomfortable with this thought, perhaps your outdoor yoga sessions should begin in your own backyard before you venture out into the local park. Once you are comfortable with your outdoor location you will learn to turn your attention inwards even in the face of distractions such as dogs, children, and nosy onlookers. This will actually benefit you by forcing you to concentrate harder on your breathing and poses. You may want to invest in a thicker yoga mat specifically for outdoor practice if it is something you enjoy and want to continue doing. The standard yoga mats are thin and may get roughed up with the ruggedness of the ground. If it is sunny and hot out don't forget to pack plenty of water and bring your sunscreen with you. Dehydration is more of a factor when practicing outdoors or in extreme heat. Keep yourself well hydrated as you practice your yoga among the wondrous elements of nature.

Yoga breath

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of yoga is the ability to breathe deeply with our abdomen and synchronize our breath with our movements. Unfortunately because of the impact of our nervous system and the many daily stressors we face in life, we have learned improper breathing technique and often breathe quite shallow. Yogic breathing encourages long deep and purposeful breaths that extend from the abdomen up through the chest. Yoga breathing is incredibly healthy for us and has a tremendous amount of advantages to our body including the reduction of stress and anxiety. Yoga breathing does not just have to be restricted to yoga practice and in fact can become a

part of every day life. We can train ourselves to breathe differently than we have been by embracing longer deep breaths. When we slow down and elongate our breaths we reduce stress, feel more relaxed, and increase our lung capacity. There are other health benefits to our immune system, cardiovascular system and central nervous system. Yogic breathing calms our mind and prepares the way for another important facet of yoga practice; meditation. When we meditate, we cannot go deep into ourselves with shallow breaths and uncalmed nerves. Practicing yogic breathing will greatly assist our ability to go deeper into meditative states and improve our overall concentration and mental focus. Being able to breathe deeply and properly will help us in all areas of life, not just in yoga class.

How do you know if you are breathing properly?

When you are breathing from your diaphragm you should be able to feel the rise and fall of your abdomen. Place your fingers gently on your lower abdomen and lay on your back staring up at the ceiling. Breathe in deeply and slowly and notice the movement of your abdomen and chest, breathe out completely letting your lungs collapse. If you are not used to taking such deep long breaths, you may notice that they are bumpy or staggered at first, but this will quickly improve with practice. One helpful technique when you are first learning is to place the tips of your fingers together gently an inch or two underneath your belly button. When you breathe in deeply, your fingers should naturally separate. This is a great practice to get into when you are first getting used to yoga breath. With a little bit of effort and time you will find that you will breath this way

naturally and will reprogram yourself to breathe in a manner that will greatly benefit your mind, body, and spirit.

Eating for yoga practice

Another often-overlooked factor to consider with your yoga practice is what you are putting into your body. The food that you use to nourish your body is what carries you through your yoga practice and nourishes your body. For this reason it is extremely important to consume the foods that are going to have the best effect on your body. Don't worry too much about what others are doing with their diets. Everyone is different and has different needs and personal values. If you find it too difficult on you to cut out meat, then perhaps you don't have to. Just because others find a Vegan life rewarding for their own personal ethics and values, doesn't mean that it is the right path for you. Similarly, perhaps eating meat is out of the question for you due to your own personal beliefs and values. It is important to choose the foods that are best for your body and not to get too caught up in what you should be eating. Listen to your body and intuition, your body will communicate with you.

When changing your diet, perhaps the best place to start is with foods from the earth. If you are not getting enough vegetables in your diet, that is a good place to start.

Experiment with different veggies and find what works best for you. There is a whole world of options available to you and many great resources on the Internet to refer to for ideas. If you cut out meat, make sure you are still getting your protein and iron from somewhere otherwise you may find yourself feeling tired and weak. Experiment with

different foods and keep a food journal to record the effect that your new diet is having on your daily life and yoga practice. Remember that what works for some may not work for others. Your diet is a very personal choice that will need to reflect your own beliefs and personal tastes. Seek out your local farmers market and try eating locally sourced fresh food. Note the impact that local food has on your body. Ask yourself how you feel and how it has impacted your yoga practice. Eventually with some experimentation, you will find a perfectly balanced diet for your unique needs. Perhaps this is Vegan, or vegetables and meat, or an all-raw food diet. Whatever your choice, just ensure that you are making the choice that is right for you and that your decision is not based on the influence and recommendations of what works for others.

CHAPTER 7: LOVE YOUR BODY

"Every achiever I have ever met says, 'My life turned around when I began to believe in me.'"

- Robert Schuller

How many times have you looked into the mirror, stared at your body and said something negative to yourself about the way you look. We have all done this at one time in our lives, some of us daily. Many of us have been brought up to focus more on what others think and how things look on the outside, rather than looking inwards to cultivate feeling good on the inside. This is completely backwards because the way we feel on the inside greatly affects how we feel about ourselves in general, and often how we look on the outside. When we feel awful about ourselves on the inside, we may reflect this by carrying extra weight, not putting a lot of effort into our appearance, or by manifesting physical symptoms. When we feel good about who we are on the inside, we have an outer glow that transcends negativity and criticism. Our confidence shines through and gives us the strength and courage to go through life feeling that we are beautiful and exactly where we need to be at the moment.

Unfortunately we live in a very aesthetic society, and when we are not okay on the inside this can have detrimental effects on our self-esteem and confidence. We are constantly faced with a barrage of mass media messages telling us that to be beautiful means to be thin, in great physical shape, and to dress a certain way. What we must remember when taking those messages in is that they are focused on advertising and influencing the public to think or believe something for the sole purpose of profit. When

we remember this important fact, we become less impressionable and can look inwards for the answers rather than outside of ourselves. The only thing we need to do to be beautiful is to believe that we are. We don't have to eat certain foods, follow a strict regimen, or dress a certain way. Beauty comes from the inside first. When we feel great about ourselves on the inside, then we have the foundation from which to build from. If we want to alter our diets to be more locally based, or to include more fresh food, or just to cut things out that we have built a dependency on – that's fine because we are coming from a place of love and self-acceptance. If we wish to introduce more exercise into our lives and become more active, it is also much better to do so when we are coming from a place of self-love. When we make changes to our life from a place of love and self-acceptance our reasons for making changes are more balanced, as are our attitudes towards making those changes.

If your inner dialogue has been negative towards your body and you have been walking around feeling embarrassed and ashamed, it's time for a change.

Change comes from within

Before embarking on any life-altering diets or lifestyle enhancements recognize that change comes from within. Embrace this concept first before you set out to make changes on the outside. We need to be okay with who we are and love ourselves before we can do any real lasting work on the way we look. The way we feel is of huge importance. We often carry around negative messaging that has been with us for a long time, sometimes since childhood. What makes it more difficult is that we aren't always

aware of what these negative messages are. They become so much a part of who we are that we are unaware of just how damaging they are to our psyche and wellbeing. Some may remember growing up being told to eat everything on their plates otherwise they would be in trouble. This mentality has passed down from generations and is almost always a result of a history where families had very little in the way of food on the table. The children were told to eat because parents really did worry about where the next meal would come from, and wanted their children to eat what was in front of them, while it was there. This history then became a belief for our parents and possibly even ourselves and the way we teach our own children. Most of us never stop to ask “well why does my child have to eat what is on their plate” or “why do I feel the need to finish everything on my plate, even when I am full”. This is just one example where a belief that did not originate with you may have found its way into your belief system. The problem with this belief is that it may keep you unhealthy by having you eat more than you need, or it may force you to feel pressured to eat, thereby enjoying your food less.

Examine your beliefs about your body, food and exercise. It may help to write them down. Ask yourself if there are any unusual habits that you have, and then try to get to the root of those habits. There is almost always a limiting belief underneath an unhealthy habit. There is an emotional connection to the way you feel about yourself that stems from years of programming, self-talk, and the environment in which you’ve lived. It is important to look at these things to uncover any areas that may not be serving you well or that do not support a healthy attitude towards self. Sometimes this examination requires looking back to our past to things that may have happened, or

experiences we may have had. We are unaware of just how much past programming affects us today. Perhaps someone told you at one time you were too short or too fat or that you were too thin. It doesn't matter what was said, but what matters is how it made you feel and what impact that statement had on you and continues to have on you today. We must free ourselves from these types of situations, as they can be extremely damaging to our overall sense of happiness. It is extremely important to get to a place of self-acceptance and love so that external events and comments don't have detrimental effects on our psyche.

Notice the good

From now on when you stand in front of yourself in the mirror notice the good things instead of the bad. If you have become accustomed to picking yourself apart and criticizing yourself in the past, you may want to start with small things like "these jeans look good on me" or "I am having a good hair day today". It doesn't matter how small the thing you notice is, as long as it is positive in nature. Over time those positive messages will become louder and clearer and you will begin to feel better about yourself. We can often be our own worst critics, pointing out things that nobody else seems to notice and focusing on the minutest imperfections. But what we fail to see is that these are not "imperfections". We are perfect the way we are. We are beautiful and we will shine magnificently when we feel good on the inside. It's wonderful to want to make changes to create a longer, healthier life for ourselves, but we really have to practice loving ourselves and embracing who we are first otherwise those changes won't change the way we feel. By beginning to notice the good things in our lives we will

retrain the mind to look for positives instead of negatives. When we become accustomed to negative thinking, it is easy to criticize others and ourselves. When stuck in a negative mode of thinking we often find it hard to see anything about ourselves that we can appreciate. So start small. Notice little things about yourself and take a moment to appreciate them in the mirror.

Many of us feel embarrassed and ashamed of our naked bodies even in front of those who absolutely love us. We may act shy or inhibited when we are intimate with our partners because of this embarrassment. Women and men go to great lengths to hide their bodies when they don't feel that they look good. We find fault in ourselves so readily, and often the fault we find is not something that the person standing across from us even notices or cares about. We make an issue out of something that is a non-issue to our lover and become completely uncomfortable in our own skin. The problem in this scenario is not that we have something that we would like to change about ourselves, but instead that we are completely unloving and unaccepting of our body because of it. Men sometimes go crazy wondering why their partners don't feel comfortable being naked in front of them when they have absolutely beautiful bodies. Women feel unable to be completely open and sexually liberated when there is something that they don't like about their bodies. Men and women both have insecurities with their bodies, but women seem to carry this into the bedroom with them, whereas men can often temporarily detach from any feelings of self-doubt.

What we need to do is love, accept, and allow ourselves to be who we are without harsh judgment or criticism. Stand in front of the mirror naked and get a good look at yourself.

Tell yourself that you are perfect. Notice the things that you appreciate about your body and don't worry so much about the other stuff. We are primarily energy beings. These bodies are vessels for our spirit. We can't get too hung up on the way we look on the outside otherwise we will suffocate on the inside.

Healthy inner dialogue

Every day we go about our activities with an inner dialogue running through our mind. The inner dialogue represents the things we tell ourselves about our self. These messages are built upon experiences, circumstances, relationships, and childhood events. Our inner dialogue can be negative sometimes when our self-confidence is low, or with some people, negative all the time when we have no self-esteem. The negative messages that run through our thoughts are not always apparent to us depending on how long we have been carrying them around. For this reason it is important that we maintain a high state of self-awareness so that we may catch and correct our negative self chatter.

The more connected we are to the universe and in flow we are with our lives, the healthier this inner dialogue becomes. When we are living in our light anything becomes possible. Living in flow means that everything around you just unfolds for you with ease and nothing seems too strained or struggled. Things just happen to and for you that you desire. These things appear to be magic, but what's really happening is co-creation with the universe. When we stop giving way to detrimental human thinking and rise above our thoughts, we become pure love and acceptance. This is the nature of who we really

are. We are not our thoughts, so when we rise above them we are able to make wonderful things happen in our lives. This creates a level of separation between that which you are and that which you think you are. So those thoughts that you used to have about worthiness are no longer applicable. We know without a doubt that they are just thoughts and that they have no true bearing on who we really are. This is when inner dialogue begins to shift. Thoughts about not being good enough or worthy are shifted into feelings of empowerment.

So how do we get to a place of healthy inner dialogue by living in flow? First we must analyze our lives and see that we are living in accordance to what resonates with our spirit. Success often comes to those who follow their passion in life, but their reasons for wanting to do so have nothing to do with material wealth. It is the people who follow their hearts and do what they feel they need to do who find themselves suddenly successful. Material gain and money should not be on your list when you are looking to make changes in your life to bring you into flow with the universe. Abundance will be there when you are living in your light. Ask yourself what is causing you dis-ease in your life. What areas are making you unhappy, stressed out or uncomfortable? These are the areas that need your attention. Figure out what you can do to change these circumstances or situations. If there is nothing you can do to change these things, ask yourself what you can do to change the way you feel about them. Your emotions are a great barometer and often indicate how well you are doing in certain areas of life. When we feel good about something and are happy we are at peace with ourselves and living

in accordance to our light. When we feel bad about something it is an indicator that we need to make a change.

Since our bodies are often the focal point of feeling uncomfortable with ourselves, think about what you can do right now to change how you feel. Your body will not suddenly be different tomorrow, but your thoughts may. Take care of the other areas of your life first before you attempt to focus on your body. Be happy with your work, family, and social life. Do things that make you happy and fulfilled. Contribute to society in a way that is spiritually uplifting for you. Once you take care of these other areas of your life you will be astounded at how easy it is to make changes to your body and physical health. Have you ever noticed that people who are in flow with their lives look good? The reason why they look good is because they feel good on the inside. If you don't feel good on the inside, the outside will reflect that.

Change your inner dialogue if it is sabotaging your efforts at a healthy life. Start doing things that make you feel worthy and fulfilled. Pay attention to your spirit and find time for meditation. Doing these things will slowly train your mind chatter to become more positive, serving you in ways you cannot even imagine. True personal power comes from within. How much money we have, how beautiful we are, or the titles we carry do not sustain us in the spiritual world. Only when we are connected to our inner voice, and find our light will we begin to shift our thinking to become positive and supporting. This is one of the most important things you can do to love your body.

Be good to your body

Your body will tell you when it is happy with the decisions you are making. When we eat bad foods that don't agree with us, we will find that our body may respond by giving us heartburn, a stomachache, or diarrhea. Our bodies communicate with us all the time about what it likes and doesn't like. The problem is that we sometimes don't want to hear what it is telling us. Many physical symptoms are simply a result of a poor diet. When we consume a lot of unnatural foods that are processed and filled with preservatives, we are not giving our bodies the nutrition and nourishment that they need. Our bodies thrive on sustainable food from the earth. Exercise is also another important factor in treating your body right. In today's society it is very easy to become sedentary. Get outside and get moving. Do something that you enjoy. When you respect your body and are good to it, you will be rewarded with a healthy mind, body and spirit.

The importance of exercise

Working out doesn't have to mean sweating it out on a treadmill at the gym or going for a 5-mile run if you don't find those things to be enjoyable. There are lots of ways for you to get active and enjoy yourself doing it. If the concept of active living is somewhat foreign to you, talk to your friends and people in the neighbourhood who are active. Find out what groups or classes are available and try out something new. Exercise is extremely beneficial to our overall health and wellbeing. It reduces our stress and anxiety and gets our blood flowing. When we live sedentary lives it becomes very easy to pack on extra weight because we don't give our bodies the chance to burn off the calories we consume. If you are taking in more calories than you are burning off, you will gain weight. If you are unable to exercise due to a medical condition, just be very

careful with your food intake. Fresh natural foods from the earth are easiest for your body to break down, and what your body needs most of. Make sure to drink plenty of water whether you are exercising or not. Our bodies already naturally contain a large percentage of water and it is vital to our health. Water helps to carry oxygen to our blood cells, helps remove waste, and keeps our joints healthy. When we are active, water should be consumed at regular intervals to avoid dehydration.

There are lots of choices for active living these days. You can find a group, class, or center for almost anything you can think of. In order for exercise to be sustainable and lasting, make it something that you truly enjoy. If you don't feel good doing it, you probably aren't going to continue. Think about your passions and things that you have always wanted to try or get good at. Pursue those things over regular trips to the gym. Even if you enjoy going to the gym, get outside or take a class to mix it up every once in a while. We can get incredibly bored if we do the same fitness routine day after day, especially if it's in a gym. If our routine is more varied with one day in the gym per week, two days of outdoor activity and a class of some kind, it is a lot easier to be enthusiastic and enjoy yourself.

Having a healthy body will add years to your life expectancy, keep your weight down, and support the overall body in functioning to its highest capacity. Physical activity keeps us healthy in mind, body and spirit, which allows us to love ourselves and accept ourselves as we truly are.

What you eat

We all have our momentary binges of fast food, sweets, and other carb delights, but it is very important that we restrict the amount of fatty foods we eat and increase the amount of clean food so that our bodies can process and digest the food we eat properly. Whenever you buy something that has a complex recipe, you run the risk of chemicals, preservatives and unnatural additives being present in your food. Your body thrives on simple food from the earth that can be broken down and digested with ease. Aside from the obvious health and weight benefits, you really do feel better when you eat better. Your body will thank you for nourishing it with healthy, colourful and natural food and will not appreciate foods that are harder to break down. You will notice this with your washroom habits, energy levels and the way your stomach feels. When we eat good food we have lots of energy, feel satisfied but not stuffed, and have normal bathroom routines. When we eat unhealthy foods with a lot of chemicals, additives and sugar we feel sluggish, bloated, and we may have irregular bowel movements. This is our body's way of telling us that we must focus on healthier eating.

What many people find to be successful is to eat healthy 6 days a week and have 1 day where you go to town and indulge in whatever tickles your fancy. For those 6 days focus on fresh vegetables, fruit, and protein. Prepare your meals and make sure you eat regularly throughout the day. Avoid drinking too much caffeine and stick to water if you can. Your body will become accustomed to eating healthy and will thrive on the food you are eating, and you won't feel like you are missing out by having a cheat day. The cheat day won't make you gain weight because it is not long term and is only one day out of the week. Over time, you will find that your taste for sweets, salty foods, and

unhealthy carbs will minimize naturally based on what your body desires and communicates. If our diet is too strict we are prone to fail, but if we leave some wiggle room it is far more sustainable and the likelihood of us being successful is greater.

Honor thy self

There are many ways we can honor ourselves. The body is simply one facet of who we are; the greatest part of the self lies in our spirit. Our spirit is the essence of who we are and what makes us shine brightly with confidence. The more love we have for ourselves, the stronger this light shines. Loving ourselves is so important to our self-confidence and will carry us through the most difficult times in life. When we believe in ourselves and our ability to handle whatever comes our way, we feel confident about everything we do from climbing a rock, to taking a test. There is an inner knowing that occurs with self-love. It tells us that it is going to be all right no matter what the outcome. Our confidence rests with our inner peace and the knowledge that we are not our thoughts, circumstances or actions. We represent pure light and love and are simply energy beings experiencing a human existence.

Unfortunately many of us sink like a submarine when external events happen to us. We lose a job, a relationship, or someone says something negative to us and it rocks our sense of self and shatters our self-esteem. This only happens when we are not in alignment with who we are, and only happens when we are not practicing self-love. When we honor our inner being external events don't shake us. Of course there is always some level of stress and pain in life, but handling that stress and pain becomes a

hundred times easier when you have love for yourself. Loving ourselves means forgiving ourselves for the mistakes we have made, and will continue to make. We are human and we make mistakes. It's okay and all part of the process. Many of us beat ourselves up over things we did wrong and become our own worst enemy by injecting negative thoughts into our inner dialogue that just make us feel worse and worse about ourselves.

When learning to love and accept yourself, consider the following:

1. Forgive yourself

Let yourself be human and make mistakes, just learn from them and look at them as a gift. Carrying them around with you every day serves no good.

Recognize what happened, replay it if you'd like, then forgive yourself and move on. This is extremely important in learning to love yourself.

2. Forgive others

You may wonder how forgiving others factors into self-love but it absolutely does. Often when others wrong us we hold them accountable and become angry at the situation or event. We are not angry at them though, we are angry at ourselves for not knowing better, not listening to our intuition, or for allowing ourselves to be put in a situation. The other person is only responsible for their actions. You are responsible for your own actions. You cannot afford to carry around anger and resentment towards another. Free your spirit and forgive others for what they may do. Know that your ability to love and forgive even

when it's difficult, will empower you beyond words, and will nourish your belief in self.

3. Use words of love

Even if we aren't judgmental or critical of others, we can often be too hard on ourselves and hold ourselves to impossible standards. When we make a mistake our inner dialogue can turn negative if we are not in alignment with who we are. Unloving mind chatter can be detrimental to our spiritual expansion. As we go about our life, experiencing all of the ups and downs that life has to offer, make sure the words that flow through your mind are words of love. Say I love you to yourself in the mirror. If you make a mistake tell yourself you still profoundly love and forgive yourself no matter what may happen in your life. These powerful words and the energy that they emit will radiate your core and help you through more stressful times.

4. Belief in self

Belief in self is one of the most powerful energies you can put forth. When you believe in yourself you send waves of energy out to the universe about what you want to happen in your life. The law of attraction states that we attract the essence of what we think about. So when we practice self-belief and truly believe in our spirit, intelligence, and capabilities imagine what will happen when we begin to ask for what we want in life. If you have trouble with belief and need to prove it to yourself, start with a few small things that you can accomplish and say, "See, I am wonderful". Use these small wins as the stepping-stones of

self-belief. Every day demonstrate your belief in self by disallowing fear and embracing the all-knowing energy that is already within you. Approach everything you do with the belief that you will see miraculous results, and you will. Expect the best.

5. Trust your intuition

Often we get gut feelings about things and don't listen, then something happens and we kick ourselves for not listening to our intuition. This happens all of the time, with our bodies, our careers, and decisions we make in daily life. When we are doing any work with the body (whether it is dietary, exercise, or simply focusing on changing the way we feel about it, it is important to listen to that inner voice and hear what it is telling us. This may require turning down the volume on the brain, which can amplify distracting thoughts. Yoga is a great exercise to tune into your innate sense of peace and allow your intuition to shine through. Your intuition is your higher consciousness without all of the mind clutter and fear. Your intuition always knows what is best for you in your life. Make it a practice to listen to it, even when you don't agree.

These five points will help you get to a place of self acceptance and love, which will help you in all areas of your life. Our bodies are nothing to be ashamed of. As human beings we come in all shapes and sizes. Every soul on this planet is beautiful. Look for the beauty in everyone. Find it in their smile, or their eyes or their warmth. Know that you possess this beauty too. People who only focus on superficial beauty are not really seeing beauty. They are seeing a mirage of what they think is beauty. True beauty is not

something that can be explained, defined, or bought in a department store. It just is.

When you love your body and your self, you will begin to notice just how beautiful everyone on this planet is.

The next time you are standing in front of the mirror criticizing yourself for a bit of extra weight around the belly, or a facial feature that you don't like, give your head a shake. Catch yourself doing it and repeat to yourself "I am much more than this body. I am an energy being experiencing a human existence. I am pure love and beauty". Know that what you see in the mirror is important to your expansion as a human. You must not get caught up in such superficial things. It is the dis-ease of our time to judge others and ourselves in such a harsh manner. When we love our body we are not concerned with what others think. The most important person is you. What you think is more important than what anybody else thinks. Bring yourself to a place of love and acceptance, even if you are not completely satisfied with your health or weight at this time. Give yourself permission to see your true inner beauty. Tell yourself what you love about yourself and repeat this until you believe it. Feel it in your core. Then, and only then will you see how easy it is to manifest your health and wellness goals. We cannot come from a place of self-criticism and punishment if we want to experience a balanced mind, body and spirit. Love yourself every single day. Know that with your self-love will come the body you desire, the health that you hope for, and the energy that you may have been seeking for a long time but have been unable to find. Everything changes when you can look at yourself and say I love you. Stand naked in front of the mirror and face your truth. Your skin, your hair, your eyes, your smile – It is all beautiful. But it is nothing compared to

the beauty that resides within you, and the light that comes from the very core of your being.

You are beautiful. Believe it.

CHAPTER 8: ACTIVE LIVING

“Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it.”

- Plato

As species of the human race, our bodies are accustomed to a certain amount of physical activity and exercise. Over the years we have become very good at eliminating the activity in our lives in favor of convenience. Most of the products we buy, activities we engage in, or meals we prepare are designed with the least amount of work and time involved. We have become creatures of convenience; to our own detriment. Our lives are more sedentary than ever, especially when we work at jobs that involve a long day of sitting. We wake up, sit in our cars and drive to work, sit for 8 hours at work, drive home again, and then often sit again in front of the television as a means of relaxation. Even though we may sit for long periods of time at work, our minds are not in a state of peace and relaxation while we are working, so when we get home the first thing we want to do is sit and take a load off.

The problem with this way of life is that it is making us unhealthy. Our bodies are physically not meant to do so much sitting and resting and when things start to go wrong inside of us; it can often be attributed to lifestyle concerns. Leading a sedentary life causes a whole host of problems including; obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. These are serious health concerns that can lead to death. Who would have thought that sitting could lead us to death? But it can. Our lives of convenience and technology have planted us in front of screens for extended periods of time. We spend more time online

looking at a screen than ever before. Even those who don't have a job looking at a computer screen may come home and look at a computer screen as a means of socialization and relaxation.

Obviously with the introduction of technology to our lives some things have changed. Technology has enabled us to do a lot of wonderful things and has advanced us collectively as a species. The problem is not with technology, or television, or the number of hours we work. The problem is with our lack of balance among these things. We don't place the same importance on taking care of our bodies and ourselves as we do with looking after our families, jobs, and homes. What good are we to anybody if we are too tired to get off the couch, or can't muster the motivation to go for a walk.

If you do have a job where you sit in front of a screen all day clicking away on your mouse, then perhaps you need to consider ways that you can modify your working life to include some physical activity, some outdoor time, and a change in your normal routine.

