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Scientists Prove DNA Can Be Reprogrammed by Words and Frequencies

The human DNA is a biological internet and superior in many aspects to the artificial one. Russian scientific research directly or indirectly explains phenomena such as clairvoyance, intuition, spontaneous and remote acts of healing, self healing, affirmation techniques, unusual light/auras around people (namely spiritual masters), mind’s influence on weather patterns and much more. In addition, there is evidence for a whole new type of medicine in which DNA can be influenced and reprogrammed by words and frequencies WITHOUT cutting out and replacing single genes.

Only ten percent of our DNA is being used for building proteins. It is this subset of DNA that is of interest to western researchers and is being examined and categorized. The other ninety percent are considered “junk DNA.” The Russian researchers, however, convinced that nature was not dumb, joined linguists and geneticists in a venture to explore those ninety percent of “junk DNA.” Their results, findings and conclusions are simply revolutionary! According to them, our DNA is not only responsible for the construction of our body but also serves as data storage and in communication. The Russian linguists found that the genetic code, especially in the apparently useless ninety percent, follows the same rules as all our human languages. To this end they compared the rules of syntax (the way in which words are put together to form phrases and sentences), semantics (the study of meaning in language forms) and the basic rules of grammar. They found that the alkalines of our DNA follow a regular grammar and do have set rules just like our languages. So human languages did not appear coincidentally but are a reflection of our inherent DNA.

—Collective Evolution

Machines That Let You Transform Plastic Waste Into New Objects – At Home!

When designer Dave Hakkens realized there were no readily available, at-home machines to help everyday consumers transform their plastic waste into useful objects, he knew he had to take action. So he created Precious Plastic, DIY tools and machines that help you give new life to your plastic waste, right at home!

This is amazing news, considering eighty-five percent of the world’s plastic is not recycled. This reality is especially harmful to marine animals. A recent study found that as much as eighty percent of the trash that ends up in the oceans comes from land-based sources and nearly ninety percent of that is plastic. That’s about 8.8 million tons of plastic that make their way from land to the oceans every single year, causing the near-extinction of about 700 marine species, who are under constant threat from entanglement, pollution, and ingestion of plastic.

But with Hakkens’ machines, you can skip the middleman and handle the recycling process all on your own. The best part about these incredible DIY machines is that they can be used all over the world, using basic material found nearly everywhere. Everything you need to get started is right online, via open source—Hakkens just wants the word to get out. That’s the kind of attitude that will change the world!

The results are amazing. Learn more about Hakkens and his work by visiting his website, and check out Precious Plastic’s website to learn how you, too, can #CrushPlastic with these DIY tools!

While efforts are being made to remove debris from the oceans, improve recycling systems, and innovate barriers to prevent plastic from getting into waterways, we can all take action in our daily lives to stop plastic waste at the source.

“Plastic is ubiquitous in modern society and seemingly unavoidable. But is it worth risking the lives of marine species, the health of the oceans and our own future in the name of convenience? By taking steps to minimize everyday plastics in our lives, we can crush plastic at the source and give marine life a fighting chance,” says Nil Zacharias, Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief of One Green Planet.

If we all make an effort to identify where we use plastic and actively look for alternatives, we can drastically cut down on the amount of plastic pollution that finds its way into the oceans.

As the leading organization at the forefront of the conscious consumerism movement, One Green Planet believes that reducing everyday plastics from our lives is not about giving up anything or sacrificing convenience, but rather learning to reap the maximum benefit from the items you use every day while having the minimum impact.

—One Green Planet
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E-Cigs Shut Down Hundreds Of Immune System Genes—Regular Cigs Don’t

It’s widely assumed that swapping cigarette puffing for vapor huffing is better for health—after all, electronic cigarettes that heat up and atomize a liquid concoction can skip all the hazards of combustion and smoke. But researchers are still scrambling to understand the health effects of e-cig use (aka vaping) and to track down the variable and undisclosed components of those vaporized mixtures. The most recent data hints at unexpected health effects unique to e-cig use.

After comparing genetic information swabbed from the noses of smokers, vapers, and non-users of both, researchers found that smoking suppresses the activity of 53 genes involved in the immune system. Vaping also suppressed those 53 immune genes—along with 305 others. The results were presented recently at the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington.

Though research on the significance of that gene suppression is still ongoing, the initial results suggest that e-cig users may have compromised immune responses, making them potentially more vulnerable to infections and diseases.

“The gene expression changes we’re seeing are consistent with a modified immune response,” lead researcher Ilona Jaspers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill told Ars. “Any time you change [the immune system], it’s probably out of balance,” she said, explaining that a hyper-immune response or a weak response is problematic. Whether the imbalance caused by e-cigs leads to boosted infection risks or other immune diseases, “we don’t know,” Jaspers added.