Here are some ways for you to keep active at work:

1. Take the stairs

If you work in an office building that has an elevator, try taking the stairs every once in a while. You will be amazed at how much exercise you can get in a day simply by taking the stairs in the morning, at lunch and after work. For extra fun you can even run up and down them a few times at lunch or after work to get a good workout.

2. Park far away from the entrance

Don't circle around looking for the closest parking spot to the door. Instead, park the furthest from the door and walk. This little exercise will help burn off some calories while giving you a few extra steps to take each day.

3. Wear a pedometer

Pedometers are great for measuring how many steps you take each day. You don't have to only wear them for a traditional workout though. You can wear them all day at work. Measure the steps you take, set daily goals for yourself and increase those goals as you become engaged in the act of counting your steps each day and being aware of your activity level.

4. Organize a workout group

Chances are if you work in an office environment, it's not just you who's noticing the extra pounds you are putting on with the lunches and office birthday cakes. Your coworkers are likely feeling it too. Talk to a few work friends and organize a workout group. You can powerwalk, jog, or even go to the gym together. Check in with each other weekly with your weight loss and fitness goals. Keep each other motivated and on track.

5. Don't email. Walk.

We often get into the habit of emailing our coworkers to ask questions and get information, when it would be easier, faster, and healthier for us to get up from our desk and walk over to their office or cubicle. We think we are saving time by emailing, but when emails go back and forth, we actually waste time when we could have just walked over and had a two-minute conversation. Next time you need an answer to something from someone in the office, walk over and speak to them in person. Not only is this better for your health, but you will build stronger relationships with your peers as well.

Chances are, unless you are already super motivated and doing a fantastic job with being active, you are feeling the pressure to do something about it. We know intrinsically that we cannot live sedentary lives and eat foods that are built around convenience. We all have that inner voice inside of us that tells us we should do something and prompts us to think about the state of our health and bodies. But what about when that little voice isn't enough? What do we do when that voice has been replaced by indifference. Sometimes we know we should be doing something, but can't be bothered to try or can't muster the motivation to start.

If you find yourself in this difficult place of apathy, fear not. There are things you can do right now to make yourself feel better and get to a place of greater motivation.

DON'T do it for your body

That may seem strange, but when you are unmotivated and not feeling inspired to look after yourself, the last thing that will motivate you is doing something “for your body”. You are not there yet. You are at the stage of needing to find the motivation, and unfortunately if getting in shape was a good enough reason, you would already be living an active life. You know logically that you will be happier when you lose a few pounds, firm up, and feel more energetic, but the gravity of daily life and responsibility has taken a toll on you. Perhaps you are so exhausted that the idea of doing any exercise or fitting anything else in to your daily routine is overwhelming and unrealistic for you. Don't feel guilty if this is you. It happens to the best of us.

Instead of running out and joining a gym, starting a powerwalking regime or going to yoga with your friends, think about something active that you LOVE to do. This can be anything from swimming to flying a kite, or walking the dog. Perhaps there are a few things that you can think of. Write them down. Think about how you feel when you do these activities. Does it feel like work? If it is something you truly enjoy, you will feel much more motivated to get out and do it, and will be more likely to find the time to enjoy it. Don't do it for the health or weight loss benefits. First just choose something that is fun, without thinking about how many calories you are burning. Choose a goal that is realistic for you. Maybe it is only once per week to start. When you start enjoying this activity once per week you may choose to increase your frequency to three times per week. There are no hard and fast rules. Just get out and do something that you find

enjoyment in. Your motivation will start to come back when you feel happy, inspired and are engaging in activities that you love.

When you are feeling good and happy again, you will find it much easier to honor your body and will find that you have a natural instinct to do so.

Get enough sleep

When we get four hours of sleep, work all day, then come home to wash dishes and do laundry, is it any wonder that we don't feel very energetic? As adults, we need about 7-8 hours of sleep per night in order to feel our best. We can even function on 5-6 (although not recommended), but any less than that and you begin building sleep debt. This sleep debt accumulates making you feel tired, sluggish and out of sorts until you eventually spend a whole day sleeping just to catch up.

A consistent amount of sleep will help you feel energetic, motivated, and decrease stress. Being less tired will also make you more effective at work because you can think clearly and make better decisions. When we are tired our brains don't work the same way they do when we are well rested. Getting enough sleep is important for our overall health and vitality. Try going to bed an hour earlier for a week and watch the difference that it makes to the way that you feel. Often we aren't fully aware of how little sleep we are getting until we make a change to our bedtime routine. Going to bed earlier is something simple that you can do and experience immediate benefit from. Unlike

working out that takes weeks to months to notice a difference, you will notice a difference the very next day when you have a good night's sleep.

Eat food from the earth

It goes without saying that we aren't meant to ingest words that we can't pronounce. The human body is incredibly resilient and it is a marvel to think that we can treat it the way we do and still have it function in the way that we need it to. We eat chemicals and preservatives and inhale pollution; we ignore our body's need for sunshine, exercise and sleep. Yet every day our heart still beats and our brains still function. Imagine now if you only ate the foods that were healthy and natural for you to eat. Food from the earth is natural. Vegetables and fruit grow from the earth and it makes sense for us to eat those things. Our bodies can break them down and digest them properly. When you eat a diet that consists of mostly natural food from the earth, you will notice that your body thrives on this. You feel energetic, happy and even your bowel movements are better.

Sometimes we get so used to eating fried, unhealthy food that we don't even realize the impact it is having on our bodies. Even if you aren't overweight and you are eating unnatural foods, it is still having an impact on your energy, brain and stress. Change it up. Even if only for a week; experiment with yourself. Try eating only natural food from the earth and see the difference that it makes in you. Eating healthy food that your body loves will give you more energy and make your brain function at a higher capacity. You will find it easier to be active and have more of a natural interest in moving your body. Stress and exhaustion seem to go away when you eliminate bad food from your diet.

Our bodies are communicating to us all the time about what they like and don't like, it is up to us to listen and adopt healthy practices. We can't expect to live a long and healthy life if we aren't treating our bodies with love and respect. Eating food from the earth is a natural way for us to nourish our human bodies and is a great way to love our selves in a way that resonates with the universe.

One of the common misconceptions with living an active life is that being active is just more work, or that it takes a lot of commitment and dedication to keep active and a lot of long hours in the gym. If this is your view of being active is it any wonder that you don't feel motivated to get up and moving? Being active should be a way of life rather than a job or obligation. Keeping active can be fun, inspiring, motivational, and bring new meaning to your life. Don't view it as a job; view it as a life enhancement.

Think about what makes you tick. What activities did you used to love as a child or a young adult? Perhaps you used to be on the track team or you were a dragon boater. Maybe you just loved to ride your bike. Think about all of the ways that you have been active in your life in the past and what it was about those activities that made you feel alive and rejuvenated. You can feel that way again.

Another possibility is that you haven't found an activity that makes you feel alive yet. And that is okay too. That just means that you get to start experimenting. If you aren't sure what type of activity you would enjoy, ask yourself "What have I always wanted to try?" Chances are your intuition will have a little bit of insight to share with you on this one. Our higher self always knows what is best for us and just wants us to be happy and

enjoy life. Our intuition knows the things that we need to invite into our lives be it activities, hobbies, lifestyle, or relationships. Start writing down some ideas and let your creativity take over. Imagine there were no limits (physical, financial or otherwise). What would you do? Next, check out what is happening in your community. What groups, classes, or centers are available to help you accomplish your activity goals? Start experimenting. If you don't want to commit to an entire series of classes or a season, ask if you can try one class. Call around and talk to people and explain that you are looking for something to enjoy. Maybe it's ballroom dancing, maybe it's kayaking or mountain biking. It certainly doesn't have to be four times a week in the gym on the treadmill; unless of course, that appeals to you.

Sometimes our reasons for not keeping active are more psychological than they are anything else. As we get older we think far too much about the roles and responsibilities that we are supposed to adopt as adults. When children play they don't worry about how they look, or if they are engaging in an age appropriate activity. They are in the moment with play and enjoying every minute of it. Forget about how old you are and what is appropriate for your age. If you want to skateboard, go jump on a skateboard and do it. If you want to roll down a grassy hill with your children on your side, do it. Worrying about what other people think just keeps us from experiencing true joy.

Psychological barriers about what we should be doing and what others will think often keep us from living the life that we are meant to live. Think about a time when you looked at something and thought that you would really like to experience it, but then didn't because you thought that it wasn't appropriate or that you "shouldn't" be doing it

for some reason. Instead of paying attention to how we feel and what makes us happy, we overlook that in favor of social convention and act in accordance to what we think others want.

It's time to stop doing that.

It's time to start living for you. Forget about what people think, want and expect. This doesn't mean that you have to be rude or disrespectful in any way. It simply means that it is time to honor the self. Live for you, not for others. You will be able to share yourself more readily and will have more to give when you are living in your own light. We must nurture ourselves and give our minds, bodies, and spirits a chance to thrive and grow into the beings that we truly are. We must break free from those lower vibrations and expand ourselves into a higher plane of consciousness that allows us to live fluidly experiencing all that life has to offer.

Watch a child at play. Notice how they move from activity to activity with a sense of wonder and openness. They don't worry who's watching or worry if they look silly. They embrace joy, experience and live in the present moment. We can learn a lot by observing children at play. As we grow older and become more responsible, we forget to give our spirit that essential role of play. We as adults need to play as well. The world is our playground. Of course we have responsibilities, families and obligations to attend to as well, but it is also our obligation as an energetic being experiencing human life on this planet to indulge our spirit in the joy of life. Does work, laundry and paying bills make you feel exhilarated, alive and connected to the universe? Probably not. But those

are necessary parts of life that we must deal with before we can allow ourselves the time to play. What we must be careful of, however is that we don't overlook play in lieu of those things. If we don't give ourselves time to have fun in life we become disengaged and can easily get depressed or angry in every day situations. Our spirit knows when it is being stifled. Think about how you feel when you work at a job that you hate and know you shouldn't be doing. When we are not acting in accordance to our true nature, and living in our light, our spirit knows this and communicates this to us routinely until we "get it" and make a change in our life. The same is true with keeping active and having fun. We aren't supposed to sit for 12 hours a day in front of various screens. Our human bodies were designed to move and be active, whatever that means for you. Your inner voice nags at you when you are living in a way that is stifling your true nature and suffocating your spirit. The unfortunate part is that we have to navigate through all of the complexities of modern life in order to come to the realization that we need to be in tune with our spirit. Being in tune with your spirit doesn't only mean being active (especially if you already are). It simply means that you listen for the inner cues that your intuition provides to help you experience joy.

The reason why being active helps us to experience joy is because being sedentary isn't natural. So when we move our bodies, get outside and have fun our body thrives on this and we release endorphins in our body, which heighten our feelings of wellbeing and happiness. Keeping active helps to ward off depression and just makes us happier all around.

Including the family

If you are like me, you probably remember being a kid and running around outside for hours playing and having fun with friends. These days kids have fun online, on their gaming consoles and in front of the TV. They aren't exactly rushing out the door to play soccer or hide and seek anymore. The tragedy of this is that kids too aren't getting enough exercise and are facing weight issues, much like their adult counterparts. Our society as a whole has become less active and codependent on convenience and technology.

Our kids learn from their parents behavior, so if they see their parents driving around the corner to the store or opting to drive them to school instead of walk, chances are they are going to choose the easy route when given the opportunity to choose. Children learn how to live by example and by what they experience in the home, and with many families working 60+ hours per week it's no wonder that it's hard to muster the motivation to go hiking with the family or to cook a meal together. It's exhausting and life gets in the way of those things sometimes. But more than ever it is important for us to put forth the energy to the universe to change the things in our lives that cause us to be out of alignment. Bring balance back to your life, back to the family, and back to the self. Work is important, and so is money, but absolutely nothing is more important than your health and wellbeing. When we put all of our energy into work and money, what room does that leave for self-nourishment and spending quality time with loved ones?

Your spirit craves this balance, as you have probably known or discovered if you have been in this position yourself. If you feel like you aren't spending enough time with your family, or that you aren't getting outside enough or doing enough together as a family, there is good reason for that. Don't discount those feelings. Those subtle messages are gifts from the universe asking you to make a small change that will have a big impact on your life. We don't just have these recurring thoughts or nagging feelings for nothing. This is our inner spirit pleading with us to please make a change.

The problem with families today is that everyone is too busy, too distracted and too disconnected – from each other. You can't have a quality conversation with your son or daughter while peering over your laptop, and you can't be in the moment with your parents while you're texting your friends. We are all distracted and concentrating on the wrong things in life. We think we are connected because we have hundreds of friends online, when in fact the people who are right there in front of us are being neglected and ignored in favor of artificial connections. Your online friends are not the ones that you are going to turn to when you need a shoulder to cry on, they are not the ones that are going to love you unconditionally or do anything for you. Sure you may have some fantastic and amazing friendships with beautiful people that you have met online, but they are not under your roof or right there in front of you. And it is those people, that are right there in front of you that deserve your attention the most.

Get outside with your loved ones

Most families today find it difficult to get out and do things together. The kids have their own social lives, and so do the parents, add to that a busy 5 day workweek and getting outside as a family seems like an impossible feat. The good news is that it isn't impossible. No matter how old your children are, you can still make time for them. If you don't have children, then think about someone else in your life that means a lot to you. It doesn't just have to be one person. Get outside with your family. This is so important because even when you think you are spending time with them if you are in the house you are more than likely being distracted by the phone, the computer, the television and possibly one or more mobile devices.

Step away from the screen. It will be there when you get back. Get outside and enjoy nature together with your family or loved ones. Whether it is just sitting out in the backyard or a walk around the neighborhood, getting outside is great for helping to keep you active as a family and is also a great way for you all to reconnect on an emotional level.

Here are some helpful tips to get your family moving and connecting together:

1. No phones rule

Whether you are going on a day trip or just heading out for a half hour. Make a hard rule of no phones. This means everyone. Leaving your phones at home will keep you in the moment with what you are doing and keep your conversations and experiences in the present moment instead of you trying to divide your time between your loved ones and the latest email or text you received. Mobile

phones are great at keeping us connected to the outside world, but sometimes we just need to switch off from those connections and switch on to the ones right in front of us. Namely your family and loved ones.

2. Set a realistic goal

If you rarely spend time with those who are closest to you it may be a stretch to all of a sudden announce that you will be spending an hour per day hiking a trail together. Instead start small with a realistic goal and choose something that is enjoyable for everyone. Perhaps you may choose to go canoeing once per week or bike riding on Saturdays. Whatever you choose, stick to it and make sure that it is something that everyone will enjoy. If you are faced with push back from children who think it's a dumb idea, explain that it means a lot and that you would really appreciate their support and participation. You may want to let the objecting members of your family be the ones to choose the activity. This will ensure that you are giving them a voice and allowing them to make a decision on behalf of the whole family. Set a realistic goal that you will be able to keep. The point is to introduce more activity to your family, get away from technology for a while and reconnect with the great outdoors. Doing this will make you closer as a family and help your communication with each other so you can reconnect and stay in the present moment of life.

3. Change it up

A great way to keep everyone interested and engaged in doing something new as a family is to keep it interesting. How do you keep it interesting? Change it up

and make room for flexibility and growth. Step outside of your comfort zone and ask your family to do the same. Maybe instead of choosing the same activity every week you can agree to try something new every time. As long as it involves some kind of activity and gets you all outside spending time together, that is the ultimate goal. You don't have to be strict about doing the same thing each time. Sometimes the excitement of something new can bring you closer and allow you to connect in new ways. You can introduce new traditions to your active family time. Develop your own rituals and traditions that will make each outing special and memorable. Consider letting each member choose an activity. Each week you could rotate. That way everyone gets to pick something. The only rule is that it has to involve some kind of activity and preferably be an outdoor activity (weather permitting). The act of getting everyone excited and involved in the decisions will help make this time special to your family (or loved ones) and will be the stuff that beautiful memories are made from.

There are so many reasons for you to embrace an active lifestyle, the least of which are your waistline or fitting into those old jeans from high school. What the scale says will be a natural byproduct of having an active life, but the true value will lie in how you feel, the quality of life you experience, and the impact that it will have on the people in your life. We don't know how long we have here on earth to experience this beautiful human experience. It may all be taken from us tomorrow. To live in any other place other than the present moment is just silly. Yesterday has come and gone and tomorrow isn't here

yet, so why would we stress or worry about something that has passed or hasn't arrived yet.

Keeping active is another method for us to practice being present with mindfulness. You may not think that being active and engaging in sports or exercise is a meditative thing, but there are some huge meditative qualities. When we are focused on an activity or an exercise we are very present in that moment. We concentrate on what we are doing at the time. If we are spending time with our family bike riding, hiking, canoeing or playing volleyball, we are doing that thing. This means that we aren't worrying about how to pay the mortgage, or stressing about work relationships and social situations. We are doing exactly what we are meant to be doing by staying present with our family and the activities that we engage in.

Staying active doesn't even have to mean exercise, it can even just be walking casually talking to each other. Getting the family out for a post-holiday dinner walk can be a wonderful way to spend time together while getting outside of the house. Does your family have access to a cottage or campground? The great thing about a cottage is that they are often on a lake and have very little in the way of technology. With camping and cottaging you tend to sit outside more, swim, play cards, sit by the fire and talk. These are incredibly important moments that will have a lasting effect on the entire family.

As we get older and look back on our lives to reflect the moments that held the greatest meaning, it isn't the day we brought home the new TV or the first time we sent an email from our mobile phone that are going to be the days we remember and cherish most. It

is the days we spent connecting with our loved ones. The time we spent, the conversations and laughs we shared and how those moments made us feel. It may seem strange to you that I view these things as being connected to an active lifestyle, but they truly are. We connect with people in such a different way through activity than we do through daily life.

Being active also gives us the time and space to think. Because we are in the moment with what we are doing (be it walking, biking, or taking a class of some kind) it presses the reset button for us. We aren't stressing or worrying when we are being active. We are there in the moment of what we are experiencing. This rejuvenates our mind, body and spirit and makes us feel whole again. The feelings of exhilaration and happiness that come from doing something active are what lend way to clear thinking and rational thought. If we sit around all day worrying and stressing about problems, those problems sometimes get bigger and become increasingly bothersome. We may not have an answer to a problem or be able to figure it out, but getting out and doing something active in the midst of a stress crisis is often the catalyst to change that we need. Being active clears our head and lets us take a momentary break from the stressors and challenges of our daily lives. We work too much, sleep too little, eat too quickly and worry too frequently. All of this can be balanced out by adding some activity to your lifestyle.

You are worth it. Every day when you wake up and stand in front of that mirror tell yourself that you are worth it. You deserve happiness and balance in your life. You deserve to feel excitement and exhilaration. You deserve to feel proud of yourself for

stepping outside of your comfort zone, trying something new, or staying committed to a personal goal. Work will always be there and so will many of the stressors we face in daily life, but there is only one person who can change the quality of your life and that person is you. You are the only one that can decide to make your life better by giving yourself the opportunity to thrive. Test it out and see how you feel. Give yourself one month as a trial and if you don't feel significantly better, happier, and more alive then go back to the way that you were before happily knowing that you are okay.

Life happens out there where the trees, air, grass and earth is. These buildings and structures and cars are all man-made inventions that have taken us further away from who we are. Our goal in life is to live in the true light of that which we are. Our connection to our spirit and to the earth is a key component to this. The universe will go on regardless of whether we send out that last email or show up for work today. We are part of a magnificently beautiful system of design. It is a blessing and a marvel that we get to be here on this earth experiencing life in the way that we do. As humans we have done incredible things and advanced our beings to new heights with our innovation and creativity. But not all of what we have done is good, and not all of our systems are healthy. Because of this, we must carve out space for ourselves in the jungle of humanity to breathe and experience the energy and light of our being. We are pure light and love. Sometimes it's easy to forget that in the midst of consumerism and chronic workaholism. Our intentions are always good. We want the best for ourselves, our families and want to leave a legacy behind us when we go. The reason why we work so hard and buy nice things is all to do with happiness. We want to be happy and we want

to do well in life. Well part of being happy and doing well is feeling well. A big part of feeling well is treating our bodies with love and respect. If you don't love and respect your body, how can you feel well?

Living an active life and modifying your lifestyle to include activities that get you off of your couch and outside will enhance your life in ways you cannot imagine. The benefits are not only present in our physical wellbeing but also in our emotional and mental wellbeing as well. Being more active increases our intelligence, decreases our stress, increases our cardiovascular health, makes us feel happier and more balanced, gives us longevity and keeps us in the present moment of life, where the magic is.

Turn off the TV, the mobile phone and the computer and get outside for a walk, run, or bike ride. Your connection to the earth is an essential part of reconnecting to your inner spirit. Notice how amazingly beautiful this world is, and take the time to appreciate it and express your gratitude for it. Keeping active grounds us in ways that are of benefit far beyond our bodies.

CHAPTER 9: FOOD FOR LIFE

“Shipping is a terrible thing to do to vegetables. They probably get jet-lagged, just like people. “

- Elizabeth Berry

The food we eat has a tremendous impact on the way we feel emotionally, physically and spiritually. Our food can elevate our mood, heighten our senses and increase our body's vitality; or it can do the opposite and make us sick. Unfortunately through our age of convenience and comfort, we have become disconnected to our food in many ways as a society. We have lost the pride and meaning of preparing and enjoying a meal with our family. At one time, preparing a meal and sitting down as a family to enjoy it was a daily occurrence. Today we eat out, reach for the grocery store freezer and simply prepare foods for ourselves and families that are nutritionally vacant and leave our bodies feeling tired and sluggish. We ingest chemicals and toxins daily and have become accustomed to this. If you can't pronounce an ingredient or have never heard of it, is it really something you want to put into your body?

As our collective consciousness increases, people are starting to wonder about their food. We see more documentaries and movements towards healthy clean food and locally grown produce. The reason for this is that we have an inherent knowing that processed food and chemicals are not healthy for us. We have always known this, but somewhere along the way we stopped focusing on our food and allowed ourselves to become victims of convenience consumption. We allowed this to happen to ourselves

because our priorities were askew. It is up to us and nobody else to care for our bodies, minds and souls. Food is physical nourishment and one of the ways in which we care for ourselves.

We are what we eat

What does your diet say about you? Think about the foods that you consume on a daily basis. All food carries a certain energy or essence with it. When we think of French fries, potato chips and soft drinks we can say that the energy of those things is unhealthy, addictive, and spiritually void. They are packed with fat, chemicals sugar and/or sodium. If we want to live a long happy life on this planet, why on earth would we eat these things with any sort of regularity? Now think about the essence of a tomato or a head of lettuce. Think about how those things come about. Imagine them growing and being nourished by the sunlight and the rain. These are foods from the earth. They aren't being manufactured in a processing plant, they don't contain chemicals that we've never heard of, and they make our bodies feel healthy and uplifted. Eating these foods creates a connection to the universe. We are creatures of light born from the energy of the universe. Food that comes from the earth is spiritually aligned with the energy of the universe.

Our bodies are incredibly resilient. We make so many poor choices and yet the systems of our body continue on carrying us throughout each day, giving us subtle cries for help every now and then; asking us for nourishment. The food that we ingest on a regular basis represents where we are in our life and often is a good indicator of how well or

how poor we are treating ourselves. Eating over processed foods that are riddled with chemicals and toxins will have serious effects on our body. We will amass a great degree of toxicity inside of our bodies. Sometimes we cannot see the damage that has been done, but our bodies become addicted to harmful chemicals because we get used to ingesting them. Did you hear that? When we eat poorly, we train our bodies to tolerate and crave more of what keeps us sick, turning our precious sacred vessels into a toxic wasteland.

Eating clean food from the earth has not only a tremendous impact on the way your body feels inside, but also on your emotional and spiritual health too. Whole foods that are unprocessed and simple allow us to reconnect with our food source again. We take the mystery out of our food and can visualize the process from growth to preparation. What's even better is growing and preparing that food ourselves. That act alone provides a great deal of connection and love to our food source. Clean food is simple, natural and comes from the earth. There are no harmful additives or unknown chemicals found in these foods. Try eating organically grown produce for a week or two. Cut out the fats, sugars, and carbs. If you can't pronounce an ingredient or don't know what it is, don't put it into your body. Your body is your temple. Take responsibility for it and give it the nourishment that it wants and needs. You will be amazed at how your body thrives when you eat clean natural food.

Listen to your body

Our bodies are communicating to us all the time. They tell us when we have eaten too much, too little, and even what it likes and doesn't like. Many of us ignore the intelligence of our body's communication. We continue to eat food that we know isn't healthy for us even despite our body's repeated attempts at providing us with signs and signals that we may be harming ourselves. There are a number of physical signs and symptoms that our bodies give us as a result of poor eating.

Some of these signs include:

- Weakness & Tiredness
- Headaches
- Weight Gain or Loss
- Indigestion & Heartburn
- Irritable Bowel
- Nausea
- Bloating
- Depression
- Mental Foggiess

Sometimes our food is affecting us physically and we aren't even aware of just how harmful it is. We often think that our symptoms are a result of some other medical problem, when in fact simply changing our diet to include more nutrient rich food would be a huge advantage and have the capacity to change the way we feel and the way our

body functions. Sometimes we just need a little bit of motivation to understand how advantageous this can be to us. If you are eating poorly now, becoming a vegetarian over night is probably not realistic or appealing to you. Instead, start small. Make a few sustainable changes one at a time and note the impact of those changes by documenting how you feel. Perhaps you can introduce a green smoothie to your breakfast routine. Instead of wolfing down a muffin and a coffee have a green smoothie instead. Make notes about the way you feel, things you notice and anything that comes to you. Eventually when you are convinced that you can do that and that your body is benefiting from it, you may want to introduce a second change. Perhaps you may choose to cut out sugar next. Whatever changes you make, ensure that you listen to your body. It provides us with a great deal of intelligence and clarity. We simply have to be listening to get the message.

Conscious eating

The food we eat carries a unique vibrational frequency that is dictated by the conditions in which the food was grown or came about. The energy from our food begins at the source, carries through to preparation and ends with consumption. When vegetables are grown in a garden, looked after, nourished and loved, the energy from that food is transferred to us when we eat it. The result is that our bodies feel healthy, nourished and alive; and we feel uplifted by the experience. The same is true for food manufactured in a factory. If we are eating unnatural food that is being treated with chemicals and is being mindlessly prepared by an assembly line worker who feels disconnected and unhappy, we are ingesting that negative energy. The life force of our

food is paramount to how we feel when we are eating. Conscious eating allows us to feel good about our food and think about its source, and create a better relationship with it. If you cannot feel good about the source of your food or do not know or understand where it is coming from and how it is being prepared, you are experiencing a disconnect with your food. There are several things that you can do to create a healthier conscious connection with your food.

Buy organic produce from local farmers markets

There is something to be said for meeting the farmers who grow your food, or at least knowing the name of the farm that your produce was grown on. Farmers markets provide this connection and allow you to experience a deeper relationship to your food. Take a trip around your local farmers market and check out what they have to offer. Many farmers will invite you to their farm to see and experience how they grow their food, they want you to visit and see this. They are proud of their crops and feel good about the way they grow them. Now think about asking to visit a corporate farm production facility and I am sure I don't need to tell you what the answer would be. The act of buying fresh fruits and vegetables that were just plucked from the earth is a very rewarding and joyful experience and quite different than the experience of buying from a grocery store where much of the produce is shipped in on trucks over a period of days. The staff in a grocery store aren't connected to the food like they are at a farmers market because they haven't participated in the process. The people who sell their

crops and goods at a farmers market have poured their heart and soul into it and are passionate about what they do.

If fruits and vegetables had feelings they would tell you that they feel happy at the farmers market. They haven't traveled very far to get there and they are going to go home with families who will respect and appreciate the source from which they came. Next time you are at a farmers market, take note at how lush and vibrant the produce looks. The fruits and vegetables even look happier than they do in a grocery store. This is not an illusion. They really are happier because they have been given the respect and love they deserve, and are fulfilling their duties of feeding the local community.

One area where we must really be conscious is with our meat, because when we eat meat we are ingesting the energy and life force of another once living breathing creature of the earth. In order to respect and thank the animals we consume, we can choose to purchase our meat from farms who raise their animals in ethical conditions, as apposed to farms whose sole purpose is profit and turnaround. Animals are just as important as humans and should be treated with dignity and respect, the same way that we treat each other. Do you really want to eat a chicken that has never seen the light of day or a cow that is being made to eat dried blood from it's deceased ancestors? The way that we have industrialized meat production in our society is both alarming and saddening. We can take greater responsibility for this by refusing to eat unethical food. Find out where your chickens were raised, what your cows are eating. Ask the question.

Eating meat is a personal choice, but if we choose to eat meat we can at least choose to be as responsible with that choice as possible.

Animals and plants are all living things that belong on our planet. We have to consciously think about this before we eat. We must connect with our food in order to appreciate it. Plucking a potato or a beet from the earth is not the same as killing a cow. Think about how you feel when you eat, really take the time to enjoy your food and think about where it came from and how it came about. Visualize your meal as starting from a single seed and picture the growth in your mind.

When practicing conscious eating, consider the following:

Slow down

Take the time to chew and enjoy your meal. Sit down with it and allow your senses to take over. How does the meal smell, taste, and feel? Make meal time a tactile experience and don't rush to eat. Stay in the moment with your meal. If you find your thoughts drifting away from your meal or bouncing into the future with what you are going to do next, gently bring your focus back to the meal. Notice the smells; savor the taste and texture in your mouth as you are eating. Bringing the focus to the present moment while you eat will help you slow down and enjoy your food. This connection also helps you appreciate your food and creates a positive vibrational frequency, which results in happier meal times.

Say thank you

You don't have to be religious to say grace before a meal. Simply saying thank you for this abundant meal and respecting the source from which it came is an empowering way for you to connect to your food. Thank the farmers who grew your vegetables or raised your cattle. Think about everything that your food has gone through before arriving on your plate and take a moment to appreciate and respect that process. Saying thank you will fill you with abundant joy and love and will make you feel a greater connection to the universe and your food.

Avoid multitasking at mealtimes

Put down your mobile phone, switch off the television and close your laptop when you are eating. When you are distracted you cannot consciously eat your meal and enjoy it the same way you can when you are solely focused on it. Avoid engaging in activities that are distracting or noisy while you are eating and seek some solitude with your food. If you are eating with your family or loved ones, focus on sharing the experience of the meal with them. Talk about the taste, texture and smell.

Find the joy in your food

We focus so much about what we shouldn't eat that often we get stressed or anxious at mealtimes because we have created a negative association with our food. This negative association ends up being the reason that we do not enjoy our meals because instead of focusing on the experience of the food, we are focused only on what we are not allowed

to consume. We think about all of the things we cannot eat or shouldn't eat and then reach for something healthier, not because we choose that food but because we are acting on conflicting motivations. Learn to seek out the joy in your food. If you are at the stage where you don't feel good about eating healthy because you feel deprived, try branching out and experiencing varying types of healthy options until you find something that you really enjoy. Enjoying food is as much about taste as it is about the way it makes you feel. Unhealthy food may make you feel happy while you are eating it, but shortly afterwards we often feel tired, sick, or sluggish. This is not the case with healthy food from the earth. Our energy is boundless and carries us throughout an entire day. Fresh food makes us feel alive and creates an inner vibration of wellness.

Don't focus on what you can't or shouldn't eat. That is not the way to look at it. Instead, think about the world of options that are available to you and how those things resonate with your being. Experience the joy in the food that you eat and experiment with different types of vegetables and ingredients until you find something that makes your body, mind and spirit feel harmonious. When experimenting with food, notice all of the flavors and textures, truly allow yourself to stay in the moment with your meal.

Don't be afraid to try new things, even when they are outside of your comfort zone. Experience the joy in your food by eating the things that make you feel happy and connected to your spirit.

Food as part of our spiritual path

The food we consume is as much a spiritual journey as it is a journey of the body. All plants and animals are of this earth and carry a unique vibration. The vibration of animals and humans is higher than the vibration of plants, but all things in our universe express varying levels of consciousness. Even stones give off a vibrational frequency and have an energy that is unique to the type of stone it is. Think about this in the way that you view your food. We are all one in this universe and all have a place here, we must feel gratitude for the gifts of nourishment that are bestowed upon us. Our food is sacred and spiritual because it is not just food that we are ingesting when we eat, we are ingesting energy, consciousness and wisdom from the things that we choose to consume.

When we eat a raw food diet, we are ingesting high frequency foods that are of higher vibration and allow us to connect to source. Through the process of doing this we come to appreciate plants and living things. We discover new things about ourselves and get closer to God, in whatever form that may be for you. Raw food gives us phytonutrients, which are beneficial nutrients that come from plant-based food. These nutrients have the potential to make us feel incredible and help us ward off illness and disease, even prevent cancer. There is a lot to be said for eating fresh fruits and vegetables. Almost everyone who switches to a diet containing an abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables reports feeling happier, less stressed, and more balanced overall. Raw food provides us with an essential spiritual connection to our food because it clears our system out of mental foggiess and gives us clarity and peace of mind. Our food has a tremendous

impact on the way we feel inside and out. When we feel mental clarity we have greater access to wisdom, creativity, ideas and can make decisions which are best for our higher self, rather than poor decisions with brains that are functioning at a lower frequency.

We know that eating a lot of carbohydrates and fatty foods can make us feel sluggish and foggy. We also know that eating a diet rich in nutrients, such as a diet containing a large amount of fresh fruits and vegetables can make us feel alive and alert. What's amazing is that we often make the wrong choice and choose the food that makes us feel the worst, not the best. What if you knew you were getting better, stronger, and more intelligent with every healthy meal you ingested, would you make better choices? That is what happens when you consume a healthy diet. It may not be the things you want to eat, but they are the things that your body wants and needs. Your body's higher intelligence is communicating this to you by showing you how you feel when you eat this way.

Making room for reality

The reality is that most of us don't want to only eat fresh fruits and vegetables day after day. We have to allow ourselves some room for indulgence, otherwise we would not be very happy and would feel that we are missing out on some of the fun things in life.

Think about what your weakness is. Perhaps it is chocolate, or cupcakes, or potato chips. If you allowed yourself to eat these things once per week, and ate a healthy diet the rest of the week, you would appreciate and savor the taste of the indulgence to a greater degree, and you would become accustomed to treating your body with love and respect

the rest of the week. If you allow yourself one day where you relax your diet and let yourself eat whatever you feel like eating, you won't feel as if you are missing out on something and will be more likely to succeed with your healthy eating habits during the rest of the week. Another important factor is guilt; we don't feel guilty about eating something sweet or fatty when we are eating healthy 6 out of 7 days per week. We feel more entitled to allow ourselves to go a little crazy and have some fun. Then, the following day we are likely to look forward to going back to our healthy diet again. So don't tell yourself that you can never enjoy a double chocolate cupcake ever again and resort to the fact that if you are going to make some lifestyle changes, you will still be able to indulge in the occasional treat.

Kidding yourself with convenience

Many of us get caught up in the great myth of convenience. We think that we are somehow doing ourselves a service to prepare a quick meal that we can pop in the oven or microwave, when in fact we are doing ourselves a great disservice. The notion that eating this way is convenient is almost comical. Is it convenient to gain weight and feel bad about our bodies, or to feel tired and sluggish? Is it convenient to have health problems and pass poor eating habits on to your children? You are kidding yourself if you fall victim to the convenience factor. Most times when we tell ourselves this story it is because we are misinformed, inexperienced with healthy food, or lacking in motivation. When you begin preparing healthy meals for yourself and your family, you will see how quickly you can prepare a meal that is packed with nutrients and good health. A salad requires no cooking at all and can be made faster than any convenience

food. If you like chicken in your salad pick a day to cook some chicken breasts and keep them in the fridge for future use in your salads. If salads aren't your thing, you can always do steamed veggies, bean salads or smoothies. To make a green smoothie in the morning takes about 5 minutes and will keep you going until lunchtime. Pack your smoothie with spinach, apple, banana, blueberries, lime juice and water. Adjust your ingredients for taste. You will be getting so many nutrients and will feel satisfied and energetic. Try doing this every day for a week and then you will see that it really is convenient and makes you feel better in the long run than any fast food possibly could.

Trust your intuition

When it comes to your diet, trust in your intuition. Your higher self knows what is best for you and you will have a sense when you eat something if your body likes it or not. A lot of it will be common sense, but sometimes you may have to listen to the queues that your body is providing you with. Don't keep trying to eat something because it is good for you. Sometimes you will simply not like a certain food, and that is okay. Move onto something else. Healthy eating provides us with a world of opportunity; it's not just about salads and nuts. There are many great websites that can help you find easy and delicious recipes using the ingredients that you like most. Listen to the inner wisdom of your body to guide you with your eating. If you feel bad about eating something or that you shouldn't, it may be that your body is trying to tell you to reach for a healthier alternative.

When we are looking after our homes and our cars we spend a lot of time finding out what the problem is, asking questions, and getting to the core of the matter. Why would we not do the same with the most important asset of all, our body? We take them for granted and spend our lives treating symptoms that may not even be there if we were to eat and nourish our bodies the way they really want to be nourished. Our hospitals and waiting rooms are packed with people seeking help for physical symptoms related to poor eating choices. Type 2 Diabetes is a man made disease that is a direct result of a poor diet. It has been said that our body contains everything it needs to repair and heal itself, so long as it is properly nourished.

Follow your intuition and lead your body to a place of higher vibration by eating food from the earth that is plant-based and high in nutrition. Just listen to how your body responds when you allow yourself the luxury of eating this way.

Food & sharing

Have you ever noticed the way you feel when you are sitting around a dinner table with good friends or family sharing an incredible home cooked meal? Sharing in the experience of a meal is a great way to connect with your food and enhance the experience by enjoying it with others. Our hearts expand and our spirits soar when we share and give to others, and there is no greater gift you can bestow on someone than the gift of a home cooked meal prepared with love and attention. When you go to a McDonalds restaurant the experience of sharing a burger and fries with your family is not the same as having a picnic with them in a park with things that you have prepared

in the home. The energy that you bring to the food when you prepare it, cooked or not, is paramount to the experience of sharing a meal. Your intention when you cook for others is to make others happy and fulfilled. That intention carries such a positive vibration, that it permeates through the food and into the people who ingest it. This is why the experience of sitting down to a meal with family is very different than going out to a fast food restaurant. Have you ever noticed that you can taste the passion of a chef at a really great restaurant? The food tastes brilliant because they love what they do and they love to share that passion with diners.

Consider all of the ways in which you interact with food. What is your relationship like currently? How can you improve the experience of eating and enjoying your meals? We all eat on a daily basis and go through our days getting hungry, eating, and drinking. Conscious eating can completely change the way we interact and feel about our meals and bring us to a place of light and love. Food is a spiritual experience, and so your relationship to food should be one of respect, appreciation, and enjoyment. Healthy eating isn't meant to be miserable and make you feel unhappy, in fact the opposite. Healthy eating should make you feel amazing and uplifted, it gives you the energy and vitality you need to be more and do more. Your higher self only wants the best for you in this human life, and eating a diet that is loaded with fat, carbohydrates, sugar and sodium only takes away from your quality of life here on earth. Your higher self knows this, and your body knows this and repeatedly attempts to communicate this to you when you mistreat it.

We are getting better as a society and have been placing a greater emphasis on locally grown produce, gardening, and clean food. Our collective consciousness has been raising and so too have our standards for what we are willing to accept in our lives. We know that the way we have been doing things is not sustainable and does not help the planet or each other. Every time we visit our grocery store we have a choice to make. We can buy locally grown organic produce, or we can buy vegetables that have been shipped from thousands of miles away and have been sitting on trucks for days. Similarly, we can buy meat that is born from unhealthy conditions and negative karma, or we can buy meat from ethical conditions where the animals actually get to enjoy their lives and feel good. When you head out to the store to buy your groceries, think about every item that you put into your cart. If you are unsure about something find out. Know what you are putting into your body. It is your right and your responsibility to know this, and it is perhaps one of the best things you can do to honor and love yourself, ensuring a long and healthy life.

CHAPTER 10: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR LIFE

“Take your life in your own hands, and what happens? A terrible thing: no one to blame.”

- Erica Jong

Life doesn't just “happen” to us. Our lives are the result of decisions, and conscious choices that we make each and every day on a moment-by-moment basis. We are not like the boat without a sail, at the mercy of the waves of life, although sometimes it may feel that way. We are in control at every step and have the ability to change and evolve our position at every point in time. We steer the ship and get to decide where we go and how we get there. Never underestimate the power that you have over your own life. At times it may seem that you have no control, but this simply isn't true and is only your mind feeding you thoughts that cause you to believe that. Most times when we feel out of control, it is because we have not done anything to demonstrate our control. Fear is a dangerous emotion that can wreak havoc on our stress, emotional wellbeing, and our overall health. When we live in a state of fear and allow fear-based emotions to control our thought patterns and choices, we can lose our sense of direction and feel out of alignment with the universe. The wonderful thing about this, however, is that when this happens it is a gentle reminder that we must re-center ourselves and connect with our intuition once again to guide us on our life journey.

Following your intuition

Have you ever had a nagging feeling that you should get off the highway and then stayed on against your better judgment only to realize that there was an accident up ahead? If you are like most, there are countless examples of times when you ignored your intuition because your thoughts became louder than your feelings. Trusting our intuition isn't always as easy or cut and dry as it seems. Our thoughts often try to keep us thinking in terms of fight or flight, and are always attempting to assess risk. The conflict with this is that if we listened to our intuition more often, we wouldn't need those primitive reactions in the first place. Our intuition is our higher guidance system and can sense things before we even see or register them. Intuition is an intelligent form of communication that comes from within us. This information is unclouded by thoughts, judgment, or fear. It is pure information based on what is best for us. When we follow our intuition, we can make positive decisions in our life that lead to a happier more fulfilled life.

This same rule of intuition applies to our health. We are prone to question our intuition because we listen to our thoughts, even when we have an unmistakable nagging thought nipping at our heels. Where we get confused sometimes is between intuition and fear, but this is because we simply haven't mastered the listening part yet. When you feel inside that something is wrong with you but then brush it off telling yourself that it will go away, you may just be getting a cold or you are just worn out; these are rationalizations that are rooted in fear. Your inner guidance is trying to prompt you to go to the doctor and get yourself checked out, but your fear is trying to keep you feeling

safe and normal by providing you with thoughts that are an attempt at making you believe that everything is fine. Where it gets tricky is when the reverse is true; when you have an inner knowing that everything is fine but your fear about getting ill or dying causes you to believe that something is very wrong with you. We often turn to the Internet to look up our symptoms and end up feeling terrified about what may be wrong with us because we've spent an hour researching worst-case scenarios. This interferes with your natural intuition and causes you to feel anxiety about being ill. You may exaggerate your feelings unconsciously because of what you read and begin feeling much worse than you did before you researched your symptoms. This is an example of when your intuition gets completely drowned out. You knew that you were fine on some level, but you still had doubt. You didn't trust your intuition and began instead, looking for evidence to prove that your intuition was wrong.

As human beings we tend to distrust our intuition often, we don't believe that this amazingly accurate higher guidance system could possibly exist inside of us. So when our intuition tries to warn us of something, or tell us what we need – we discount our feelings and don't recognize them for what they truly are. It is easy to recognize your intuitive feelings afterwards when you have time to analyze where you went wrong, but in the moment we question it. We don't trust our gut and go with our intuitive guidance because we fear being wrong. Ironical – because not trusting our intuition does cause us to steer wrong often.

Here are some tips to help you develop your intuition:

1. Quiet the mind

Our mind is a noisy place full of random thoughts, ideas, and judgments. Our fears and worries also run rampant through our minds, so many of our thoughts are based on fear. It is important when faced with a decision or a question to quiet our mind to allow the clarity of our intuition to come through. To do this, find a quiet place to sit free from distraction and noise. Begin deep breathing and focus on each breath that you take in. Sit like this for fifteen or twenty minutes, focusing on your breathing. Allow thoughts to come and go, but don't let them distract you from being in the moment with your breath. When you are relaxed and ready, ask for guidance regarding the decision or question you have, and listen to what comes through.

2. The answer may not be the one you want

Part of the problem with intuition is that when we do receive guidance or answers, it may not always be what we thought or wanted. In fact it is often the exact opposite of what we want. For example, if you are having a hard time with weight and have tried every fad diet available. The answer might be simple – you need to exercise and eat right. But your unwillingness to acknowledge this in looking for an “easy way” to lose weight is causing you to not listen to your intuition. The answers that come to us through intuition are not always the ones that we want, but they are always the ones that are right for us. Our inner guidance does not pay attention to what other people want, what is expected of

us, or what we feel is best for ourselves; it simply gives us a gentle prompt for what we need most in our lives. Implementing those things can often be difficult. When someone is in a bad relationship and they know they need to move on, but are fearful or worried about what their new life looks like – their fear keeps them from following their intuition. Often following your intuition means being prepared to make major life changes.

3. Start doing It

Your intuition is always with you. Start following your intuitive impulses and see where they lead you. They may surprise you. Start small when you are first learning to trust your intuition. Be mindful of your thoughts and feelings so that you will begin to identify intuition. Usually intuition prompts you to do something, so whenever you have a feeling about taking some sort of action in your life, pay attention to it. At first you will want to practice on small things like where to go for dinner, which road to take, and what to do on the weekend. Eventually, your intuition will become louder and stronger and you will begin to trust it automatically, knowing that following it leads to a happier more peaceful life.

It is extremely important to develop intuitive listening skills when it comes to our bodies and overall health. We have an immediate knowing when we need to pay attention to our health and our livelihood depends on our ability to listen to it.

Listen to your body

We talked about intuition and how following our inner guidance can help us make the best decisions for our overall wellbeing, now let's take a look at listening to our body. Intuition can help give us prompts and cues when something in our body needs our attention, but if we have missed the cues or are still learning to trust our intuition we also need to tune in to our bodies to get a sense of any imbalance that may be occurring. Sometimes our intuition can help us identify a problem within our bodies, but we need the communication from that part of the body to truly understand where the problem is. We often get caught up in the routine of dealing with our aches and pains with over the counter drugs and place our very own health in the lives of doctors and drug companies rather than relying on the one person who knows us better than anyone – ourselves. When we do this, we are not taking responsibility for our health and are giving away our power to others. When you visit a doctor, his job is to treat your symptoms and help you to feel better but rarely will he work with you to find the root of the problem and help you adjust your lifestyle accordingly. Doctors treat us when we need them, but what if we didn't need them? What if we could listen to our body's natural signals and learn to avoid problems before they occur? This is something that we are just starting to come around to in the Western world. Other parts of the world are accustomed to preventative medicine when it comes to health. Here in the West, we focus a great deal on reactive medicine, treating problems when they occur and trying to find out why rather than focusing on prevention and stopping them from occurring in the first place.

You are the biggest ambassador for your own health. Nobody knows your body better than you and nobody can give you better advice than the advice you will get from simply paying attention to the cues that your body provides you with on a daily basis.

How to listen to your body:

When you get a headache or a pain somewhere in your body, pay attention to it. Tune into the pain and then think about what might be causing it. If it is a headache – ask yourself if you are stressed out, dehydrated, hungry, or if there is some root cause that may be causing your headache to occur. Before you run to the medicine cabinet try treating the root cause of the headache. For example, if you know that a likely trigger for your headache is stress and anxiety, try practicing some deep breathing exercises, meditation or some yoga. See how you feel afterwards. If your headache is still there then give yourself the option of taking something for it.

Try this technique with other things that occur in your body. Each time you notice a different feeling or sensation that wasn't there before, ask yourself what that sensation might be trying to tell you. Trust the wisdom of your intuition to help you decipher what the problem might be in addition to tuning in to the way your body feels. Once you begin listening to the signals that your body provides you with, you will become good at tuning into future problems. Always try to get to the root of the problem before you run for over the counter drugs. Are you getting enough sleep? Are you eating enough? Are you eating the right kinds of foods? Are you relaxing and taking time for yourself? There are a lot of potential triggers that can cause your body to send you messages of distress.

Tune in to what your body is telling you. Meditation is also a great way to identify any imbalances that may be occurring in your body. Try meditating once per day for ten or fifteen minutes. Sit quietly focusing on your breathing, with your eyes closed, in a room free from distraction. Scan your body from the bottom to the top, tuning in to the energy of that area of the body. If you sense anything during your meditation (a pain, an ache, or a discomfort) remember what that pain was at the end of your meditation and then ask yourself why it may be happening. Sometimes this information will come to you during the meditation as you are scanning your body, but sometimes you will have to do some further asking to understand why it is happening.

Our bodies are functionally sound and operate systematically. When we experience symptoms that are not normal to our typical bodily function, it is a sign that something needs our attention. We have done something or ingested something that is causing our body distress and it is our body's way of communicating. Think of your body as complaining when you experience aches, pains, irritations or discomforts. Your body is telling you "I don't like what just happened" and it is almost always reactionary. It is for this reason, that we must take a look at our routine and assess where the changes are. We must know the impact things have on our bodies and be willing to remove them when we experience adverse effects. Our body will always tell us when it doesn't like something, and then it is up to us to listen to that message and act accordingly.

Know your limitations

It is really quite amazing that our bodies continue to function so well for us despite the unloving things we do to it, such as eating fatty unhealthy foods, drinking too much alcohol, smoking, or leading sedentary lives. We push the limits of our human bodies on a daily basis and often don't think about what we are doing to our bodies. Many of the things we consume are products based of a society of convenience. We eat unhealthy foods that are quick to make because we are too busy to prepare real wholesome food. We smoke and drink alcohol because our lives are busy and stressful and we need a release. We drink several cups of coffee each day because we wake up tired and unrested, so we need an artificial jolt of energy to give us the motivation to get through the day. We indulge because we are tired, stressed, anxious, and unmotivated. It is a vicious cycle of unhealthy behaviors that are all a result of the same thing; a life of overextension. We need to simplify our lives in every respect and know what our limitations are.

When we overextend ourselves it has a negative impact on our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, all which affect our overall health. We must learn to set realistic goals and limits for ourselves so that we feel balanced and well at the end of each day. Consider the following, as they relate to your own limitations.

Sleep

This is one area that has a tremendous impact on the way we feel, function, and live. If we don't get enough sleep we feel depressed, lethargic and cloudy. When we are tired

we are less likely to exercise, cook a proper meal, or get outside. Our work suffers when we are tired, and we don't spend quality time with our loved ones because we are only partially present in our interactions. Getting enough sleep is vital to our ability to feel good and function well. When we are well rested we have energy to do things and feel happier, and we are more likely to feel up to cooking a proper meal or exercising.

Know your limitations with sleep. If you are only getting a few hours of sleep per night, you could be building a sleep debt that will take you a long time to recover from. Adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night to feel good the next day. If you are not getting this, ask yourself what affect this is having on your life and in which areas. You can only push your body so far before it starts to push back. Sleep is one area that you shouldn't be willing to compromise. Your body deserves to be well rested at the start of each day. You are worth it and your longevity depends on it.

Eating

Our bodies are incredibly resilient and continue to function even despite the many things we put into it. The food we choose to put into our bodies is one area that we can truly take responsibility for our health and have a positive impact on our vitality and longevity. Choosing healthy natural foods instead of over-processed fatty foods will help our bodies to fight off illness and provide us with energy to get through each day. Eating healthy also helps to ward off depression. Many illnesses and diseases today are a direct result of a poor diet and an unhealthy lifestyle. We have the opportunity to choose at every meal, what we eat and put into our bodies. We can always choose something

healthy over something fatty, and something natural over something artificial. These choices will guide our health in profound ways and either carry us through each day feeling good and full of energy, or completely rob us of energy and make us feel lethargic and tired. We have less time than ever before and many people are looking for an easy way out when it comes to preparing meals. The problem with the age of convenience is that it costs us too much in the long run. You may not think that your daily indulgences are a big deal, but when you add them up over a period of years it can wreak havoc inside of our body, and can cause major problems for us in the long run; such as heart disease and diabetes.

It is important that we know our limitations with food. Overeating is easy to do when you are in the habit of doing it, and choosing the right foods becomes increasingly difficult when you have been choosing the wrong foods for so long. You know that eating all carbohydrates at every meal isn't healthy and is going to make you overweight and unhealthy, and you know that eating a lot of refined sugars is detrimental to your health. You don't have to know a lot about food to know which foods are good for you. A good rule of thumb is; if it comes from the earth, it's good for the body, and if you can't pronounce it don't eat it. A poor diet, much like sleep debt, catches up with you and takes a heavy toll. There is no telling what that toll might be. Do you really want to leave your health to chance? Every day you make conscious choices about what you eat. We cannot eat poorly every day and not have it impact our health and wellbeing. It may not affect you on the day that you eat it, or the day after, but it will catch up with you and you may not like what it does to you.

The simplest way for you to take control of your eating is to set realistic expectations. If you have a sugar or a carb addiction don't completely cut it out of your diet, because you will only crave those things even more. Give yourself some wiggle room, but make sure that it's a healthy quantity. Many people choose to eat healthy Monday through Friday, and then allow themselves an indulgence or two on Saturday and Sunday. This helps keep cravings at bay and lets you still enjoy the things that you love, without sacrificing too much. Eating healthy 5 out of 7 days is much better than 1 or 2 out of 7 times. You will find over time that your body will begin rejecting those unhealthy carbs and sugars and that you crave them less and less.

When you eat healthy you feel healthy and when you feel healthy you don't want to lose that feeling. Try eating only whole clean food during the week with no refined sugars and then allow yourself an indulgent meal or two on the weekends. See how you do and notice how you feel. Your body will love you for it.

Stress

Stress is something that we don't often relate to the body when we think of health, but stress can have a serious effect on the body. Stress can cause depression and cause us to be irritable, moody and feel lonely or isolated. Depression makes it incredibly difficult for us to exercise or eat healthy and can make maintaining a healthy lifestyle seem like an impossible feat. Stress can also cause physical ailments such as indigestion and heartburn, headaches, nausea, frequent colds, and aches and pains. Whenever you have

recurring physical ailments it is important to consider whether stress is a factor, and if so, get to the root of the cause and deal with it before it gets worse.

We must know and understand our limitations with regards to stress. There is bound to be a certain amount of stress in everyone's life. No one can fully escape stress and we will all have those days where we feel agitated and overwhelmed, but as long as those days aren't a regular occurrence. The things in life that cause us the most stress tend to be relationship problems, family and children, work, financial, and lack of time. These are areas that we must pay attention to so that we don't become overwhelmed by stress and anxiety and experience physical and emotional problems as a result.

Take stock of your life; ask yourself how much stress you have in each of the above mentioned areas and rate that stress on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest). If you have anything above a 6 it likely needs your immediate attention. Use your intuition to ascertain which areas need your attention and formulate a plan to eliminate some of the stress in your life. Some of the things that can help reduce stress in a person's life are; a loving support network, a strong sense of self, attitude and outlook, and preparedness for life's situations. Consider the ways in which you can be better in each of these areas. What can you do to regain any control that you may have lost? Eliminating stress from your life will allow your body to be in balance with your mind and spirit and will make living a healthy life much easier and natural. Paying attention to these areas will also help better equip you for the stress you may encounter moving forward in your life.

Control your thoughts

Another area in which our sense of self and ability to thrive in life is greatly impacted is in the level of control we demonstrate over our thoughts. Our thoughts can shape us and dictate how successful or unsuccessful we are in life. We can't avoid thinking, but we can certainly gain control of our thoughts instead of allowing our thoughts to "think us". Our thoughts relate to our body because the decisions we make often have a direct impact to our body. For example, when we are trying to exercise and eat healthy, our thoughts can either support this new lifestyle or act in opposition. If we have low self-esteem or aren't comfortable with change, our thoughts can sabotage our attempt at working towards a new body with negative self-talk. These are the thoughts that bring you down and reinforce negative beliefs about yourself. They work against you and make it impossible to accomplish your goals because you have no confidence or belief in yourself. These thoughts are the ones that make it easy to quit a workout regiment or easy to stop eating a healthy diet and go back to unhealthy eating. What you must realize, however, is that these thoughts can be controlled and stopped. These thoughts are often rooted in patterns of the past. When we desire change in our lives we must support that change with healthy thinking patterns. The problem is that it isn't easy. Our thoughts want things to be the way they always are; comfortable, predictable, and free from fear or risk. Our thoughts try to keep us safe by protecting us. But sometimes, this protection is more of a hindrance than anything and prevents us from making great strides in life.

It is important to have a separation between that which you are, and that which you think you are. Your thoughts are not you and you are not your thoughts. Thoughts are things and they come and go. We have a dizzying amount of thoughts running through our minds on a daily basis, some conscious and many unconscious.

Because it is harder to change unconscious thought, start with your conscious thoughts. The ones that you know you think. You can observe your thoughts on a daily basis by practicing meditation and asking yourself how and what you feel. You may wish to keep a notebook to record these observations. When you start analyzing your thoughts you may notice that many of your thoughts are negative or harmful in nature. They may not be loving or supportive and provide you with a stable framework for personal development. If you notice this, that's a good thing. Awareness is the first key to change. You can change your thoughts and experience positive results in your life by creating positive mind chatter to replace negative mind chatter. If the old you used to look in the mirror criticizing and saying unloving things to yourself, the new you will look for the good, no matter how small.

Keep it positive

Positive language leads to positive thought, and positive thought leads to positive results. Your life will change profoundly simply by being positive. You can achieve the results you want in your life by believing in yourself and supporting yourself when you set out to do it. Tell yourself that you know you can do it and that you will make it. Come up with daily affirmations to support your journey, no matter what that journey

is. If you are looking to start a healthy lifestyle with a new diet, believe that you are going to experience profound changes in your life. Every day remind yourself that you are doing the most loving thing you can do for yourself and that your life will be happier and more fulfilled as a result. If you are starting an exercise regiment or working towards a new personal body goal, tell yourself that you will succeed and set small measurable milestones for yourself to pump you up along the way.

By thinking positively about yourself and the goals you are setting out to achieve, you will initiate real lasting change in your life. Positive thinking has a tremendous impact on our body, mind and spirit. It supports our overall health and wellbeing and makes life more enjoyable and meaningful.

Stay present

Another important thing to remember when practicing positive thinking is to stay present in your thoughts. Staying in the moment helps you to appreciate what you are doing when you are doing it and avoids stressful future fearful thinking or past regrets. Staying in the moment is a happier place where you don't envision terrible things happening, don't fear your ability to handle something, and know that you can handle what is happening – because you are. It helps you appreciate the things in life that often pass you by when you are too busy stressing or worrying. Staying present will help make positive thinking an easier task.

When you notice yourself stressing out or worrying about something that hasn't happened yet, snap yourself back into the moment. Where are you? What are you

doing? Think only about what you are doing in this very moment. Smile and take some deep breaths. Notice the smells, sights and sounds around you and stay present with your thoughts. Don't allow fearful thoughts of things that haven't happened (and may never happen) into your precious mind space.

When it comes to your body, there are many factors involved with ensuring that you have a healthy lifestyle. Some of these factors are physical but many are mental and emotional. Your health is up to you and you alone. There is no miracle cure, diet, or person who will save you from yourself. You are the only one who can work towards the life that you want to achieve. There is no easy way out when it comes to a healthy body and lifestyle, it is going to be work, but the rewards will far outweigh the risks.

Rely on YOU

We must stop relying on our health system to solve problems that are a result of our poor lifestyle choices. You certainly wouldn't feed your plant a diet of coca cola and darkness or your dog a diet of French Fries and sugar, so why would you treat your body any differently. You deserve to look and feel your best. It isn't hard once you get going. We gain much more than we lose when we adopt a healthy lifestyle; it makes our life more enjoyable in so many other areas. Our body responds to what we put into it. So if you are feeling sluggish, tired, unmotivated and depressed try eating healthy food from the earth for a while. Incorporate as many fresh fruits and vegetables into your diet as possible and notice the effect that this has on your mood, your body and the way you feel. Experiment with different types of healthy food and observe the impact that each

food has on your body. Everything has an impact and the more you observe, the better you will become at knowing what your body loves and doesn't love. Just because our bodies become adjusted to refined sugar, bad carbs, and sodium, doesn't mean that we should have an all access pass to eat as many of these things as we want. We are doing long-term damage by doing this, and we must be conscious in our eating. Love your body the same way you love a child. Teach your body what to take in and how much to take. Your body will become accustomed to any new lifestyle you offer it, so why not have that lifestyle be a positive one that leads to a more fulfilling and longer lasting life.

Love your body

No matter what your size, shape, and what the scale says; love your body no matter what. There is nothing wrong with wanting to make changes to your body if you are feeling that you can do better, but don't let those desired changes make you feel inadequate now. Everybody is unique and uniquely beautiful. No two bodies are alike. There is no universal body type that is ideal for everyone. It varies person by person and what is right for one person isn't right for the next. Part of taking responsibility for your life means taking responsibility for the way you feel about yourself. Low self-esteem is detrimental to progress and personal development. The messages that you play in your mind will contribute to your success or failure in the things you do. It doesn't matter if it's a diet, a new workout regiment or a class you are taking. The self-love you have inside will propel you to be more, do better, and keep on going even when you feel defeated. It is hard enough to make changes in your life when you have lots of self-love and confidence, don't make it even harder on yourself by being your own worst enemy.

The only true way to take control of your life is to get control first over your thoughts and feelings. Our thoughts and feelings shape the way we feel about ourselves and can be detrimental if we don't keep them in check. One of the biggest factors is to not let others thoughts and opinions shape what you think about yourself. Often when we try to appease others and live up to their expectations, we fail and end up feeling worse about ourselves in the process. No matter how hard it may seem, we have to remain true to ourselves and be the people we know we are inside, regardless of what anybody thinks.

When you look into the mirror tell yourself that you are beautiful, smile, look for things to feel good about. You may not be perfect, but the mere fact that you are here on earth is a miracle, and a few pounds here and there or an imperfection or two is pretty insignificant when you consider the vastness of the universe and all that had to have happened for you to be standing here today. When you begin to love and accept yourself for who you are now, who you are today, change will come easier and life will seem easier. It won't feel as if you are carrying the world on your shoulders anymore because you will have the confidence to succeed.

Taking responsibility for your life means loving yourself first, if you don't do that the rest will seem impossible. So start with your own thoughts and feelings about yourself. Make sure that you are good on the inside and happy with how you feel today. When you love yourself it is easy to be your own ambassador of health and wellness. It is easy to eat the right foods, and listen to your body, and make the right lifestyle choices, because you come from a place of love. When you honor yourself, you do yourself the highest

good by tuning in to your intuition and living your life the way that you are meant to live it. Just like nobody can tell you how much to eat, or how much to exercise, nobody can make decisions for you either. You must take the reigns of your life and gain the control that you need to lead a happy and fulfilled life. You only have one shot at this lifetime; don't you want to live it with the healthiest body, mind and spirit possible?

SPIRIT

CHAPTER 11: THE LAWS OF THE UNIVERSE

"You are creating your life with your thoughts and your feelings. Whatever you think and feel creates everything that happens to you and everything you experience in life."

- Rhonda Byrne

There are Universal Laws or Laws of Nature; the principles which balance the universe and everything in it. These universal laws are unchangeable inter-related laws that shape the universe and create harmony and balance in the cosmos. There is no one thing, person, or entity that is unaffected by the laws of the universe, they are universal, absolute, and eternal. We don't even have to be aware or conscious of universal laws in order for them to work, they are an unwavering principle of life no matter whether you are aware of them or not. Our awareness simply helps us understand how to live within them to create a life that is in alignment with the rest of the universe. Universal laws are as real and tangible as the law of gravity and can facilitate our spiritual development and personal growth when lived by. At one time they were largely considered to be theoretical or strictly spiritual in nature, but now have significant scientific relevance. These truths govern everything in existence and can lead us to happiness and abundance when we become conscious of how the universe works as it relates to our unique lives. Many people have heard of The Law of Attraction. This is only one of the laws of the universe, there are many more as well as a number of sub-laws. Different visionaries and spiritual mentors have created their own versions of the universal laws, some of them expanding more than others. The jury is still out with regards to the

number of universal laws in existence, and they tend to change depending on who you talk to – but there are a few significant ones that deserve our attention. These are the ones that we can really apply to our own lives and bring our lives into balance and harmony by living in accordance to them. For the purpose of helping you achieve your life's goals, we will focus on the most commonly known universal laws in this chapter, the ones that will greatly facilitate your spiritual development and bring you closer to the type of transformation that will launch you to success in life. Some of these laws will already be familiar to you, and you will likely be able to draw upon real life examples when you or someone you know have leveraged these laws effectively in their own life.

1. Universal oneness

The law of universal oneness states that everything in the universe is connected and is one in the same. We, along with everything in this universe are born from the same source energy (also what some like to refer to as God energy or God). We are connected to all that is, all that was, and all that ever has been. Often the cause of human suffering is the notion of separateness. When we separate ourselves from others we bring about isolation, loneliness, and a feeling of disconnection. On the other hand, when we embrace the divine law of universal oneness, we begin to see the world unfold around us and we feel that we are apart of everything. We notice connections more readily, we feel deeper relationships with others, and we view everything around us as being interdependent and connected through an invisible matrix. This feeling makes us feel alive, happy, peaceful, and gives us a great sense of purpose in our lives. When we begin our lives as babies, we come into the world pure

and unaffected by thoughts, misconceptions, and the influence of others. We arrive as pure love and accept everything that comes our way. Children have no qualms about playing with a new friend; they don't worry what others think, or feel uncomfortable playing in a group. Children are one with everything around them. They are in the moment and live for the pure joy that they feel through experience. They love and accept all of the creatures of the earth and each other. It isn't until age and experience start to build a history that things begin to change. The older we get the more we worry, think, and stress. Worrisome thoughts form the foundation for our feelings of separateness and isolation. When we make a mistake or face misfortune in life we often turn inwards and feel helpless instead of turning towards our friends and family for support. That support network and interconnectedness exists always no matter how we choose to handle the circumstances in our lives. The only time we feel alone is when we are ignoring the universal oneness and allowing ourselves to feel painfully disconnected.

In order to feel a greater level of connection in your life and truly tap into the power of the law of oneness put yourself out there and connect with others. It is through your relationships and connections with others that you will thrive and feel the interconnectedness of everything that is. Get outside, get involved with your community, family and friends. These relationships are the fabric of your existence.

2. Vibration

The law of vibration states that everything in the universe is in constant motion, perpetually moving. Nothing is ever idle or still. Energy is manifested through

vibration and the higher the level of vibration (or frequency) the faster and stronger things come to be. Everything that is or ever has been has a unique vibration, including your very own thoughts and ideas about things. The reason why vibration is important to us is because everything we do creates a cosmic ripple in the energy field of time and space that extends outwards to the universe, and enables us to experience the reality that we are experiencing at any given moment. We can choose the thoughts we have, the ideas we hold, and the visualizations that we see with our mind. Because another law of the universe (the law of attraction) states that like attracts like – when we are experiencing positive vibrations, we can only attract other positive vibrations. The same is true for negative vibrations. So when we are in a negative cycle of emotion and thought, we are actually attracting more of what we don't want by continuing to attract further negative experiences. When we learn the truth of the law of vibration, we can set our vibrational frequency by learning to control or redirect our thoughts when they begin to turn negative. This helps us tremendously by creating more positive vibrations, which attract positive experiences to our lives. When we are able to control the type of vibration we are setting, we are able to control what we attract into our life. Our vibrational frequency is very important because the vibration that we are in will be the determining factor with what type of energy we attract and thus the experiences that we have in life. As human beings, we are not just made up of the flesh, blood and bone that you see in our bodies. We are energy beings made up of energy, light and electricity. Although that is not as obvious as the physical attributes, it is one of

the most important things to consider when you think about the laws of the universe and how we (as humans) relate to those laws. Because we are made up of energy, light, and electricity – we vibrate thoughts, feelings and emotions. These vibrations are the essence of what we experience here on earth because they create the energy necessary to attract the things into our lives that we want to attract. We are creators. We create, shape and imagine our world the way we want it to be. And the better we are at doing that, the greater we become at manifestation.

The law of vibration is really the foundation on which the law of attraction works. The law of vibration helps create the energy that is necessary for the law of attraction to work. Vibrations create energy; both positive and negative. And we, as human energy beings, can create and change our very own vibrations impacting the direction of our lives. Think about a time when you had a bad day. Perhaps your alarm clock didn't go off one morning, you were late for work, missed a meeting, had to work through lunch. Each event you experienced that day was negative in nature because the circumstance before it also had a negative vibration, which caused you to get caught up in the cyclical negative energy of the day. You didn't do anything to consciously change your energy from negative to positive, so the universe had no choice but to abide by its own eternal and unwavering laws. Like energy will always attract like energy no matter what you do or say. The universe makes no distinction between negative and positive and simply responds to vibrational frequency and energy.

Think about how you can set your vibrational tone. We all get discouraged, frustrated, or stressed out in life – it is simply a byproduct of living a complicated human life. But we can choose what we think and how we think about things. We can choose to see ourselves in the light that we want to live, or notice the absence of all that we have ever wanted. It is up to us how we choose to view our lives and it will make all the difference to the reality that we experience. Is your glass half full or half empty? It is a very important question that will shape the experiences that you face in life. Don't allow your thoughts to run rampant in your mind. Know that every time you have a negative thought or perpetuate negative ideas, you are setting a negative vibration that the universe respond to by giving you more of the same.

3. Attraction

The law of attraction is perhaps the most popular and widely known law of the universe. It is the one that people try to master most. The law of attraction states that like attracts like and that we create our own reality through our thoughts and energy towards those thoughts. When we think about something, it creates a unique vibration, which is either positive or negative depending on how we feel about that thing. This vibration grows stronger when we have multiple thoughts that support the same feeling. For example, if we fantasize about being an incredible guitar player and have a strong urge to learn, we will begin to manifest that desire. At first, we may buy a guitar or have one given to us. Then a teacher may come into our life or we may discover one in our community and begin taking lessons. Before you know it, we have manifested that desire that we put so much thought and energy into and

now own a guitar and can play it quite well. The universe however cannot and does not distinguish between positive and negative. We create our reality with our thoughts and feelings about what we want or don't want. For this reason, it is extremely important that we focus our energy and feelings upon the things we want in our life rather than upon the things we fear, worry about or simply don't want. Everything that we think and feel at any moment in time is creating a vibration and an opportunity to attract the essence of those thoughts into our life. Think of yourself as a powerful magnet and all of your thoughts as pieces of metal being pulled in towards the magnet (YOU). The more that you think about something the greater this force of attraction will be. Like thoughts stick together in clumps and attract other thoughts just like it. This perpetuation creates a powerful cycle and ultimately manifests into our life. When we have recurring negative thoughts, perhaps a worry or a fear, we often find that we attract exactly what we feared. For example, you feel that things are not going well at your new job. You feel uneasy, uncomfortable, and just generally like you don't fit in. These thoughts and worries continue to build and attract other thoughts that are similar. You begin to feel that the other employees don't accept you or want you around. You feel that your boss doesn't appreciate you and wishes she had hired someone else. And finally you start fearing the loss of this job. You have worked yourself up into a state of panic with these recurring thoughts about the people you work with and the circumstances at work until you reach the big scary thought and the biggest fear – losing your job. Every day you go into work with this vibration, this energy swirling around you. You

may not notice it when you look in the mirror each morning, but you are giving off this vibration and affecting others around you. When you believe something so profoundly and carry it around with you, others will invariably pick up on that energy. You start behaving in a manner that is different from your usual and doing things that support these thoughts, fears, and beliefs. Eventually, your biggest fear comes true and you lose your job. Your boss tells you that your work just hasn't been up to par and that you haven't been a team player. Perhaps this is a good thing, a blessing in disguise – or maybe it's a bad thing and something you wished you could have avoided. Either way, it all started with a single thought; a vibration of energy that snowballed into a swirling perpetuation of thoughts about your workplace, coworkers, and your job security.

We must take responsibility for our thoughts so that they don't get control over us in a way that makes us feel helpless. You are the creator of your own life. Think about all of the times that you have just believed that something will work out, and it does. Think about all of the times when you have said "I just knew that was going to happen" and you were right. Think about all of the times when that very thing that you wanted, talked about and craved came rushing into your life. These are not coincidences. These are occurrences that have been deliberately created by your thoughts and feelings about your life. Focus only on what you want, not on what you don't want or don't have. If you start noticing the absence of things in your life the universe responds by manifesting more of the same, because that is the energy that you are putting forth. Noticing the absence of a meaningful relationship in your life

will only continue to bring about more of that absence in your life. Noticing the lack of financial stability and resources in your life will only bring about more financial insecurity. Even when you want something with every fiber of your being, by noticing the absence of that thing, you are focusing on the want and therefore lack thereof. You must focus on abundance and see yourself in the light of the success that you desire. Visualize the relationship that you want. Think about how that will feel and what it will do for you as a person. Visualize the life you will have when you are completely in control of your finances and have everything you need. Visualize yourself clearly in the role that you want to be in, whatever that means for you. Thoughts are creative, and we are blessed with the gift of imagination. The clearer and more well thought out our thoughts, the easier it is for the law of attraction to work in our favor. The universe may not always give us what we expect, but we always get the essence of what we think about.

The greatest lesson to learn from the law of attraction is that we must focus upon what we want, not upon what we don't want. Visualize the life that you want for yourself by seeing yourself living that life. Know and believe that you are already queued up to receive these things that you hope for yourself. Don't ever doubt that you will make it, because if you doubt it you are right. Whatever you believe is correct. Believe that you are alone and you'll be alone, believe that you are wealthy and you will be wealthy, believe that you are successful and you will be successful. You cannot fool your thoughts into pretending either, you truly have to believe in your dreams in order for them to manifest. Keep your thoughts and feelings positive

and always believe in the power of your dreams. You can and will have what you desire in life if you know and practice the law of attraction.

3. Relativity

The law of relativity teaches us that there is no real meaning in anything until compared to something else. We wouldn't know hot without knowing cold, big without little, or good without bad. These things just are without the comparison of something to relate it to. It is our human judgment that makes things what they are and our perception of things, which gives them definition. The law of relativity teaches us that everything in our physical world is only real and defined because we make it that way by comparing it to something else. We "relate" to things in our existence by identifying how we feel about them. We know that something is hot because we touch it or feel it and can then identify when something is cold. There is a lot of value in this because it gives meaning to some wonderful things in life, but it can also be quite defeating and damaging if we are constantly comparing our selves to others who we perceive as being "better off" than us. There is always something or someone better off, and there is always something or someone with less. If our benchmark is always higher than where we are in our life, then we can easily feel inadequate or like a failure. By contrast, if we notice the people or things that are perceived as being worse off than we are, we are able to be more compassionate and appreciate our lives more.

When we are in a state of wanting we do not see what we have right in front of us, nor can we truly appreciate the things we already have in our life. For example, if we live an average life and compare our life against someone who lives an extraordinary life of travel and wealth – our own life suddenly seems mundane, and we feel like we are not very fortunate. But if we were instead, to look at the homeless man on the street, or the family who lives in a village with no fresh running water in Africa, suddenly we feel grateful. We feel thankful that we have a roof over our head, a steady job, running water, clean clothes, friends, family and opportunity in life. The way we feel is relative to what we are comparing ourselves against. If we get into the habit of noticing those who have less than us, we are able to feel compassion towards those people, send them loving energy, while also appreciating our own lives. Expressing gratitude for where we are at in life is extremely important to our ability to manifest abundance and happiness. We cannot manifest abundance when we are in a state of wanting. We cannot attract wealth or happiness when we are noticing their absence. By noticing absence we are comparing and defining our situation rather than accepting what is and visualizing what we want.

All things in the universe are relative to something else. Nothing is good nor bad, light nor dark without the comparing contrast to another thing. When you practice the art of appreciating what you have and expressing gratitude, you will no longer compare your life to those who have more than you. You will no longer desire for wealth, status, and abundance – but you may just attract it. When we accept where we are in life and allow the energy of the universe to flow through us, we open

ourselves up to the possibility of life. We expand our possibilities and increase our opportunity to manifest abundance. Be positive, accepting, and loving of where you are in your life. Don't notice those who have more than you, simply accept that there are many people worse off and many people better off. This is the way life is. Appreciate what you have and express gratitude for it. Feel compassion towards those who have less than you. Notice how happy they are, even with less.

One of the beautiful things about the law of relativity is that we wouldn't know true joy without pain, or happiness without sadness. Joy would have no meaning without sorrow. We wouldn't appreciate true happiness without the knowing of sadness. The law of relativity gives great meaning to these things.

4. Cause & Effect

The law of cause and effect states that for every cause there is an effect and for every effect there is a cause. This cycle of cause and effect keep things in perpetual motion and determines that for every outcome (or cause) in a person's life there is also an affect. We live in this ecosystem of cause and affect on a daily basis, navigating life with our desires, decisions, deeds, and choices about things.

Everything changes and is in perpetual motion as we create our lives with cause and effect. Every decision we make in our lives is a cause, and the result that decision produces is an effect. We must take responsibility for this by thinking about the choices we make, and the energy that those choices put forth. This universe is a sea of energy, which enables our actions to produce reactions and gives us either a

positive or a negative outcome. When we tap into this law, we can make it work to our benefit by knowing which actions produce positive reactions and which actions produce negative reactions. This knowing will create harmony and balance in your life by allowing you to only focus on the positive causes that create desirable effects.

The universe has an intelligently designed system of karmic accounting. Every cause has an effect and every karmic debt is paid. You can likely see evidence of this in your own life or have witnessed it in action in someone else's life as an outside observer. Karmic debts can be repaid in a positive manner by cancelling out negative behavior with positive loving behaviours. A lie can be balanced by telling the truth, a mean gesture or name-calling can be balanced by an apology, and an ill deed can be corrected with a good deed. We should never treat another the way we ourselves do not wish to be treated, because the law of cause & effect will surely come back around to us and deliver the same experience to us that we thrust onto another.

This is the way the universe works and the way that karmic debts are balanced.

When you only act with love, compassion, and kindness you can be sure that you will manifest an abundance of this in your own life. Whenever you are about to take action in your life think about the consequences of your action and determine whether they are positive in nature, or negative. If the consequences are negative, ask yourself if the payoff is really worth it. Whenever we produce positive causes and act with our hearts, we produce positive effects that bring us balance and harmony in our lives. You will know if a cause is positive or negative by the way that it feels. When things feel right, whole, peaceful and calm they are of higher

vibration, and thus creating a positive cause for which will have a positive effect.

When something is of negative cause it feels stressful, pushed, hard, or angry. This is a lower vibration and thus will bring about a negative effect.

To truly make cause & effect work in your life, keep your emotions and actions in a higher vibration by focusing on the positive and letting go of the negatives. Live with passion and purpose. Don't try to manipulate others, hurt or harm them, or treat them in any manner that you wouldn't want to be treated yourself.

5. Gestation

The law of gestation is perhaps one of the lesser-known laws and is one that some people struggle with. The law of gestation states that everything we intend has a gestation period. Our ideas, goals, and intentions are like seeds. These beautiful seeds grow into flowers over time, we must be patient and give them water and sunlight and have faith in knowing that they will grow into something beautiful. The same is true with our intentions. We water our intentions like a flower by giving them positive thoughts, and focusing upon them and believing in them. Believing in the power of our dreams is nourishing them the same way water nourishes a flower. Gestation tells us that everything comes in due time. It may not always be the time that you had thought or planned, but it will manifest when the time is right. The key is to believe that it will and not abandon your beliefs, intentions or goals because they aren't happening quickly enough.

The law of gestation teaches us to be patient and trust in the divine timing of our lives with a knowing that all will be as it should when the universe allows it to be so. It takes time for a thought (or a seed) to develop and grow and manifest into your life. Once you put your thought or intention out there, you must trust in the timing of the universe and let go. Know that you have put it out there and that it will manifest into your life when the timing is just right. Think about the pregnant woman about to give birth. She knows that in nine months time she will have a newborn baby in her life. She cannot see the baby, hear the baby or touch the baby until after it is born, but she knows that her pregnancy will produce a baby. We must place this same trust into our intentions and goals. View a goal as a pregnancy that you will soon give birth to. It may not happen in nine months, but you know it is coming because you have placed the intention into the cosmos and are now just in the waiting period. During the waiting period, however, you let go. You trust in the divine timing of the universe and move on, going about your life knowing that eventually “that thing” is going to pop up and appear in your life, just as you had asked. We must resist the urge to obsess over our thoughts and intentions and leave them alone for fate to take its course. When we believe in our thoughts, trust in the universe and let go of expectations, we manifest abundance into our lives with ease.

When we are impatient or continue to notice that we don’t have something in the time that we had expected, we run the risk of not ever seeing those desires come to fruition. We simply must trust in the timing of the universe and allow nature to take its course and deliver things into our life when we are meant to have them. You can

set an intention, think positively about it, and believe that you will manifest it, but as soon as you begin noticing that it's not here yet and start asking why, you may have already lost it.

These 5 universal laws are crucial to your life if you want to manifest your goals and take control of where you are headed. As with the law of relativity, these laws are all interrelated and dependent on one another. So you must take care that you don't limit your chances of manifestation by only focusing on being positive, but then setting expectations about when or how you will manifest those goals. Being positive is only one part of the picture, you must also believe, trust, and be patient. The more specific you are with your intentions the better. When you are specific and know what you want, visualizations are easier and manifestation comes with ease. If you aren't really sure what you want or keep changing your mind, how do you expect the outcome to be? Know what you want and set clear goals for yourself.

Higher vs. lower vibrations

Our emotions are our barometer for how well we are doing in life. Our feelings tell us when we are on the right track and serve as the guideline for everything we do.

Generally speaking, when we feel good, peaceful, calm and happy we are doing something that is good for our spirit and nurtures our being. By contrast, when we feel stressed out, angry, frustrated, or depressed, we are clearly not on the right path or doing what we need to be doing in life. We can measure these instances in day-to-day

interactions as well by asking ourselves how we feel at any given moment. Trust in the intuition of your feelings to steer you where you need to go.

Each feeling or emotion carries a unique frequency or vibration. Vibrations that are of a higher frequency include love, acceptance, compassion, contentment, joy, and excitement. Lower frequency vibrations include blame, guilt, anger, judgment, resentment, and anxiety. You get to choose how you feel at every point in time throughout any given day. We can choose higher frequency vibrations or lower frequency vibrations. Higher frequency vibrations make manifesting our goals and intentions easy and our lives happier as a result. Lower frequency vibrations keep us unhealthy, unhappy and unfulfilled. The lower frequency vibrations tell us that we have no control over our lives and are merely but a ship without a sail being thrashed about the water at the mercy of the waves. This is not the case unless you believe it to be. We can always choose to feel better about a situation, circumstance or event in our lives, no matter how bad it may seem at the time. Our ability to choose higher frequency vibrations can sometimes mean the difference between how quickly we get over something or how long we carry it with us. Higher vibrations allow us to feel good, happy and fulfilled in life. We know that everything is an experience and that everything passes in time. We enjoy the joys while we have them and accept the occasional sorrows; we just don't build our house there.

Be conscious of your vibrations at every point throughout the day. When something happens that changes your vibrational tone, gently pull yourself up by reminding yourself that it is crucial to your happiness and enjoyment of life. We must feel pain,

stress and sorrow at times in our life. We wouldn't be human otherwise. It is important to recognize those feelings, but then move on from them. Learn from them, grow from them and ask yourself what you need in order to feel better. You must choose to feel better in the moment that you are in, as each moment you are experiencing is paving the road to the future you will meet.

How to live with the laws of the universe

By acknowledging the laws of the universe, you can accept them into your life and lay the groundwork for your life to unfold before your eyes in the way that you had always hoped it would. Knowledge of the laws of the universe allow us to make the necessary changes we need to make in our life to bring about abundance and happiness.

Sometimes we do things unconsciously without knowing that we are making it impossible to attract the things that we want in life. One example of this is in noticing the absence of things. We often forget that noticing the absence of something creates want and focuses our attention on the fact that we do not have something. This makes it impossible to manifest what we desire and only brings us more of what we don't want - that which we are missing.

Consider the laws of the universe and how you can better tune into them and apply them to your life in a way that works for you. Assess your thoughts, behaviours and beliefs to identify areas that you may be limiting yourself or your access to abundance. Set clear and specific goals and intentions for yourself. Do not concern yourself with too many of the details; the universe will take care of that. Trust that the universe will find a

way, and that it will happen when the timing is right. Your work is to believe in the power of your dreams and nourish them with positivity and trust.

The laws of the universe are unchangeable, eternal and at work regardless of whether you know that they are working or not. They are immutable laws that govern everything that is, was, or ever will be. Knowing the nature of how things work will simply make life more enjoyable for you and less of a struggle. Try it out and see how it affects your life. Set your intentions and release them to the universe with trust and faith. Don't expect or ask how or why. Just let things happen as they may. You will discover that your ability to manifest will become stronger and things will come to you faster as you embrace the divine nature of things. We live in a sea of energy and light and everything carries a vibration. Every time you have a thought, a wish, a hope, a dream, or an intention you are releasing a vibration that is sent out to the universe and will eventually come back to you in some form. Be conscious of your thoughts by not allowing them to think you. Avoid stress and worry by staying in the present moment. This is where the magic of life is, and where you will experience the most joy and freedom in life. The laws of the universe are always at work; let these laws of nature be your guiding light by allowing their eternal presence to be felt in your life.

CHAPTER 12: CREATING THE IDEAL YOU

"Our intention creates our reality."

- Wayne Dyer

Our whole lives are spent searching; for what defines us, what shapes us, and what we are meant to do here on earth. Our happiness is rooted in our ability to do the things that make us feel connected and whole. When we are doing what we know we have to do, we somehow feel a sense of peace and clarity within us. This is our emotional barometer and our way of knowing indefinitely that we are on the right track in our lives. When things are running smoothly and we feel happy about where we are, we don't feel the need to search or make changes because the pieces of the puzzle fall into place beautifully, as if by magic. Our lives are a constant creation. We are creating our futures moment by moment with every thought we have, decision we make, and intuitive lead that we follow. We are in constant creation mode; crafting the ideal person that we want to be, making decisions that bring us closer to who we want to be, and projecting the image of who we think we are or ought to be.

Be the you that you want to be

There are many influences in life from social, familial, to community and religious. It would be silly to say that these things have no impact on the decisions we make. They absolutely do and we can only control the level of impact that they have on us in the decisions that we make in our own life. We have to be the person that we want to be

inside in order for us to be happy. Sometimes we are pressured by others to be a certain way and make certain decisions that others believe are right for us. The problem with this is that those decisions are often originating from someone else's being, and not our own. If we share in those decisions and want the same things for ourselves, then harmony can be achieved. But when somebody else wants something for us that we ourselves do not want, this creates imbalance within our being and can be a tremendous source of discomfort and unhappiness. A good example of this is the parent who wants nothing more than for their son to go to law school, but their son has little interest in these pursuits. Such a strong emphasis is placed on this achievement in the home that the son grows up and agrees to go to law school, hoping that this will make his parents proud. Pretty quickly he realizes that this dream is not his own, but his parents'. He spends his time in class drawing and sketching out things from his mind, lost in his imagination until he flunks out of law school. Eventually he discovers that he is more artistically inclined, and really wants to be an illustrator. He pursues this path after repeated prompts from the universe and turns out to be very happy, even though it is not what his parents wanted for him.

We must learn to let go of what other people expect from us, as well as let go of our own expectations of others. Expectations are the root cause of imbalance in human relationships wreaking havoc in marriages, parent child relationships, work relationships and friendships. Our desire to control others is a lower vibration and is not in accordance with higher consciousness. When we learn this, life becomes much easier and a more peaceful place. We have no control over others and can only control our

own lives and decisions, much like others may only control their own destinies and not ours. Each decision we make paves the way for our future and creates the person that you will be. If you make decisions based on what others want and not what you want, then you are not in control of your life, nor are you creating your life. You are surrendering to others and giving them the wheel to drive your life. This is the biggest mistake that one can make. The only reality in life is the one that you yourself are experiencing and creating. Every person on earth perceives and experiences life differently. You must acknowledge and exercise the power that you have by consciously creating your life. We do this through being present, mindful and connecting to who we truly are. That which we are and that which we think we are, are usually different. We are pure energy and consciousness; that has always been. This being that we are is who we became and continue to be. But before all of the decisions, life circumstances, and choices; we were that pure energy. And we can still tap into this eternal source, for this is the root of our higher self and where we draw upon our intuition.

There is nothing more important in your physical life here on earth than following your intuition and being the person that you really are. Don't be someone else's version of you, be yourself, always, even when it isn't what others want. This truth is the light that will illuminate your path in life and bring you to a place of tremendous peace and joy.

Following your intuition

Life isn't always easy and knowing which decisions are best for us isn't always a simple thing to do. Thankfully we have a wonderful tool at our disposal whenever we want it to

be available to us. This tool is our intuition. Our intuition serves as a wonderful guide in life to give us hints or queues about what we need in our life in order to attain harmony and happiness. Our intuition is something we know intrinsically and does not require our thoughts or analyzed review; it is a sense of knowing that we all have within us. The trick is learning to trust our intuition. This is where most of us fall short. It isn't that we don't believe in our intuition, but merely that we haven't learned to trust it yet. Our thoughts cloud our judgment causing us to overthink things and fear circumstances and outcomes. As a result of over-thinking we often make decisions for the wrong reasons; because we feel they are safer, they are within our comfort zone, or because we are simply afraid of what our intuition is telling us. The irony of this is that if we would just listen to our intuition, we would discover an incredible sense of peace and happiness within us. It is doing the exact opposite of what our intuition tells us that causes us stress, not following our hearts. Your intuition always remains, even when you may think you have no intuition. It is always there to access and use as a resource and guide in your life. All you have to do is be willing to listen, much like you notice and observe the subtle queues from the universe; intuition works in much the same manner. Most of the time it is subtle, and therefore easy to miss, especially with all of the noise of every day life and the millions of thoughts and stressors we have running through our mind on any given day.

One of the greatest things you can do to observe and access your intuition is to meditate. Spending as little as 20-30 minutes per day (even broken up into two sessions if desired) can be one of the best things you do for your emotional and spiritual

wellbeing. Meditation helps us reduce the clutter and noise in our minds and reminds us of whom we really are, allowing us to experience peace and mindfulness. When we are meditating we are not worrying about what has happened or what might happen, we are simply observing our breath, staying in the moment and watching thoughts pass us by. We observe our thoughts as being separate from ourselves and are able to understand this division through meditation. We are not our thoughts. This is a very important thing to remember as we journey through life. If we make the mistake of believing that we are our thoughts, we can find ourselves in a very unhappy place filled with stress and anxiety. Thoughts are things and they shape our being and who we are, but they are not *who* we are. Who we are is an energy being full of light and love, connected to all that is and all that ever was. This truth supersedes any notion we may have crafted about ourselves through thought and life experience. Therefore our most intelligent self is our highest self; the being that knows when something feels right and when it doesn't. Our emotions serve as the indicator for this and tell us whether we are in flow with the universe or out of sync. Intuition and emotion work hand in hand, so when you are first developing your intuition, you may find that you rely more on your emotion, which is also fine. The problem with using only emotion, however, is that sometimes our emotions are irrational and deeply rooted in thoughts. Thoughts can often steer us in the wrong direction when they center on safety and fear. This causes us to perceive danger, or attempt to protect ourselves when there is no reason to fear or put up barriers. Our primitive mind is based in fight or flight and is often where we run into problems with thought patterns as we navigate life with this primitive protective

shell around us. When we learn to trust our intuition we can then rely on our emotion as a backup measure. When we sense that something may not be in our best interest, we can also look to our emotions for confirmation. This is the ideal way to guide our lives using intuition and emotion.

When you are first developing your intuition you will have questions about what constitutes intuition vs. thoughts. The important thing to remember is that intuition will never be rooted in negativity or lower vibration emotions. Intuition is of higher vibration and will therefore be confident, kind, and loving. You will have a confident “knowing” when your intuition guides you. Sometimes, however, we overthink things and do the exact opposite of what our intuition tells us, only later to say, “I should have listened to my intuition.” If you are experiencing any sort of confusion or questioning, do not stress or worry about it, simply find some space to breathe and take a few moments to meditate on your situation. You may also choose non-action or delay your action until you feel a greater degree of clarity. Just remember that your intuition will never steer you wrong, put you in harms way, judge, or criticize you. Your intuition is one of the greatest gifts you have at your disposal and can ensure that you are following the right path in life.

Finding balance

In today’s world we wear so many hats and have so much to do. Societal pressures, family responsibilities, longer working hours, and a perpetual desire to improve ourselves create a great deal of expectation in our lives. We have less time and more to

do, and expect more of ourselves than ever before. It is sometimes hard to even take the time to breathe and allow the time to ask ourselves, “Who am I and what do I want out of my life”? These questions are essential to understanding how we can make the most out of our time here on earth. We must live for ourselves and allow ourselves the joy of doing the things that make us feel happy and whole. There will always be work no matter what we do. Whether you own a company, work in an office, work from home, or are retired; work is a part of life. You will have to spend time each day engaged in some form of work. And that is okay, just as long as you are also making time for other things, like relationships, hobbies, passions and fun.

One of the best things you can do when seeking balance in life is to take stock of how you currently spend your time. Draw a circle on a page and start sectioning off pieces of the circle to represent time spent on certain activities or tasks. How much time do you spend per day working, cleaning, watching TV, on the computer, doing a hobby etc. This will give you a good assessment of where you need to cut back or increase the amount of time you dedicate to certain areas. Ask yourself if there are any areas where you can perhaps eliminate tasks, or make more time for the things that bring you tremendous joy. By focusing on the things in life that you are passionate about and bring you joy, you will invite more happiness into your life. We should always be concentrating on that which brings us joy, for this is how we know when we are in alignment with the universe and living our life in flow. When we are in flow, our lives have more meaning and balance is easier to achieve because we are happy. When we only do things in life out of obligation or responsibility, we are out of alignment and not living a balanced life. A

balanced life should be an equal division of work and responsibility, family, relaxation, and hobbies or passions. We can only be our best when we are living our lives in flow, we are balanced and doing the things that we are meant to be doing.

The problem for many is knowing what you are meant to be doing. Sometimes we get knocked around by life and go where the wind blows us, with no particular direction in mind and no intuition about what we are really supposed to be doing. We often receive intuitive information about what our purpose in life is, but when we live our lives reactively instead of proactively, we miss out on discovering our true purpose. We must clear the space in our lives to allow ourselves the time to discover what we are here for and how we can best spend our time. Sometimes we work with people or are friends with people who we know are not doing what they are meant to be doing. Think of the teacher who moonlights as a writer, or the factory worker who builds custom furniture. Look at your hobbies, the things that you don't think you could make money doing; the things that bring you tremendous joy. Focus more on those things to find the balance you need in life. You don't have to be thinking about how to monetize your hobby to be able to justify its presence in your life. You simply need to allow yourself the space and time to focus on that thing. Those things that bring you joy and happiness and make you feel in your element when you do it. These are the things that deserve our time and attention in this life. Use your emotion as a barometer.

Unless you are one of the lucky few to have a job that you really love and are doing what you are passionate about, then you likely don't feel in alignment at work. It feels like work because it is work. You are there to earn money to pay the bills. Perhaps you

fell into the line of work that you are in or perhaps you took on a family business. We all have a certain amount of work in our lives (be it our careers or the work we do around our home) that we must account for and put up with. But we must also spend an equal amount of time analyzing our lives and asking what it is that makes us tick. What do we love about life? What do we need to spend more time on or more time doing? Once you start to have some things on your short list, things that make you feel tremendous joy – figure out how to integrate more of those things into your life. You may have to set a schedule, or sign up for a class, or simply shuffle around some other things in your calendar to allow time for them. This is one of the most important things you can do to find balance in your life. Life feels out of sorts, mundane and exhausting when we don't spend enough time being who we truly are, and when we aren't focusing on the things in life that we love and feel excited by. Carve out some time in your life for your passions and notice the impact it has on your work, life, balance, and your overall feeling of happiness.

Stop resisting and embrace acceptance

Have you noticed how it feels when you accept the things in life that you cannot change? What a relief that is. You are the center of your universe and can only control the things that happen in your own life and the way you choose to view things. As soon as you attempt to control, restrict or direct someone else's life you will fail and will be fighting a losing battle. The same is true when you fight against anything you cannot change; be it a person, a circumstance, or a personal truth. There are some things in life that will just be the way they are no matter what you do or say about it. You may not

like them, but you can change the way you view those things and bring yourself some clarity and peace through altering your viewpoint. We often try to control circumstances and people out of fear. We are afraid that we will be abandoned, embarrassed, or fail at something. This fear causes us to make decisions that are not in our best interest and often impede our logical thinking. Resistance is one of the greatest causes of human suffering. We get sick and unhappy when we continually notice what is wrong, what we don't like, and what we wish to change. The act of doing this keeps us unwell and makes our vibration negative. Through the law of attraction you know that putting forth a negative vibration only invites more of the same, so when we are stuck in a perpetual cycle of negativity we are the cause of our own unhappiness. Even when we believe that someone else is causing us unhappiness, it is never the fault of another, but only the fault of ourselves – for choosing the mentality that we have chosen and for allowing ourselves to focus on what is wrong rather than what is right.

When you shift that perception and begin noticing what is right, what you feel good about and what makes you happy; everything changes. Your view of the world changes and you become happy inside. Human suffering is caused by thinking about what makes us unhappy and noticing the things that we don't have. Stop resisting what is and you will invite tremendous joy into your life.

If you have been living in a state of negativity for a long time, you are likely already in the habit of resisting what is. When you notice the things that you don't like and tend to focus on those things – you are living in a state of resistance. You are not in flow and this is something that can be changed by altering the way you view things. It is merely a bad

habit; which can be broken if you desire change. Habits can be hard to break and will require some work on your part, but it can be done so long as you have the motivation and persistence to do it. The first step towards changing this cycle is to practice noticing the good things in your life and make mention of those things. Always look for the silver lining in a bad situation, no matter how hard it is to find. The next time something negative happens to you try your hardest to find even one solitary thing about the situation that is positive, no matter how small that thing may seem. You can always choose to view situations in a different light. We have the power to choose how we think about something; we can choose to view negative situations as misfortune and unfair circumstances or we can choose to view negative situations as learning opportunities, which evolve us and help us learn important lessons about life. Think about how many times you have come through a difficult situation in your life and have grown or learned a great lesson as a result. This happens to us all the time. When we are in the moment of what we perceive as misfortune, we are unable to see the bigger picture, the light at the end of the tunnel or the lesson that is hidden in the circumstance of our life. There is always something that can be learned from hardship, we can always grow and evolve from the unfortunate circumstances in our lives; that is, if we choose to. When we criticize others, judge people, and point out the negative in every situation, we only hurt ourselves. It is not others that need to change, but us – our viewpoint and the way we look at the circumstances in our lives. Get into the habit of noticing the positive, look for good in others rather than pointing out shortcomings or

judging people for not being more like you. We can learn something from every person, situation and life circumstance that we encounter.

Accept what is and allow life to happen, to unfold and manifest before you. When you stop going against the grain life becomes easy and joyful. Resistance is the greatest cause of human suffering and it is one hundred percent treatable. We can change the way we view things, we can be more loving and accepting, and we can make the decision to go with the flow and say yes to life. Joy is at your fingertips.

Attract abundance

Using the law of attraction, you can create the life you want by attracting the people, circumstances, and outcomes that you desire in your life. We can have the things in life that we want by focusing on what we have and what we want rather than what is missing in our lives. When we only notice what is wrong or what we don't have, the universe has no choice but to deliver us more of the same. This is how the law of attraction works; like attracts like. For this reason it is incredibly important to snap yourself out of a negative cycle of behavior or thought pattern. Nothing is more important than feeling good and happy, because you create your destiny with your thoughts and feelings about life. Every thought you have, feeling, and action you take, is paving the way for the future you will experience. It is all energy that you put forth. This energy is what creates your future by attracting back into your life what you put out. When we are thankful for the people and things we have in our life, we tend to attract more of those types of people and experiences. When we feel gratitude for the personal

success we've achieved or the material possessions we have, it is easy to attract more of those things. By contrast, when we notice what others have and compare ourselves, feeling inadequate or lack of – we make it very easy to attract more of that into our lives. This gives us exactly what we don't want; more of the same. That which we are missing and noticing is what we are attracting.

The way to attract abundance (in every manner) is to appreciate what you have, notice the good things in your life, and not pay attention to what you don't have. If you are trying to achieve a goal see yourself accomplishing that goal. See yourself in the positive light of achieving what it is that you want. Don't doubt for a second that you will get there. Know with every fiber of your being that you can and will accomplish whatever it is that you desire, simply by focusing your energy on that vibration. You attract abundance by believing in yourself, feeling happy about where you already are, but knowing that you will also get to where you want to be. Keep positive about your life and don't concern yourself too much with obstacles, timing, and your own shortcomings. Be specific about what you want and take steps towards that thing in any way you can. For example, if you really want to open up a retail business selling accessories take control of that desire. Instead of sitting there just hoping (but not really believing), start doing some market research. Learn how much you will need to start the business, put together a plan, and even talk to some store owners. These steps make the believing part a lot easier and move you a few steps closer to realizing your dream. When you focus on your dreams and take steps towards them (no matter how small they may seem) they put you closer to achieving success. You can always choose to do

something, or take some small step towards the goal that you want to manifest in your life. Abundance will come naturally when you begin practicing the focus of positivity and goal manifestation.

Make a list of everything you want out of your life. This list can be as large or small as you want and can have absolutely anything on it. Don't pay attention to restrictions such as family obligation or financial restraints. Simply put your desires down on paper. What do you want out of your life? What would the ideal you look like? How would you live? Put down as much as you can. Now take a look at your list and think about like versus love. Which of those ideas do you often think about? Which of those ideas do you absolutely love? Circle the ones that appeal to you most, that you have spent a great deal of time thinking about, or that you have already tried working towards. These are your short list items. The rest are "nice to have's", but for now, focus on the ones that you have circled. Maybe you circled one, or maybe you circled three. It doesn't matter. What matters is that this is going to be your focus now. This is what you are going to work towards. Don't let your mind turn negative now, telling you that it is impossible, or it will never happen – believe that it is possible, and that it can and will happen if you so desire. If your negative thoughts try to impede you, simply shout "STOP" in your mind, or take yourself to a visualization of you accomplishing this goal that you have circled. The more you imagine and see yourself in this light, the harder it will be for your thoughts to interfere. Eventually, when you have visualized yourself as a success enough times, your thoughts will have no choice but to conform to this. In order to keep your focus on this goal, or the many goals you may have circled you may choose

to create a vision board. A vision board is a group of images, words, photographs or visual queues that are a reminder of this goal. The vision board helps you visualize your goals and keeps them at the forefront of your mind. It also helps you to think positively and puts images of success in your mind, which help ward off negative thoughts or self-defeating internal chatter. Next, pick a goal to focus on and ask yourself what steps would be involved or what you could do right now to learn more, attract greater opportunity, or become involved in some way in this goal. Make a list for each goal. This list is your list of “to do’s”. Don’t put down anything that you couldn’t do, only focus on the things that you could or can do. The rest will unfold for you as you begin to focus on your goals. Attack your goals one by one. Try to spend at least twenty minutes per day thinking about your goal, visualizing success and taking steps towards what you desire. Pay no attention to how grandiose or out of reach you may perceive your goal to be. Simply believe that anything is possible and see yourself achieving the goals that you have set forth for yourself.

Belief in self is one of the key attributes to success. You have to believe in yourself even when nobody else will. Sometimes we have to pursue our goals or dreams when others don’t believe in them, or think that we are foolish. Always remember that you are the creator of your own universe, there is no other universe except for the one that you create with your thoughts, actions and feelings. Therefore all that matters is that you believe in the power of your own dreams, and that you believe in yourself.

Be love

All humans on this planet are looking for the same thing out of our relationships; love. We all have an inherent need to be loved and accepted. Often when you experience personal conflict with relationships it stems from someone's insecurity about himself or herself. This insecurity can manifest into fear; fear of being abandoned, rejected, humiliated, unloved, unaccepted, or hurt. These insecurities make otherwise intelligent people make poor choices. Fear is not real and not something we should waste our time or energy on. It really serves us no purpose. When we only act with love, despite our fear, we open up a world of possibility with our relationships. We lose out on wonderful opportunities when we fear getting close to someone, fear their judgment or rejection. These fears keep us from enjoying life, love and people. Not all people in our lives will like us; in fact some may not like us at all. But that is of no concern to us and should never keep us from enjoying the company of others. Don't focus on what the people who don't like you think of you, focus on the people you do have in your life. The ones who you are grateful for, the ones who make you feel elated when they are around you. You cannot change someone's opinion of you, they must do that themselves. And you cannot be controlled by someone else's opinion of you either; you must let it go and continue to connect with others in meaningful and profound ways. When we concentrate too much on what others think, or stress over the people who don't like us, we continue to perpetuate that energy in our lives and attract more of that same energy. Instead, let it go and focus on the love in your life. Choose to be love in every aspect of your life. Love everyone regardless of who they are or what they have done to you. Choose to love. We all need others in our lives. Part of being human is the inherent

need to connect and be around others. Never make the mistake of thinking or believing that you don't need anyone in your life. The presence of other people in your life creates a great deal of joy, as well as expands your consciousness by teaching you important lessons about who you are. Accept that people will always be important to your life and that you need your community and support network. Take responsibility for what you put out. If you aren't putting out any love towards others, how do you expect to get it back? Are you secretly desiring for love and connection but putting up a huge wall around yourself? How can love get in when you do this? It cannot. You must be open to give and receive love equally. We get what we put in and we attract what we put out.

Get into the habit of really connecting with people. Look them in the eyes when they speak to you and listen to what they are saying. Try to resist the urge to plan your next sentence while they are speaking, for when you do this, you are not actively listening. When you begin truly listening to others, you will be able to connect in a deeper manner by noticing more clearly how and what they feel. Your relationships will expand with empathy. Always look for ways to help when you notice a loved one or a friend is feeling down or needs a helping hand. Ask what you can do. Sometimes a warm hug, a smile, or a nice cup of tea is all it takes.

One thing many of us are guilty of is withholding our love because of something another person did or said. Our love should never be used as a weapon or be withheld from anybody for any reason. If you feel wronged or something is bothering you, talk about it in a loving and supporting way. Do this without accusation and choose your words

carefully. Words can hurt if not selected carefully, especially when discussing conflict. Try explaining things from your own point of view without putting words in the other person's mouth and without rationalizing their own behaviour with your thoughts. You cannot speak for another person, nor do you truly know their motivations or intentions. Resist the urge to defend your behavior or to win an argument for the sake of winning an argument. Truly listen to what the other person is saying and repeat it back to them. Try to understand why the conflict is occurring and understand what role you play in it and what role they play in it. Rather than rehashing something that has already happened focus on what you can do moving forward. Keep it positive and focus on solutions. Don't put down another for not being like you, making the choices you would have made, or for not living up to your expectations. You are only responsible for your own life and cannot control another. If someone disappointed you, it is because you had an expectation of that person. So in reality, you disappointed yourself instead of letting things be and letting people be the people that they are.

When you practice being loving in all of your relationships you will experience a great deal of joy in your life. Human expansion is possible through love, as love is a higher vibration that allows our consciousness to evolve. Always be loving even when others aren't or don't give it back. When we drop our expectations, we make it easier for ourselves. We don't get caught up in disappointment and have our feelings hurt when we drop the expectations we have of others. People simply are who they are and we are who we are. Love freely without the expectation of having it returned, don't place stipulations on your love. Give love freely and without reservation. When you are

capable of doing this, you will attract love back into your life in every area. People will be drawn to you and you will attract loving people who give their love to you freely.

It is much easier to be loving when you come from a place of inner peace. When we are stressed, angry or otherwise upset it is very hard for us to express our loving feelings towards others because we are caught up in lower frequency vibrations. Assess the ways in which you can eliminate stress and frustration in your life. If there are toxic people who anger you that you could perhaps limit your time with, take steps towards doing so. Protect your feelings at all costs. Your feelings are so important to your ability to give and receive love. Giving and receiving love is easy when you are happy and surrounded by positive nurturing people. But when you are faced with frustrations, anxiety and people who aren't coming from a place of love, it is important to change those factors and allow yourself a more loving environment from which you can thrive. It also goes without saying that in order to give and receive love freely, you must also extend that to yourself. Practice consciously loving yourself every single day. Say I love you when you look at yourself in the mirror. Don't judge or criticize yourself too harshly when you make mistakes, and look for the things that you like about yourself rather than noticing the things that you don't like. Do loving things for yourself such as giving yourself the time and space to breathe, relax and concentrate on hobbies or personal development. When someone pays you a compliment, listen to what they are saying and feel your heart expand with love for that person. Smile and say thank you, instead of rejecting the compliment or secretly feeling that they are just feeding your ego.

You can be love at every moment of the day through your smiles, actions, thoughts, and behaviors. Be love to yourself, your family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers.

Exude love from your pores. Let your inner light shine and be your guiding force in life.

Don't be discouraged by others who aren't as loving, simply send them loving thoughts and know that they too will get there when they are ready.

CHAPTER 13: CONNECTING TO SOURCE

"Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our whole lives are spent searching for answers; who are we, why are we here, and what are we supposed to do while we are here? These are some tough questions. Questions that we all have for ourselves. Somewhere along our journey in life we begin analyzing our lives at a closer view – aware that the self plays a huge role in what happens to us. We begin asking questions that we weren't asking before and acknowledging things about ourselves that perhaps do not serve us well such as attitudes, limiting beliefs, and negative thought patterns. We can feel when we are out of sorts and not living the way we really ought to be living. Things feel messy and chaotic and very stressful. By contrast, when we make the right decisions life feels effortless, peaceful and joyous. This is when we are in alignment with the universe. When we are in alignment with the universe our lives flow beautifully and feel harmonious; this connects us to source energy; the very fabric of our existence. As we navigate through our human experience, we get intelligent messages and subtle hints from the universe about where we need to be and what we need to be doing to be more connected to source and ultimately who we are inside. Sometimes we veer off course or follow a direction that we are not meant to be following, only to find out through a series of painful events, that we were off track in our lives. Our thoughts are often the cause of our missteps in life, as we tend to overthink things instead of believing in our intuition and the power of our dreams. The more connected we are to source, however, the less

and less this happens. And the more we can enjoy our lives and believe in the choices we make. Living in flow is the ultimate definition of success. Connecting to source puts the entire universe at our fingertips and allows us to manifest whatever it is that we need into our lives, simply by focusing upon it. It might not always show up in the way that we think, but we always get what we think about.

What is source

Source refers to source energy. It is the energy from which everything is born and is derived from. It is the energy of all that is, was and ever will be. Some people call source God or God energy, others simply say “the universe” or “divine source”, while others simply refer to it as “Source” or “Source Energy”. For the purpose of this chapter, we will be referring to it as Source - or Source Energy in some instances. Source is the energy of all there ever was. Before this planet was created, before life on earth and human habitation here, before our solar system existed, there was energy there; the energy of all that we are born from. Energy cannot die and therefore will always be. Whether you aware of it or not, you are an eternal being. The energy from which you were born will never cease to exist. Your body will eventually fade into nothing and become deceased, but you and the essence of you will always be. You are eternal. It is when we are connected to this eternal nature of ourselves that we are also connecting to source. Because this is when we are truly aware of who and what we are. The feeling of being connected to source is one of profound peace, joy, and harmony with the universe. You feel as though you are exactly where you should be. You do not regret, fear, hope, or covet. You are in the moment of your life and doing everything you need

to at that moment. The moment is perfect. The environment is perfect. And everything around you is in complete harmony and resonating with your soul. Being connected to source means that you are in alignment with the universe and that you are vibrating at a high frequency. When you vibrate at this level you are connected to the same frequency as source energy and can manifest anything you desire into your life.

As human beings we have an odd affliction of focusing so much on the future that we often aren't even aware of each moment in which we live. We think that we are "living" when in fact we are wasting our presence of mind by thinking about something that hasn't happened yet. One of the greatest gifts we have as human beings is the ability to tap into source by being present in the moment of life. There will be no other moment like the one you experience in the now. Never again will this moment arrive in your life. Why would you want to give it up in favor of something that hasn't happened yet, or might not happen at all? Some believe that they don't have time for staying present, because it requires too much time and dedication to relaxation. Time that they don't have. But it really doesn't take a lot of time out of your day and you can spend as little as ten or fifteen minutes per day connected to source for it to make a lasting difference in your life over time.

Staying present with your thoughts is one of the most powerful (and obvious) ways to connect to source, however another often overlooked way to connect is to raise your vibration. Raising your vibration is accomplished by focusing on emotions, actions and behaviors that are in line with your higher self. These higher frequency vibrations are what connect you to divine source and enable you to create true manifestation in your

life. When we are stuck in negative cycles with negative emotions, these are considered to be lower frequency and cannot connect us to divine energy; therefore cannot allow us to live in the light of who we really are. Only when we transcend negativity, can we come closer to the nature of our true selves, and feel peace and lasting happiness.

Humans have complicated lives and we often take on more than we can manage. Many times our lives become stressful beyond belief. But how we manage this stress and how quickly we pull ourselves back into a higher frequency is what matters most when faced with difficult situations. Life will never be peaceful and calm one hundred percent of the time, unless perhaps you are a Buddhist monk or have the luxury of spending every day in meditation.

How to raise your vibration

Raising your vibration can be simple or difficult depending on your state of mind at the time. Your emotions and thoughts play a large role in how well or poorly you are able to switch yourself over to a new state of mind when you are in a stressful state. The most important thing to remember is that you are in control of the way you feel and the decisions that you make. You can always make another choice and you can always choose to feel better. Raising your vibration has a lot to do with feelings, but eventually your actions, decisions and behaviors should also be of high frequency if you plan on living a calm spiritual life full of peace and joy. It is always best to start by analyzing your feelings, as they tend to lead your decisions. Raising your vibration simply means to focus on things that make you feel good. Negative feelings, actions and thoughts are of lower frequency and often rooted in fear, where as positive feelings, actions and

thoughts are of higher frequency, as they are rooted in love. When we act out of fear we are in a desperate place and reacting to external influences around us. Our instincts can be primitive and cause us to be defensive, protective, aggressive and withdrawn. This is a means of protecting ourselves from perceived danger, but there is rarely any real danger. The real danger is our thoughts leading us to believe that we are in danger, when we are really just afraid.

We get what we think about and attract what we put out, so focusing on such negative emotions is detrimental to our overall health and well-being. By contrast, when we focus on higher vibrations we tend to be happier, more peaceful and enjoy life. When we are mostly positive in our thoughts and actions, we aren't simply reacting to life. We are thinking about what makes us feel good, letting our hearts guide us and living in accordance to the things that make us feel happy and give our lives meaning. Look around at the beauty of the universe. Do we really want to spend our time on this earth stressed out and angry. It is up to us to learn to savor the moment; each one that we have.

Let's assume for now that you don't know how to pull yourself out of an emotional rut and that you have the desire to live a more balanced and peaceful life. These are some steps to help you assess where you are at with your emotional barometer and what you can do about it if you feel the need to pull yourself up.

1. Ask yourself how you feel

It's important to know how you feel at all times because your feelings are your barometer for how good or bad you are doing in your life. Your feelings warn you of stress, depression, anger, and other feelings that can alert you to problems or areas that need your attention. A feeling is a reflection of a need for action. Sometimes the action is choosing to not think about something, but sometimes the action can be a decision about how you live your life. Your feelings are the best way to figure out how successful and happy you are. Each day take a moment to tap into your feelings and assess how you are doing. Take some quiet time to breathe deeply and listen to your body and mind. Allow your thoughts to flow freely and observe your reaction to those thoughts. If you notice any tension, anger, or other negative emotions surrounding something that is happening in your life, ask yourself what you can do about it.

Knowing how you feel is the cornerstone to being able to change it. If you allow your feelings to control you and your thoughts to think you, then you cannot take charge of your life and will find it extremely difficult to experience tranquility. Assess your feelings on a day-to-day basis. In the beginning you do not need to do anything with those observations. Simply be aware of how you are feeling. Once you get good at assessing your feelings, you will be able to act on them and modify your lifestyle, behavior, or thoughts to redirect your negative energy or eliminate it all together. You will find that doing this will greatly reduce the amount of time you spend in lower frequency vibrations.

2. Do something else

It happens to us all. We are at work or doing something around the house when suddenly we start thinking about something that makes us angry, worried or depressed. It is important when this happens to not let our thoughts run wild. This is the time to be disciplined and focused and to turn our attention away from that which makes us upset, and towards something else. When you start to go down, catch yourself. Say, "Oh no, I know what's happening here and I can't let this happen." Know that going down the road of negativity is only going to attract more of what you don't want into your life. Then think about something different you can do that will make you feel good. Maybe it's going for a walk with your dog, picking up a good book, calling your mom or friend, or baking some cupcakes. Whatever your "thing" is – make it something that is easy, accessible and something that you can do whenever you need to pull yourself up. You may have an arsenal of feel good tools in your belt. It is up to you to decide what works best for you. Nobody knows you better than you.

3. Quiet the mind

When we are busy with mind chatter we are not present with our inner being. The most peaceful moments that bring us clarity and joy come from those moments when the mind is quiet and the spirit takes over. Quieting the mind is essential to raising our vibration and connecting to source. Meditation is something that we are all capable of no matter how old, what our beliefs, or where we live. We can all take a few moments out of our day to take some deep purposeful breaths and release stress and worry. The more that we meditate the better that we become at letting our inner being experience peace. We become the observer of our thoughts and obtain separation between that

which we are and that which we think we are. Our thoughts are things but our thoughts are not who we are. By quieting the mind and observing thoughts, we can clearly see things for what they are. Meditation can be done while sitting in a traditional seated pose, or by laying down, or even in doing routine activities or tasks that are not thought-intensive. There are many ways to meditate. The key to meditation is to clear your mind of thought and allow yourself to be in the moment of life and let your inner being be present. Sometimes washing dishes can be meditational, or taking a nature walk, or drinking a hot cup of tea. Your method of meditation is unique to you and is deeply personal. It has to be.

If you are just starting out, find fifteen or twenty minutes per day to meditate. Choose a time that works best for your schedule, is free from distraction and when you are most likely to be in a relaxed state of mind. Regular meditation will bring about a great sense of peace in your life and provide clarity about your life's direction and purpose. When we live in a reactionary state of mind, letting the waves of life swallow us and crash us around – we are not steering our own lives. By contrast, when we meditate we learn how to sail on the open seas. We learn how to navigate in the direction that we want to go and how to listen to our heart to discover what we want most out of life. Meditation is about getting to the source of you, the universe and life. We are all the creator of our own universe, but when we don't realize this potential or tap into it we end up learning things the hard way instead of going with the grain and living in flow.

5. Focus on love

Love is a high frequency vibration that connects us to source. It is a powerful emotion that can heal us and make us feel better than any drug ever could. Love is what makes the universe thrive. It is the hidden energy in all life that expands the universe as well as collective consciousness. When we focus our energy and attention on loving and being loved, it is hard to think about any of the lower frequency vibrations such as anger or hate. Love has the power to cancel out negative energy because it is more powerful and healing. Love is not rooted in fear and is one of the purest emotions we can feel. It doesn't matter which type of love you focus on, but only that you focus upon it in your life. It can be the love of a mother, father or sibling, the love of a spouse or partner, or the love of your friends. Even pets provide us with wonderful opportunities to experience pure unconditional love. They love us no matter what and only want to be by our side and please us.

Focus your energy on the love that you have in your life. When you begin to feel down or unhappy, reach out to someone and give love. When you express love toward another it always comes back to you. Directing your attention on love and not on negative energy will give you the time you need away from your lower frequency thoughts and will pull you up into higher vibrations. It is important when you experience lower frequency emotions, to realize that you are doing it and to recognize the need to elevate your thoughts and energy. Love is one of the highest forms of pure energy you can experience. For this reason it has the power to heal and raise your vibration to a level that is required in order to connect you to source energy.

5. Get outside

Sometimes we forget how utterly amazing this expansive universe is. We sit in our homes and offices and travel by car rarely taking the time to sit outside and enjoy what is happening around us. Nature in itself is supremely beautiful and pure source energy. The energy of everything is contained in nature. It is all around us every day; we just forget to look sometimes. Every day we can choose to go outside, breathe in the fresh air, stare up at the clouds, and feel the wind in our hair. Observing nature is grounding and reminds us that there is so much more to life than experiencing minor bumps in the road. Just look up into the sky and imagine what is beyond the clouds, beyond the sun, and beyond the stars. Suddenly you aren't worried about the disagreement you had with your boss. Nature connects us to all that is and allows us to feel expansive and connected to the universe. We cannot connect with our mother earth when we are sitting on our man made couch, watching television and eating processed food. We must feel the earth beneath our feet, smell the air and be present in nature. Spend some time every day outside. Being outside has a tremendously positive effect on your health and wellbeing.

A simple walk in nature is a great way to connect to the earth. Gardening is also another wonderful way to get outside. It allows us to plant life and tend to it like we would our children. Looking after plants and flowers is healing and meditational. It takes us away from our worries and grounds us. The way we look after our garden is similar to the way we must look after our lives; weeding and replanting. We must eliminate negative

thoughts and behaviors from our mental garden and plant new seeds of opportunity.

This is how we move forward in life and make progress.

Whether you take a walk, spend time in your garden, walk your dog, or go for a bike ride – the important thing is that you get outside. Being outside lifts your spirits and is important to your overall health and wellbeing. Enjoy the many miracles of our planet.

Now that you know what source is and that raising your vibration is essential to connecting to source, start thinking about the ways in which you already connect to source. Think about the things you do in your life that make you feel the happiest. When do you feel that you are truly in your element? Make a commitment to focus on the things in your life that make you feel your best. Sometimes we feel guilty about those things because we think that our hobbies or extra curricular activities should be done sparingly in favor of work and responsibility. Many times the things we are most passionate about can turn into our life's work if we were just to allow ourselves the time enough to focus upon it. You often hear stories about people who followed their passion to realize a dream they had, simply because they stuck with something they believed in and allowed their heart to lead.

When we live our lives following our hearts and passions, we are living in flow with who we are and the possibilities are endless. We can achieve our true potential and so much more. The hard part is staying in flow. It is so easy to get knocked around by life and switch off our positive mindset when something goes wrong. Sometimes we just don't feel like being positive because we are disheartened. We just want to run away and lick

our wounds. That is taking the easy road. It is much easier to just let our emotions rule us than it is to take charge of our life and not allow what happens to us or around us to dictate how we feel inside. As we've discussed in this book many times, the law of attraction is always at work – whether we are aware of it or not. Everything we feel, focus on and allow into our lives has a vibrational frequency. When things are good our vibrational frequency is high and positive. This invites more of the same frequency events to our life. This is how the law of attraction works. The universe does not discern between positive or negative. We simply get what we think about and focus on. So the more we focus on negativity, the more of it we invite into our lives. The more we think about failing, the more we tend to fail. It is just how the universe works and there isn't anything we can do to change that. But what we can change is ourselves. We can change the way we think and behave with this knowledge.

Focus on what you want not what you don't want

Whenever you are going through something difficult or experiencing some type of pain, ask yourself what you want to happen. We tend to spend so much time rehashing what has already happened, fearing what might happen and worrying about what might have already happened – that we aren't thinking about what truly matters; our desired outcome. When we only focus upon what we don't want, we invite more of that energy into our lives. So rehashing negative events, fearing or worrying about them only brings more of that about. It sounds simple in theory but it takes practice to put into play. For some reason we often let our emotions control what we feel during crisis and this keeps us in a state of fear and stress. The most important thing for us to remember in any life

crisis (big or small) is that we must stop ourselves from making things worse with our thoughts. Focus on the big picture. What do you want the outcome to be? Where do you want things to go? What is your ideal scenario? Play out those thoughts in your mind instead of the lower vibrational ones. These solution-oriented thoughts are far more productive and provide you with tangible opportunities to actually solve problems rather than worry about them.

Focusing on solutions keeps your mindset positive and productive. The law of attraction will work for you instead of against you when you practice focusing on what you want during crisis moments. Have you ever noticed that when you worry about something happening before it does, that you can actually will it to happen? This is the law of attraction at work, even though it's results are negative. When you don't focus on what you want to happen and instead focus on what you don't want you put more energy toward what you don't want. Energy is what attracts things to us. So think about where your energy is going. What do you spend time thinking about? Is there anything you can do to change your energy so that you can attract a more positive outcome?

When the law of attraction is at work for us we are connected to source and are living in the light of who we really are. This is largely because we are taking charge of our life instead of being thrashed about by circumstance. Knowing how the law of attraction works is important, but knowing how to get it to work for you is even more important. Switching our thoughts to be more positive can be a huge task, especially if we are not accustomed to positive thinking. Sometimes our upbringing and social circles influence us in negative ways (including mindset). Even when we have negative people around us,

we must still find a way to be positive and look on the bright side. Always focus on what you want instead of on what you don't want. Notice the changes that occur in your life just from doing that.

Manifesting your desires

We all have dreams, goals, and things in life that give us a sense of great purpose or passion. When we bring our lives to a point where we are in flow with the universe and focused upon higher vibration energies, we invite possibility into our lives; the possibility to manifest anything we desire. Think about the energy that you put out into the universe. What type of vibration are you putting out? Are you focused and thinking about what you want and on solutions and goals? You will attract like energy to that which you are feeling. For example, if you are focusing on feeling abundant and see yourself in the light of being successful, wealthy and happy – you are putting out that vibration. That vibration attracts other vibrations of the same frequency, making it easy for you to experience wealth, success, and happiness. Of course in order for this to work, you must maintain this energy with some degree of regularity, you cannot just choose to do it one afternoon and think that you will be adorned with riches and wealth. It is very much a state of mind and for many, a fundamental shift in the way that you think about your life.

If you think about where you are in your life at this present time, you have a vibrational frequency that you have already been putting out for some time. This can be witnessed in the things around you. Look at the people in your life, the job you have, your home,

and what is happening in your life. All of these things are a direct manifestation of a vibration that you have already been putting out into the universe. Sometimes we do this unconsciously because we aren't in control or aware of just how much our thoughts create our universe. If you are down on yourself and unhappy with your job, your home and relationships – you will likely see signs of unhappiness everywhere you look.

Nothing feels right or good. You may feel that you have horrible luck, but truly the only problem in this scenario is your state of mind. Thinking and feeling unlucky just sets that vibrational tone and allows more of that energy into your life. It is imperative that you do not allow yourself to go down that road.

If you are someone who is easily affected by external influence, take stock of your life and look around for inspiration and ways to improve. Are you hanging out with people who motivate you or deflate you? Are you spending time on activities and hobbies that make you feel creative and inspired? Are you taking the time to think critically each day and come up with ideas and solutions? Or are you squandering your time on events and activities that don't motivate you or support your dreams? There are plenty of things in life that distract us and take us away from where we need to be. TV can do that or spending too much time mindlessly surfing the Internet. We all need a little downtime in life, just make sure that you aren't giving up your life in favor of downtime. We tend to feel our best when we are following our passions, working towards our goals and being the person that we feel we already are inside.

In order to manifest your desires in life, you must first identify what those desires are. There is a plethora of ways in which to do this, in order to keep your eye on the prize.

1. Write them down

Lists can be powerful and action oriented. They drive us to act and help give us direction on where we need to go. You can write a list of goals or dreams, or a list of what tasks need to be completed in order to reach one particular goal. The act of writing out your goals and thinking them through in an orderly fashion makes your chances of achieving them that much greater. Think your ideas out and then get them down on paper so that you have something tangible to look at, touch and revisit from time to time.

2. Talk about them

The more that you talk about things, the more that they become a part of your reality. When you bring dreams or wishes into conversation they become goals. People can see and feel your passion when you talk about your dreams and that energy is reciprocated. People like to hear about others following their dreams of success and are motivated and inspired by it. Seek out other people who follow their passion and talk to them about it. Find out what their secret is and what tips or advice they may have for you. Keep the conversation going in any way you can. Talking about your goals brings you one step closer to realizing them.

3. Vision board it

Create a vision board out of magazines and pictures. Cut out words and images that are representations of your life's dreams. You can post these things on a piece of poster board, canvas or plywood. Arrange a collage of things that you want to invite and attract into your life. Don't limit your thoughts in any way with this exercise. Post your vision board somewhere that you will see it regularly and spend a few moments each day staring at it and thinking about the things posted. See yourself in a successful light, accomplishing all that you have set out to achieve.

The whole point of connecting to source is that we feel who we really are and experience joy in the moment of that knowing. We often have illusions about life based on what society or external influences tell us. It is hard to think about such grand things when others would sometimes have us think small. The magic of life is in knowing who we are and learning to create our lives exactly the way we want them. Life doesn't have to be hard, but we will no doubt encounter difficult circumstances. Life doesn't have to be stressful either, but we will also endure stressful situations. These things are temporary and don't define our lives as a whole. They will pass and we will move on to another state of being. It is up to us which state of being we choose to be connected to at any given moment. We can always choose to think of things in a different light, a brighter light. Even when we don't feel that we are in control of our life, we still have control over what we choose to think. We may not be able to control what others do, what others think about us, or even what happens to us – but we can always control how we view those things and what they mean to us. If we let life whip us around like a

boat without a sail, then we are destined to repeat the same mistakes, act out of fear, and experience a great deal of stress. But when we take control of our boat and steer it in the direction that we want to go, intently looking into the horizon of our dreams and goals – our energy helps guide us there. Look into the horizon of your own life; that is where you need to keep your energy focused. If you always looked down at your feet you would never see the horizon and would be too focused on the micro instead of the macro.

Always do whatever you need to do to keep your thoughts positive and free from fear and worry. You will not be able to stop every single thought and will still experience stressful moments in life, but you can switch your thoughts to be more positive and productive by focusing on the big picture. Think about what you want out of your life and where you want your sailboat to go. The more that you focus upon your own energy; the more that you will be aware of how your energy attracts things into your life. Take responsibility for how you view things. We are always in control of our own point of view and can shift our perceptions at any point in time. The person who benefits from this is you. We all create our own lives and are capable of manifesting anything we desire. We simply have to believe that we can, and focus our energy on what we can do instead of what we can't do or fear we won't be able to do.

CHAPTER 14: INTUITION, OUR INNER VOICE

"The more and more each is impelled by that which is intuitive, or the relying upon the soul force within, the greater, the farther, the deeper, the broader, the more constructive may be the result."

- *Edgar Cayce*

We have all experienced intuition at some point in our lives; that inner knowing which resides deep inside of us leading us to act or believe in something that we have no grounds for knowing through logic or reasoning. This inherent feeling of truth is a source of subconscious knowledge that is divine in nature. Our intuition can be one of the best tools we have at our disposal and can help us navigate through life in a way that supports the very person we are on the inside. Our intuition is our inner voice nudging us when we need to see or understand something. It helps us make the right decisions and follow the paths in life that resonate most with our spirit. We all have varying degrees of intuition and can tap into it at any time once we become attuned to recognizing it. Intuition is very subtle, like a whisper in the wind. If we don't know how to recognize it, it can be very easy to miss. Another challenge is in trusting it. The old saying "hindsight is 20/20" comes from the discovery that looking back you can see things clearly with perfect vision for what they are, but unfortunately by the time you realize that it is too late. Your perfect vision of the past doesn't serve you when something has already occurred. Often people use this saying when they ignored their intuition and went against what they felt inside they should do. We do this a lot as

humans. Our brains are wonderful and can do amazing things for us, but they can also get in the way sometimes, especially when it comes to intuition.

Think about how many times you've had a hunch or a feeling about something and questioned your very own feelings, simply because you didn't have evidence to back it up or you just didn't trust in your own gut feeling. Sometimes we are even afraid of what our intuition tells us because we don't like what it means. Often our intuition warns us of things that could result in a drastic change to our life; a change that we may not be ready for. Most of us can say that we've both ignored our intuition and listened to it at least once during our life. Our intuition is a subtle reminder that we have divine knowledge at our fingertips; knowledge that can guide our lives in unimaginable ways and help us live the best life possible.

The trick for most of us is in knowing how to identify when something is our intuition talking to us versus our pesky thoughts or fears. The best way to explain this is that intuition is confident knowing. There is no questioning, doubting, or fearing. You just know. Where many of us fall short with intuition is when we have that initial "gut feeling" we then begin to analyze the feeling in an attempt to assess why we feel that way, where it came from, and what the basis of our feelings are. As soon as we begin deconstructing intuition, we become further removed from it. This makes ignoring it much easier because we often cannot identify logical reasons why we feel the way we do. When we become accustomed to the feeling of intuition we learn not to question it because we know that it is our intuition speaking to us, not a thought, fear, or worry. Thoughts are different from intuition and help us build cases for reason and logic.

Intuition comes from a place of creativity and trust rather than logic and reason. This is precisely what makes trusting it and identifying it so difficult for some. When learning to identify and trust intuition it is just like exercising a muscle, we must begin using it in order for it to be exercised and put into action. We may make a few mistakes at first or think that something is intuition when it isn't. That's normal and to be expected. But eventually over time, the doubting, questioning and going against it will diminish and ultimately disappear.

Raise your awareness

Now that you are considering your own intuition and how it might help you in the decisions you make in life, it is important to raise your overall awareness about your intuition. Do this by being aware of your surroundings, paying attention and listening to the subtleties of the subconscious mind. You must be aware that this divine gift resides within you in order for you to begin to use it. Your intuition will develop the more that you use it and the more that you become aware of its presence in your life. Even if you have never been able to tap into your intuition before, simply by raising your awareness, you will begin to harness the power of this divine resource. Set your intention to experience the power of intuition into your life. Each morning when you wake up tell yourself that you are going to tune into your intuition this day. Say it out loud. Create a mantra that supports your intention, you can say it each morning or write it down and look at it every day. Tell the universe that you are ready to receive and set your intention to receive divine information through your intuition. Start paying attention to the subtle feelings that you have; the ones that are almost fleeting, a faint whisper of a

feeling. If something is obsessive and causing you distress, it likely isn't your intuition. But if you have a gut feeling about something or a faint feeling that you cannot really explain, it is likely your intuition speaking to you. Start identifying feelings that are your intuition and feelings and thoughts which are not. You may choose to follow your instincts to see where it leads you. When you are first learning, you should be careful about which feelings you follow. Following your "intuition" only to find out that it wasn't your intuition can be challenging and feel like a setback, so be careful about what you do in the early days of raising your awareness. The point of raising your awareness is simply to begin identifying your intuition and learning how to recognize it. Building your awareness about your intuition will make you more confident and trusting in it will lead to less mistakes when you begin to follow it. Your intuition points you in the direction but doesn't necessarily give you the answers, the reasoning or the backup information that you need. It simply guides you and gives you subtle hints about where you need to be in life.

Find time to meditate

It's been said many times in this book and will be said again; meditation is extremely important to your sense of peace and wellbeing. But meditation is also one of the best ways to become attuned to your intuition. When we are in a meditative state we remove the noise of daily life, the rampant thoughts that irritate us, and the distractions of the external world. We go into ourselves, which ironically, is the Latin meaning for the word "intuition". When we meditate we sit quietly, observing our thoughts and letting them go, but mostly being still and enjoying the silence of our being. This is where we

can experience healing, creativity, and intuition. You may have some revelations when you meditate, things may just come to you. Solutions to problems, ideas, creative thoughts, and feelings that are seemingly out of left field may manifest. Meditation is something that we all need to make time for daily, if even for ten or fifteen minutes per day.

The best time to meditate is early in the morning. The morning is serene, peaceful and unaffected by the stress of the day. Try to wake up before everyone else in your household, find some quiet time for yourself. The mornings are the most beneficial from a health and yogic standpoint as well. The air is freshest in the morning creating the most amount of Prana (energetic life force). The rays from the sun are also best in the morning and the least harmful to you. Think about how you feel when you step outside into the fresh morning air and breathe in the life force of the day. The air you take in fills you with energy and vitality. Even if you do not meditate outside or only do once in a while, the mornings are still the best. The biggest reason is that you have yet to take on the stress of the day and the mind, having just woken from sleep is at its quietest point. As the day progresses, your mind gathers clutter, stress and thoughts begin to build. The morning is quiet and peaceful and gives you time to breathe before the stress of the day overtakes you or puts you into overdrive. If you have a busy family life, try to wake up before your family and spend your morning meditation alone without the sound of kids arguing, showers running, or dogs running around. Another huge benefit of meditating in the morning is that it sets your vibrational tone for the rest of the day. This means that your day will run smoother and you will be calmer as a result of your morning

meditation. When we are stressed out or in a hurry, we tend to overreact to things, become emotional, and sometimes show physical signs of stress. When we start our day with a meditation, the likelihood of this happening becomes significantly reduced.

If you are not accustomed to meditation, go back and read chapter two. It will help you gain a better understanding of the benefits of meditation, how to meditate, and how to get the most out of your practice. The most important thing to remember with meditation is that regular practice, if even for only a few minutes per day is the key to success. Start with ten minutes per day, then increase it to fifteen, twenty and eventually 30 minutes. You will notice that your intuition becomes clearer and more distinguished as you allow yourself to drift deeper and deeper into your meditations. At first you may feel as if you “aren’t doing anything”, but give it time, do not question it and simply allow yourself to “be”. You will notice a change in your overall health and wellbeing, and you will feel more at peace with your self and the direction of your life.

Trusting in self

The biggest hurdle in learning to trust your intuition is learning to trust yourself. It is hard for any of us to just throw caution to the wind and jump blindly into any decision. We are human beings after all; we like to examine all angles, have evidence to back us up, and the information at our fingertips. Intuition is in many ways, blind faith. If you are like most of us, you’ve been wronged in the past. You may have trusted someone only to be hurt in return or experienced pain and suffering as a result of openly trusting someone. When your trust gets broken in any type of a relationship, it affects your

entire life and your relationships with everyone; including yourself. It can be hard to come back from and can impact us in negative ways. One of the ways it impacts us is in thinking that everyone is out to get us. When we are mistreated or have our trust violated, we tend to think the worst – of everyone. The problem with this is that eventually we discover that we are wrong. Not everyone is going to hurt us and not everyone is going to break our trust. When we discover that even though we've been hurt in the past not everyone is out to get us, it actually puts us in a worse position of now distrusting ourselves. It begins with a general distrust of everyone, a suspicious attitude towards others – almost waiting for them to hurt us. But then, when the opposite happens and we are proven wrong it is a huge blow to our ego and our sense of self. We lose our self-confidence and now question our thoughts, actions and decisions. This act of self-doubting and questioning is common among people because many of us have been hurt or have had our trust broken in the past. The key is to recognize this and to not allow yourself to become suspicious of others. If something bad happens to you or someone abuses your trust, consider it an isolated incident. Don't assume that others will do the same or that you cannot trust anybody anymore. All people are made differently and sometimes we make the wrong decision. Placing all people in the same light as those that have wronged you will only hurt you in the long run – not anybody else.

Learning to trust others is the first step in learning to trust yourself. And unfortunately, until you can do this, you may have a very hard time trusting in your intuition. Trust is a huge part of developing your intuition and learning to use it. When you trust in your

intuition, your life becomes effortless and smooth. Your decisions are often correct and lead you to experiences that are wonderful and meaningful. But if you are someone who doesn't trust others, then you likely don't trust yourself, which means that trusting your intuition will become almost impossible.

For this reason, I want you to focus on trusting others first. If you are already trusting of others and have a lot of faith in yourself then you perhaps don't need to read the next two paragraphs. Think about the people in your life who you don't trust or can't trust. Think about the ways in which you don't trust them. Ask yourself why you don't trust them and what that means to your relationship with them. Next, think about what would happen if you did trust them, even if they have wronged you in the past. What would be the harm in trusting them and just allowing them to be who they are? The next time someone asks you for something or you are placed in a position of having to trust someone, don't question it. Just set your intention to trust the person without reason. See what happens. Eventually over time, you will discover that the more that you trust people, the more that they come through for you. This is the law of attraction at work. When you believe that somebody is untrustworthy, you will inevitably attract that into your life. By focusing on the qualities that upset you most about people (untrustworthiness) you are creating more of that energy in your life and proving yourself correct; people can't be trusted. This energy is negative and keeps you in a lower vibrational state of emotion, making it almost impossible to experience peace and harmony. You are on guard and your defenses are up; you've built a sturdy wall around yourself to ensure that you don't get hurt. Well guess what? The wall is hurting you. You

might as well build a revolving doorway through your brick wall because people are getting in, and your energy towards distrust is wreaking havoc in your life. You have to remove the wall and lower your defenses. Allow people into your life without thinking the worst. People will shine if given the opportunity. Give them the chance.

Once you allow yourself to trust others, your intuition becomes stronger and you learn more about people and what makes them tick. Through trusting and sharing with others, you open yourself up to a world of possibilities and deeper, more meaningful relationships with others. You also create a deeper more meaningful relationship with yourself; the foundation of intuition.

Intuition is subtle. It can also be loud and persistent and knock you on the head, but most of the time it is subtle. It can easily be lost in the crowd of daily thoughts. We have so much information coming at us on a daily basis and most of it is conscious. Intuition comes from the unconscious, and is therefore harder to grasp and hold onto.

Sometimes it appears as if it just within our reach. It is a skill that we develop over time the more that we use it and the more that we trust in ourselves and our feelings.

There are a number of ways for you to develop a deeper trust in yourself, including:

1. Listen to yourself in the quiet moments

When you are free from distraction, stressful thought, and worry – what are your thoughts and feelings during those moments? How do you feel when you are at peace? These moments can be very telling.

2. Observe your body

The body often gives us queues to how we are feeling. We tense up when we are stressed, our breathing may become strained when we are fearful or worried. Observe the changes in your body at various life events and begin to notice what they are.

3. Feel the energy surrounding you

Sometimes the energy of a room is all you need to determine what is going on. You can tell a lot by picking up on the energy of others. Start to look for energetic changes and vibrations that you can pick up on and tune into. Set your intention to tune into the energy around you. By being more aware of the energy around you, you will also be more in tune with yourself.

Follow your hunches

Now that you have learned about identifying intuition, trusting in others and learning to trust yourself – you are ready to follow some hunches and see where they take you. This is the fun part of following your intuition and where you will likely learn the most through trial and error. Intuition can be an indispensable tool and is paramount to creativity and innovation. Some of the most prolific thinkers of our time have relied heavily on intuition for inventions, theories, and progressive thought. You may worry about following your hunches out of fear that you will be wrong, or worry of repercussions. Try to eliminate these types of thoughts from your stream of consciousness. They can be harmful to you. Instead, trust in your hunches and believe

that there is validity to them. Don't try to analyze where, how or why. Simply believe that a hunch is your intuition speaking to you through the subconscious. Some of our most profound information comes from the subconscious. Pay attention to your hunches so you don't miss them. At the end of the day deciding to follow a hunch can be the best thing you ever did, but it can also take courage and belief in oneself.

Here's some practical ways for you to cultivate trust in your hunches and to become more comfortable with following them.

Gather information

If you are leaning towards a major decision or a life-altering decision, make sure you take the time to gather the information. Gathering information allows you to have an accurate view of the current situation and will prompt your intuitive hunches to be stronger and have more ammunition behind them. When you gather as much information as possible, you give yourself a better and more holistic view of the situation. This helps to ensure that you aren't jumping into things based solely on emotion and thoughts or fears. In fact remove emotion all together and build the facts, lay them out in a way that is easy for you to understand and identify. Having the facts laid out before you helps you think about things rationally. Don't plan on formulating a decision with your facts though; simply remain impartial to your decision, gather the facts and allow your intuition to take the lead. This may seem scary to you, but it is actually a very effective way to follow your intuition. The reason why so many of us cannot seem to listen to our intuition is because our rational thoughts, reasoning and

logic try to take control and out-smart our intuition. By gathering information first, you are reversing this process making it easier to trust your intuition. There won't be as much to question when you've done all of your research, you can simply trust in your intuition and let it lead you into a decision that is well backed with information.

Write it down

Whenever you have a hunch about something, no matter what it is – write it down. Keeping a record of your intuition will help you remember which ones were valid and which ones were just wishful thinking, or fear-based. You will need to consciously think about this each day in order for it to be effective. It is hard to remember to write down our feelings when we are not in the practice of doing it. Perhaps at first, you may want to check in with yourself a few times throughout the day. Ask yourself if you have any insights or intuition about anything today, then write it down. When you first begin doing this, you may be uncertain about which ones are intuition and which ones are thoughts. Don't worry so much about this, just continue writing down what you think are valid intuitive feelings and go with it. At the end of every week go back and look at what you wrote down, did any of it happen? Were you right or wrong about any of the things you wrote down? Make notes on your observations and continue to write down your intuition as you go about your days, and weeks. As you do this, you will become highly attuned to your intuition and following your hunches will be much easier. You will also have a record of which hunches were correct and which ones weren't. When you write something down, something that you have a hunch about – do your best to follow

it and see where it takes you, even if only partially. The insight that you will gain from doing this will be extremely valuable.

Let it settle

When you do have an intuitive hunch about something, resist the urge to jump into action, even if you are excited about taking action. Mistakes are often made in impatience and we can sometimes force things to happen that are not good for us and are not rooted in intuition, but rather wishful thinking. Sit with your intuition when it appears and let it settle. Write it down, as stated above and gather some more facts while remaining aware of what your intuition is. Promise yourself that you will sleep on it and revisit it the next day so that you don't make any hasty or quick decisions that could hurt you in the long run. Take a break from thinking about it and do something else that you enjoy like hiking, writing, or painting. During the quiet reflective moments of intellectual stimulation, you may have other information that will be made available to you. The point is not to rush it. Your intuition is a powerful tool and resource for you, but you must treat it with respect and allow it time to develop properly. Give yourself the time necessary to trust in your intuition. You are less likely to steer wrong when you have all of the information at your fingertips. Allow yourself the time to sit on it, step away from it, and revisit it a day later to discover whether the feeling is the same. Be patient and quiet the mind, and your intuition will be reliable and easier to trust. If you feel impulsive and impatient then you likely aren't receiving intuitive messages, or they could be convoluted with wishful thinking. A little bit of distance from that which you

are feeling, and some time to think will clear the skies and make way for clarity and harmony in your life.

Learning to trust and follow your intuition will take time, especially if you have a self-sabotaging nature, which many of us do. You will need to quiet those pesky voices that make you question and doubt yourself. Intuition is confidence in oneself and the less you try to sabotage yourself, the stronger it will become.

What are your limiting beliefs & how do you get rid of them?

When you are practicing your intuitive listening and following, you may discover that you don't feel confident, or that you are having a hard time with trusting yourself and your feelings. If this keeps happening to you, then it is worthwhile to do some self-exploration to discover what your limiting beliefs are. Sometimes we hold beliefs about ourselves that are negative and harmful. These beliefs can prevent us from achieving our true potential in life, and also serve as that voice in the back of your mind that comes at you hard with reasons why you can't do something, why you will fail, and why you shouldn't try. Often our limiting beliefs stem from a fear of some kind; perhaps something that happened to us as a child causing us to build a wall around ourselves and create a limiting belief in an attempt to "protect ourselves". Really what this does is the opposite of protect us, it in fact harms us to the point of self-sabotage. Your limiting beliefs could be holding you back from getting the job you want, having a loving relationship, making more money, and finding the success in your life that you deserve. Limiting beliefs will often prevent you from following your intuition because that could

lead you into the unknown and your limiting beliefs like to protect you from anything new or different by keeping you safe and predictable. This is a fine way to live if you don't have any goals in life. But most of us do. And most of us don't want to have limiting beliefs about ourselves, because we know that it is holding us back from who we really are.

The first step to eliminate a limiting belief that you hold is to uncover what that belief is. There may be more than one, some have dozens; or there may be just one or two really strong ones that you carry with you everywhere you go. Identifying your limiting beliefs is very important to understanding how they impact your life. Sometimes identifying what those beliefs are can be a challenge. Most of our challenges and negative experiences in life can be associated at least in some facet to a limiting belief we hold about ourselves. We can be sabotaging our lives, however, and not even know that we are doing it. If you have held a particular limiting belief for a long time, it may be so ingrained in who you are that you don't even realize that you are doing it.

When identifying what your limiting beliefs are, follow these important steps:

1. Ask yourself why

If you are not where you want to be in any area of your life, ask yourself why. Truly think about this one and break it down by topic. If you are not happy with your career, what don't you like about it? What went wrong? If you are not as financially secure as you would like, why? If you can't seem to find the right relationship, what's causing this? Why do you think that is happening? Ask yourself why and begin to write down

whatever comes to mind. Don't worry too much about how much sense it makes or how it sounds. Simply identify the areas of your life in which you are not satisfied and underneath each topic write down the reasons in bullet form why you aren't where you want to be.

2. Notice patterns in your thinking

Once you have written down all of the areas in which you don't feel successful as well as the reasons why, you may notice some recurring patterns. For example, if you feel that you can't find a good relationship and that you never found your calling in life with your career, the underlying belief could be the same. Perhaps it is "I am not worthy"; because somewhere along the line, someone made you feel that way. Try to identify patterns in your thinking and look beyond the "incident" or topic and identify a belief about yourself. Analyze what you wrote down for each topic or area of your life, and pull out a limiting belief from each. For some, perhaps there are two limiting beliefs. Write down what all of your limiting beliefs are (or what you think they are) for each area of your life. Circle any ones that come up more than once.

3. Hone in on the problem areas

If you noticed that a particular limiting belief came up more than once or crossed over into many different areas of your life put a star beside it. Looking at your list, you should now have several limiting beliefs written down, or perhaps just one if there is only one area of your life that you wish to work on. Now that you have asked yourself why and have uncovered what you think to be your limiting belief(s), it is time to challenge those

beliefs. Choose one or two of the biggest ones, the ones that have been problems in your life for years. You will know what they are by now. Simply doing this exercise has made you aware of these beliefs. You are staring them in the face and thinking about them, something that you may not have done before.

4. Challenge your limiting beliefs

Your limiting beliefs are holding you back in life. You now must face them head on and challenge them by proving them wrong. The longer you've had them, the harder this will be. But this is extremely important to diminishing their impact on your life. If your biggest limiting belief is a fear of failure, your job now is to prove yourself wrong. Think about times in your life when you have gone against your fear of failure and succeeded. Write down all of these times. If you cannot think of examples in your own life, think about people you know and times when they have done this. For each limiting belief that you have, find an example of a time in your life when this belief was proven wrong. You may have to dig, think, search and ponder – but they are there and they are within your reach. Challenge your beliefs until you begin to wonder why you have them. You should be able to come up with multiple examples of how your beliefs are wrong. If you believe that you will never lose weight, look around for people who used to be bigger than you and did lose weight. There is always an example of success if you just look for it. By consciously thinking about your limiting beliefs and challenging them, you are giving yourself an opportunity to realize that they are holding you back, they are based

in fear and not even true. This is a liberating exercise and will help you move on from your limiting beliefs.

5. Discard your limiting beliefs

You've identified them, you've challenged them, and now you must release them and let them go forever. If you are good with creative visualization and meditation, you may choose to do this with your mind. Begin by closing your eyes. See the words in your mind's eye. Hold your limiting belief so that you can see it clearly, after all it's been with you a long time. Say goodbye to your limiting belief and watch it drift away far into the distance until you can no longer see it. Perhaps you visualize it going up into the air, above the clouds and into the universe where it dissipates. Feel your body become lighter, imagine the sun warming your face and body, smile and imagine a bright White light radiating from every pore of your body. Spend a few minutes in the light of this beautiful visualization, until all of your limiting beliefs have been released. If you are not as comfortable with this visualization, you may also do a physical discard of your limiting beliefs by writing them down on paper and crumpling them up. You can throw them in the trash one at a time, or you may choose to burn them in a fireplace. However you choose to discard your limiting beliefs, ensure that you set your intention to release them and know that they are no longer needed, do not serve you and are not welcome in your life.

Intuition is knowing truth without fully understanding how or why you know it. But when you are attuned to listening to your intuition, you stop questioning it. You trust it

because you know that it is coming from your higher self in the form of divine knowledge. You know that listening to it is at your highest interest and will always lead you to the things in life that you need to experience most. Your intuition is pure, unbiased knowledge that can help you achieve things in your life that you never thought possible. It doesn't matter where you came from, what you think of yourself, or what others tell you. What matters is now and what you do with now. You are paving your future with your actions today. Yesterday has already happened and tomorrow isn't here yet so what are you going to do now?

You may have some inner work to do before you can begin fully manifesting the power of intuition into your life, but it is worth the journey and can be the best thing you ever decided to do. We are always on a perpetual mission to improve ourselves and discover who we really are. Isn't that part of what makes life so wonderful? Focusing upon your intuition will open you up to receive more love, success, and happiness in your life. You will learn to love and trust yourself when you can trust in your intuition, because you will always know what is best for you regardless of what anybody else tells you. Your intuition is your inner guide that can see the path before you even know it's there.

At the core of who we are, we are peaceful harmonious energetic beings who are unaffected by what people say, do or think. Our human brains often make it hard for us to see this when we become wrapped up in the ego brain. Our society supports the promotion of the ego self, but it is also the ego self that gets hurt, the ego self that feels inadequate, and the ego self that works so hard to project an image of who we are to the outside world. Who you are on the outside will always be harmonious when you are

in tune with who you are on the inside first. Turning inward and listening to the core of your being and taking time for silence and self-reflection is important to this process. Don't let your ego tell you who you are, it will inevitably lead to disastrous results. The ego has its place in our lives and is important for different reasons, but don't let it be your interpretation of who you are. Who you are is not defined by your career, financial status, social stature, or level of notoriety. Who you are is the person that's left when you strip all of that away.

CHAPTER 15: LIVING IN FLOW

“Those who flow as life flows know they need no other force.”

— Lao Tzu

We get one chance at living this life. It is up to us to decide how we want to live and what we want to focus on. We can always choose to make better decisions in our lives; decisions that support the essence of who we are inside. As we navigate through life we are provided with clues and intuition about where we need to be to support our authentic self. Subtle hints can help guide us as we are trying to become the best version of ourselves possible. When we are in tune with the universe we get better at following the clues and can hear the subtle whispers of the universe more clearly. These are the things that make our life run smoother and help us live the life that resonates with who we are on a spiritual level. Living in flow simply means that we are living in accordance with our true selves and making decisions based on who we really are, rather than on what other people want or expect. It is easy to veer off course in life, so it's no wonder it happens to us all. But we can control the frequency at which this occurs if we are aware of what triggers cause us to become distracted and misguided.

So far, we have talked about a variety of topics in this book. Each one of these topics will improve your life as a stand-alone principle or when combined with other principles. However, when combined, all of these things support the balance of mind, body and spirit. This book is the culmination of all of these things and has brought you to this

point – the last chapter; how to live in flow. I am going to reiterate some of the key points from previous chapters, reminding you of why each principle is important so that you can truly awaken to your true potential and live your life in flow using the lessons from this book. The mere fact that you began reading this book is the first step in changing your life for the better. Your higher self knew that you were in need of some balance in your life and that you were ready to embrace some changes to bring you closer to achieving that balance. We all have to start somewhere. Perhaps you already began before picking up this book, or perhaps this book was your starting point. Whatever stage you are at is the right stage for you. Know that you are exactly where you need to be in this journey, and it really is about the journey. Never focus only on the destination, as it's the journey that teaches us the most.

Nurture the mind

The mind can be our biggest ally or our greatest enemy depending on how we live our lives. Our minds are powerful but also deceiving. For this reason, it is imperative that we gain control over our minds and bring awareness to how our minds operate, so that we can use our mind as a tool – rather than allowing it to have free reign over us. There are times when it is appropriate to use our mind to help us solve problems, use critical thinking, or be analytical. But there are also times when using our mind doesn't serve us and we need to quiet the mind; such as when we are meditating, preparing for sleep, or spending time with loved ones. Being present and in the moment requires a delicate balance of mindfulness and awareness about our surroundings. In order to gain control over our minds we must embrace a variety of tactics and practice them with some

regularity. Our minds have been running the show our whole lives, so asking the mind to quiet isn't always as easy as it sounds. With some practice, however, it is not only possible, but likely the best thing you'll ever do to support the balance of mind, body and spirit. Our minds when left to their devices can derail us and send us spinning in a direction that is unhealthy and counterproductive to our wellbeing. We must tend to them like we would our garden and pull out the weeds.

Bad thoughts or recurring worries are like the weeds of our mind. They find their way into our headspace and can take over if we aren't careful. We must be diligent with negative thoughts and learn to recognize them when they occur so that we can observe how harmful they can be to our health and wellbeing. We know we are having a negative thought or that recurring thoughts are affecting us because it changes our entire demeanor. Negative or harmful thoughts can make us feel incredibly stressed out, panic-stricken, helpless, and depressed. These thoughts can also manifest into physical symptoms when they become too powerful. Stress can be a powerful force in our lives and can be a destructive force, causing our lives to veer off track emotionally, physically, and mentally. Anxiety and depression are often a result of stress in one's life. When we observe our thoughts and inner dialogue, we can build awareness about how well or poor we are doing at weeding our garden. When you notice yourself having recurring worries or stressful thoughts stop yourself. Ask yourself how those thoughts are serving you. You can choose to shout, "Stop!" in your mind or out loud, or you may choose to do something different to change up the energy. Distraction is often helpful when you are attempting to control pesky thoughts and emotions. Just changing what

you are doing will keep the mind active on something else and help prevent harmful thoughts from weaving their way deeper into the mind. The most important thing to remember with negative thoughts is that you can choose to do something else or think something else. Do not give up your power to these thoughts. You are in control and can change the direction of your thoughts and emotions by focusing on something else that feels better. Create a list of activities and thoughts that you can draw upon when you find yourself floundering in a negative headspace. These activities and thoughts will be your toolbox of positivity. These are the things that make you feel good. Perhaps it is making a cup of tea, calling a friend, or thinking about an upcoming vacation. You can choose any thoughts or activities you'd like, so long as they take you away from your negative thoughts and put you in a place of positivity. When we are in a negative place with our thoughts and emotions, we only attract more of what makes us unhappy. When we switch it up to something that feels better, we open the door for opportunity and can attract good things into our life instead.

One of the best practices we can get into for learning to control the mind is meditation. Engaging in meditation helps us reduce the clutter of the mind; the noise of everyday worry and stressors that cause us to be reactive rather than proactive. Meditation brings greater clarity and peacefulness to our being and promotes healthy wellbeing and a brighter outlook. Meditation has a number of physiological, psychological and spiritual benefits. There are simply too many positives to ignore and not one known negative characteristic. Meditation can heal you in ways you never thought possible. There are no barriers to prevent you from being able to meditate. Anyone can do it regardless of

age, location, physical ability, or skill set. Meditation requires as little as twelve minutes per day to be effective. If you aren't sure where to start, check out my website www.mindbodysmile.com and read one of my "Dr. Rob's 12 Minute Meditation" entries. That will get you in the mood to meditate and start you off on your journey. After you read the entry, close your eyes and drift into a meditative state for twelve minutes. You can choose to set a timer if you'd like to, or you can simply allow your internal clock to tell you when it's time to come back. Choose a position that is comfortable and peaceful for you. You can lay down if you'd like or sit up in a relaxed position. If you notice your mind becoming overactive during the process, simply bring yourself back by focusing on your breath or the rhythmic sound of something in the background. Some choose to listen to soft music or a meditation CD. It is really about what makes you the most comfortable. Practice daily meditation for two weeks and see how you feel. Twelve minutes per day is all that is needed. Of course you can do more if you'd like – there are no negative side effects to meditation and no known negatives in general. There are at least a hundred benefits to the mind, body, and spirit. Your mind will function at a greater capacity allowing you to make better decisions and be more in tune with your being. It is a wonderful way to bring balance and peace into your life and truly live in flow with the universe.

Another important factor in the functioning of the mind is sleep. Getting enough sleep is incredibly important to our wellbeing, which we discussed in Chapter Three. When we don't get enough sleep we build a sleep debt, which causes us to feel foggy and slow. It can take weeks or months to get back to normal when we are off a normal sleep

routine. The average adult requires 6-8 hours of sleep per night to feel good in the morning. Some of us can function on as little as 5, but 6-8 is recommended. Losing a few nights sleep and then catching up generally isn't too much of a problem, but when it is consistently occurring then it's time to assess and remedy the situation. Not getting enough sleep can cause our immune system to be ineffective, cause us to gain weight and have high blood pressure. Losing sleep also makes us extremely irritable and unable to make the best decisions possible for ourselves. Sleep has been linked to learning and memory demonstrating that getting enough sleep enables us to perform better on tasks and tests and absorb information better than when we don't sleep enough.

These days it is often challenging for us to get to bed at a reasonable hour. We come home from work, in some cases get our children fed, bathed and put to bed, hit the gym or continue to do more work around the house or on the computer and before we know it – it's midnight. We spend more time than ever online and the evenings are prime time for surfing the net. Some of us need to allocate our evenings for housework, laundry and other household chores. The evenings are ideally a time to relax and embrace some downtime after the heightened activity of the day. But very few of us are actually using this time to relax. We should be removing the number of stimulating activities around us in the evening and focusing our attention on calming activities and things that make us feel relaxed. Perhaps it is taking a bath, reading a book, or doing some meditation. If the evenings are a busy time for you, set a limit on how long you spend doing your work and/or chores and stick to it. Set an alarm if you have to and when that alarm goes off switch gears and focus on relaxing. Doing some meditative breathing will help. Avoid

caffeine and chocolate before bed and drink herbal teas such as chamomile. They help to promote a sense of calmness within you. Choose a time that is realistic for you. Set a regular bedtime and get into a routine that enables you to begin the process of preparing for sleep at least an hour prior. Start winding down your evening by engaging in calming activities; have a bath, read a book, make some herbal tea, or sit in silence. That way, when you are ready for bed you will be able to sleep and you will wake up in the morning feeling rejuvenated and refreshed.

Think positively about anything new that you engage in, especially if it is something that you haven't tried before. Telling yourself that you can't do something, that you will fail, or that you aren't going to be able to, not only sets you up for failure, but also wreaks havoc on your self-esteem and self worth. The person who goes into something saying, "I'll try but I doubt I will be able to" need not try, as their mind is already made up and set for failure. The way in which we talk to ourselves and the messages that we play in our minds on a daily basis are incredibly important to our ability to perform. Each time we think something, our thoughts carry a unique vibration and the more that we think something the stronger that vibration becomes. Recurring negative thoughts are not only harmful to our wellbeing, but they keep us in the headspace that we object to being in. In order for us to feel good and think positively, we have to set our intention to do so. We cannot continue to think negatively while telling ourselves "I really should start thinking more positively". If you want to feel better change what you are telling yourself. We can always tell ourselves a better story and find something positive to latch onto, no matter how miniscule that thing may seem. Sometimes we can have positive

thoughts about something and focus our intention upon thinking positively, but then our internal dialogue attempts to derail us with negativity. We can try with all of our might to be positive, but when our self-talk is negative and we don't feel good about ourselves, we can't possibly move to the next level and we become energetically stuck. Think about the areas in your life in which your negative self-talk gets in the way. You will know the voice that I am speaking of. It has perhaps been with you a very long time and comes out when things are unknown, scary, stressful or risky. It's that voice that tries to keep us safe by telling us we can't or shouldn't do something because it is too risky, or perhaps it makes us believe that we are no good at something. The negative self-chatter that we experience is a primitive reaction to the unknown. We often recall an event or traumatic experience from childhood and carry it with us in the form of a blockage. When things in our energetic field do not get resolved, they manifest in our lives in other ways. Negative self-talk is one of those ways.

We need not go back searching for the reasons why we may have an unhealthy relationship with our self, or why we experience negative mind chatter. We simply must raise our awareness to the fact that it is happening and set our intention on changing the self-talk to be more loving and supportive. When we catch ourselves in the middle of negative self-talk we can recognize in that moment that what we are doing is not supporting our overall wellbeing. We can always think of something more supportive to say to ourselves, even if it we are lacking in confidence in a particular area. For example, instead of saying "I suck at this I will never be able to do it" you can repurpose your words to say "I am getting better every day". We are not going to be awesome at

everything all the time, some things are going to be hard, and we probably are going to fail sometimes. But what separates success from failure is how we handle ourselves in those moments, not whether we succeed that particular day. The overall picture of how we learn, try things, and get better is more important than whether we made a mistake. Don't beat yourself up over mistakes, poor choices, or past resent. It's gone, it happened, now move on – and don't allow the shadow of those events to take away from your ability to be wonderful. Tell yourself something better.

A healthy mind is made up of many things; positive thinking, a good relationship with self, knowing when to turn off, and knowing how to process stressful life circumstances. Life as a human being on this planet is sometimes challenging. We get things thrown at us that are difficult or unexpected and these events often throw us off course and cause us to worry and fear what might or might not happen next. Stress is a tremendous source of sickness on this planet in every area; physiologically, psychologically, and spiritually. Stress can cause us to act in ways we might not normally, taking us away from who we really are, or it can cause us to be paralyzed in fear not acting at all. The reality is that we cannot completely avoid stress in our lives, but we can surely do better with how we manage the stress we encounter. The first thing we should think about is the areas in our life which feel the most stressful right now. We all have areas of our life that could use improvement. Think about your life and which areas are potential problem areas for you. Are you out of sync with your job, your friends, or the place you live? Feeling out of sync with people, places and things can create a lot of stress for us. When we don't resonate with what we are doing or who we are spending time with, we

are not living in the light of who we really are. Seek out people who support the inner work that you must do. Look for people who will compliment your desire to expand your consciousness. If there are people in your life who cause you a lot of stress, you may not be able to get rid of them completely (depending on who they are) but you can change the way your relationship functions. People cannot cause us stress, we cause ourselves stress by our reaction to and expectation of others. When we are okay on the inside, things on the outside don't seem that scary anymore. Focus your attention on your inner being and who you are. Don't attempt to change others, or have them see things your way. Simply accept others for who and what they are and don't try to change yourself to fit their ideals either. When you are comfortable being you and comfortable letting others be themselves, you will feel significantly less strain on your life.

Sometimes, however, we have people in our lives who are toxic for us; people who not only stress us out but whose vibration is so negative and harmful that it interferes with our ability to grow and flourish. In these rare cases it is helpful to consider whether you need that energy in your life, or whether you can realistically break ties and move forward on your own, leaving the relationship behind you. This is not an easy thing to do and not something I would recommend in all circumstances. Most relationship issues are solvable by us focusing our attention on ourselves and dropping our expectations of others; but there are times when relationships are simply too toxic for us and they need to be released in order for us to thrive.

Sometimes we complain about things in our lives that we can change; a job, our body or appearance, or even the place we live. Doing this is completely counterproductive to

spiritual progress. These things are all solvable problems and things that we are capable of improving. As a general rule, if something stresses you out and you would like to change it, work towards making a change. Don't speak negatively about the thing that makes you so unhappy; simply begin the motion to change your situation with the intention of improving. Keep your thoughts optimistic and your self-chatter healthy by focusing on the positives along the way.

Nurturing our mind is a constant challenge and something we must make an active part of our daily life work. Tend to your mind like you would a garden; pull the weeds out, notice the flowers, and nourish it with sunshine. Don't expect flowers to grow in a dark, dismal negative place. Create some light and nourishment for your being. You must create a thriving atmosphere within yourself. We are all capable of doing so.

Nurture the body

Part of living a life in flow is knowing where to turn your attention and focus. You could be doing extremely well with your thoughts and mindfulness, but be lacking in attention with regard to your body. Some very successful people who have a wonderful outlook on life and seemingly have a good grasp on life balance, are missing the body component and don't spend enough time or attention on their physical wellness. We talked about the benefits of meditation for mindfulness; another piece to that puzzle is yoga. Yoga and meditation go hand in hand. There are so many benefits to practicing yoga and they far exceed the physical attributes. Of course regular practice of yoga helps to build core strength, control breathing, and bring our attention to the chakras in

the body. Yoga is probably the most perfect exercise you can do to support the overall balance of mind, body and spirit. It connects all three components and uses the physical poses to connect us with our higher being and keep us present and mindful. There are no barriers to practicing yoga. You can be any age, any ability and practice anywhere. You don't need an expensive yoga outfit, a new yoga mat, and a trendy yoga class. You can practice yoga in your living room, outside in your backyard or in a group setting with other students. If you haven't tried yoga yet, it is definitely something you will want to investigate on your journey to self-discovery.

Nurturing your body isn't all about exercising and eating, loving ourselves and our bodies is also hugely important to developing the body that we want. When we don't love ourselves, we can never truly be happy inside, even when we achieve our weight loss goals. When you look in the mirror what do you see? Are you happy with the person staring back at you or do you engage in negative and harmful self-chatter about the way you look and what is wrong? Even if you are working on yourself and have improvements that you would like to make to your body and overall appearance, you must be very selective and careful about the thoughts you choose and the words that you allow to flow through you. Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to a loved one. If you have work to do, recognize that you have work to do, but get excited about the change rather than discouraged with the present circumstance. It is okay to feel dissatisfied with your body if you are not where you want to be, many of us do feel that way. We simply must ensure that the words we use and the thoughts we have are ones of support and love, not of judgment and hatred. We are so hard on ourselves at

times that we don't even recognize when we are hurting ourselves with harsh judgment and negativity. Always remember that unless you love and support yourself the same way you would a loved one, you will never feel satisfied with your body and appearance, even when you reach your goals.

With our lives being busier and more structured around convenience than ever before, it is difficult to embrace exercise and active living. As a society we are fatter and more out of shape than we ever have been. We definitely do not get enough daily exercise and our bodies simply weren't designed to be so sedentary. It is easy to see how this happened when we look around us. The most important thing we can do for our body is to find a way to introduce active living into our lives. Not everyone likes to pump iron in the gym or go for a 5-mile run every day, but there are other things you can do to be active that might be more enjoyable to you. Walking the dog, hiking, swimming, dancing, or bike riding are just a few examples. Get into the routine of getting outside with your family and enjoying the wonders of nature. Just going for a walk every day will help improve cardiovascular health and keep you moving. We are built for activity and are not meant to sit in front of screens all day. Even if you are stuck in the house, there are still things you can do to be active. You can do yoga from the comfort of your own home using a yoga DVD, or you can do sit-ups and push-ups.

The easiest way to be active, however, is to do things that you enjoy doing. That way it doesn't feel like something to dread or fear, it just becomes a part of your daily life. If you haven't been very active in the past, there is no reason that you can't start now. Take a new class or learn something new. Really think about what you would like to

learn about or try; perhaps it's something that you have always wanted to try but never had the courage. There is never a reason why you can't do something; we can always choose to be active. Living an active lifestyle not only makes you look and feel better, but it also creates lasting change and brings your life into balance.

We only have one body. The way we treat our bodies is supremely important to the quality of life we experience. Just like we will become overweight if we are sedentary, we too become unhealthy when we don't eat the right food. What we put into our body is just as important as what we do to it. Food is our fuel for life. It gives us the ability to ward off chronic disease, keeps our weight in a healthy range, and improves our overall systematic health. Processed food is not part of a healthy diet and is something that should be eaten in moderation as apposed to at every meal. Processed food is harder for the body to break down and can trigger a whole host of health problems including heart disease, diabetes, and it has even been linked to cancer. Natural whole foods that come from the earth are much easier for the body to break down, and create balance and harmony within our bodies.

A good way to monitor how you are doing in the food department is to track everything you eat. At each meal write down what you are eating and how much. After a few weeks of tracking, you will be able to pinpoint problem areas and identify areas in which you can improve your health by improving your eating. Sometimes we are so accustomed to processed food that we aren't even aware of just how bad our diet is. A

good rule of thumb is if it isn't found in nature, then you will probably want to limit your consumption of it.

It is up to us to take full and complete responsibility for our lives and our health. Nobody is going to come along and say, "Hey we need to get you back on track here". You are the only one who can advocate your own health. Start now by looking at what you are currently doing versus what you could be doing better. You don't need to turn your whole life upside down and bite off more than you can chew, but you can take small steps each day to creating a healthier you. Know that being healthy isn't about being unhappy, in fact quite the opposite. The healthier you are, and the better you eat and look after yourself – the better you will feel in general. Being healthy and taking responsibility for your life is all a part of living a balanced life. How can you be balanced if you are eating poorly and getting sick all the time? You can't. If a life in flow and a balanced mind, body and spirit is what you seek, you must make healthy eating and lifestyle a part of the equation. There is no easy way out, quick fix, or pill you can take that will optimize your health and weight, allowing you to continue to treat yourself poorly. It is up to you to acknowledge the things that you can change and take steps towards changing those things. Most of us know when something isn't good for us. Our body gives us queues and our spirit gives us gentle nudges in the form of intuition. Listen to your body and the queues it provides you with. You will know if you are off track with something. Treat your body with respect and provide it with proper nourishment so that you can live a complete and fulfilling life without being tired, sick, and overweight. Everything is okay in moderation, but when those extras become part

of daily living, you have a problem. Our bodies are our vessels for our spirits, they are the reason we are here experiencing a physical life on earth. We must honor the body in the same way we do with the mind and spirit.

Nurture the spirit

I like to call the spirit the smile. It is the essence of what connects us to all that is, was or ever will be. The spirit is what makes us soar and fills us with joy. When we nurture the spirit, we feed our inner being with experiences that make us feel connected to the universe as a whole. We feel no isolation, pain, or stress when we are connected to source energy. We feel balanced and harmonious. The universe provides us with ample opportunity to come into sync with it and lead lives that are more in tune with who we really are.

One of the greatest universal truths is the law of attraction. The law of attraction states that we get what we think about most and put our energy into. Like attracts like, so when we focus our energy upon the things that we want in life and express gratitude for the things we already have, we create opportunities for ourselves to invite into our lives the things we want and appreciate most. The law of attraction is one of the greatest universal truths and can change our life profoundly when we are simply aware of what we are doing energetically. By knowing every time you are in a bad mood and feeling depressed that you will attract more of those feelings by continuing down that road, you are more likely to want to change your mood. The law of attraction helps us to understand that we are sabotaging ourselves by continuing to allow negative energy

and thoughts to control our being. Every thought you have and action you take is paving the way for the future you will soon experience. Think of each thought as another brick in the road or another brushstroke on the canvas of life. The more negative your thoughts are, the darker your future looks. The law of attraction is one of the most useful and important universal truths in existence.

Life is never about a destination; it is about the journey, the process and the creation of oneself. Think of your life as your spirit's course in being human. You don't have to arrive at a particular destination at any certain time and things may not always work out as you had hoped or imagined. You simply have to experience life and stay the course picking up valuable lessons and insights along the way. When you accumulate years on this planet, you accumulate knowledge and wisdom. This knowledge helps us to understand ourselves better. When we understand ourselves, we love ourselves and we can also make better decisions that are based on what is best for us, rather than what our ego wants or what others want for us. Never live in the light of what someone else wants for you, you will never be happy that way. We must always live in accordance to our soul's truth. Our inner being will always attempt to communicate to us when we are off course. At first we hear whispers in the wind, then we get gentle nudges or signs. Eventually if we don't listen, the signs, nudges, and whispers become louder and more obvious – so much so that we can't ignore them.

Don't worry about where you are in your life right now and ponder whether you should or shouldn't be at that particular stage. Simply be happy in the moment that you are in and feel good about who you are at this very point in time. Being happy with yourself

and where you are in life is crucial to your ability to manifest abundance. When we are in need of something, the very process of wanting creates lack. This lack demonstrates that we don't feel whole or complete and creates a negative energy of unworthiness, which makes it very difficult to attract what we want into our life. Think about how far you've come to this point, and now imagine how much further you could go if you just accepted and loved yourself exactly as you are.

Think about the things in your life that truly make you happy. Make a list of those things. They don't have to be extravagant or over the top, they can be simple things like a perfect cup of tea, warm sun on your face, or a walk on a crisp fall day. Think of as many things as you can that make you happy and make your spirit soar and then try to do at least one or two of those things every day. When we do the things in life that fill us with joy, we connect ourselves to source energy and feel our best. Being connected to source gives our lives profound meaning and purpose. Think about times in your life when you did things you were unhappy about; perhaps you worked a job you didn't like, stayed in an unhappy or unhealthy relationship, or went against your intuition on something. When you do something that goes against your higher purpose, your inner guide tries to warn you that you are doing something that is not good for you. When you get good at listening to those queues you will know when to change what you are doing, or when to avoid something all together. When we are connected to source we are doing the things in life that we are truly meant to do. This includes everything from being in love, to sharing experiences with friends and neighbors, to working in an occupation that makes you feel good inside. All of the choices we make on a daily basis either support who we

are or don't. Even the things that seem mundane or pointless have their own value. For example being organized and having a clean house (while not enjoyable to some) help us to keep focused on the other things. When our surroundings are in chaos it is very easy to become distracted, frustrated, and also depressed. So even cleaning and house chores support the essence of who we are and contribute to our wellbeing.

Whatever you do in life, listen to your body and the subtleties of your spirit. You will know when you are off course, especially when you become accustomed to listening. Follow the cues of your emotions; do you feel good or bad? Your emotions are a great barometer for how well you are doing in life.

Balancing the mind, body and spirit is achievable when we put our minds to it. Listen to your intuition, and believe in yourself. If you receive intuitive messages, rather than fear or question them – follow them through and see what happens. Start small until you build some confidence, and then you will feel better about trusting your intuition.

Intuition is not something that only some of us have; we all have it. We are all capable of listening to our intuition, and we are all capable of manifesting abundance in our lives if we are willing to do the inner work required to get there.

As you have read in the pages of this book, there are many things you can do to support the person you are on the inside and live in the light of who you really are. You can learn to be mindful with meditation, you can treat your body well by eating the right foods and exercising, and you can do the things in life that bring you a tremendous amount of joy. Create a vision for your life and follow that path by doing all of the things that lend

way to a happier better you. You can live your best life possible starting today. It is never too late, you are never too old and you are never without means to make it happen. Sometimes those changes start little by little and they trickle down until they create an overflow and you begin manifesting abundance in your life. All it takes is one step. One step leads to two, then three until eventually you are on your way. You are living the journey and enjoying every moment of it. Each day here in this fantastic and amazing universe is a gift. Cherish it.