For the study, Jaspers and colleagues mined the noses of different groups of healthy people—around a dozen each of cigarette smokers, e-cigarette vapers, and people who didn’t use either. The researchers fit the volunteers into the three categories based on smoking “diaries” that they filled out for three weeks prior to nose-sampling. The researchers homed in on the schnoz because cellular and immune responses there can offer clues to those responses in the lungs, which are harder to sample, Jaspers noted.

Harvesting the genetic data from the participants, researchers looked at the activity of nearly 600 genes, all of which are related to controlling and mounting immune responses. Comparing smokers’ genetic information to that of non-users, the team found that the activity of 53 genes was dialed down in smokers collectively. Comparing e-cig users to smokers and non-users revealed the same dampened activity for those 53 genes but also 305 others—a total of 358 immune genes were muted in e-cig users’ noses.

In follow-up lab studies, Jaspers and colleagues tested e-cig liquid on immune cells from healthy volunteers. Specifically, the researchers collected immune cells, such as neutrophils and macrophages, that are responsible in part for swallowing up invading bacteria. When the cells were put into diluted solutions of different e-cigarette liquids, the cells weren’t as good at sucking in the microbes. The data, while preliminary, suggests that immune cells in e-cig users may be unable to prevent bacterial breaches, thus opening the gates to infection.

The researchers also looked at the gene-altering effects of different flavors of e-cigarettes on the cells in the delicate lining of the respiratory tract. The flavorings that seemed to have the most potent gene-altering effects were additives that taste like cinnamon—cinnamaldehyde—as well as butter flavors.

These flavorings are considered safe, Jaspers pointed out—but only for eating. The additives are categorized as generally recognized as safe (GRAS) for food and beverages, but they have never been tested for safety when inhaled, she adds. The point is driven home with one of the flavors, the butter-mimicking diacetyl. This flavor has been found in some e-cig flavorings, but it’s known to cause bronchiolitis obliterans, a severe disease caused by scar tissue and inflammation built up deep in the lungs. The link was discovered years ago in food manufacturing, particularly microwave popcorn factory employees who developed “popcorn worker’s lung.”

A concerning factor in e-cig use is that it’s not well known what or how much flavor additives and components are in e-cigarette liquid, Jaspers said.

The concern was echoed by clinical pharmacologist Neal Benowitz of the University of California, San Francisco. “E-cigarettes are not one thing,” he said, noting that the devices, liquids, and flavorings vary widely. “We’re really in the beginning of understanding the toxicity.” —ARS Technica Science
Astronomers have, for the first time, mapped a nearby "super-Earth" exoplanet to find that one hemisphere is almost completely molten rock, while the other half is almost completely solid.

The study used NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope to produce a precision temperature (exo-)map of 55 Cancri e, which is approximately forty light-years from Earth in the constellation of Cancer. This is the first time such a map has been produced of such a small rocky world around 8-times the mass of Earth.

As 55 Cancri e orbits so close to its parent star, completing one orbit every 18 hours, it has become tidally locked—one hemisphere of the world is constantly facing the star, whereas the opposite side is trapped in eternal night. This has a dramatic effect on the exoplanet’s surface; the star-facing side has a temperature that soars to 2,500 degrees Celsius (4,500 Fahrenheit), whereas the dark side is a less savage 1,100 degrees Celsius (2,000 Fahrenheit).

Though the far side isn’t exactly cold, it’s the temperature difference that is the most startling and Spitzer was able to record the steep temperature gradient throughout the planet’s orbit.

“We haven’t yet found any other planet that is this small and orbits so close to its parent star, and is relatively close to us, so 55 Cancri e offers lots of possibilities,” said Brice-Olivier Demory of the University of Cambridge’s Cavendish Laboratory.

“We still don’t know exactly what this planet is made of—it’s still a riddle. These results are like adding another brick to the wall, but the exact nature of this planet is still not completely understood.” Demory is lead author of the study published in the journal Nature.

On Earth, extreme temperature gradients from the day side to the night side are prevented by our 24 hour rotation and efficient atmospheric circulation—warm air is quickly distributed around the globe. 55 Cancri e doesn’t have this luxury; it doesn’t spin, so one hemisphere is constantly cooked and it appears to have little to no global atmosphere to transport heat away from the star-facing side to the night.

“We think that there could still be an atmosphere on the night side, but temperatures on the day side are so extreme that the atmosphere may have evaporated completely, meaning that heat is not being efficiently transferred, or transferred at all from the day side to the night side,” said Demory.

There is a mystery, however. The researchers have realized that the day side of 55 Cancri e is a lot hotter than would be predicted from stellar heating alone—there seems to be “extra heat” that, for now, will remain a puzzle until more advanced space telescopes can be launched. Perhaps NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope will take a closer look in the hope of revealing more about this very alien world. —Discovery News

Findings derived from the Nurses’ Health Study suggest a protective effect for magnesium against the risk of ischemic stroke in women.

The study, described in the October 2014 issue of the American Heart Association journal Stroke, included 459 Nurses’ Health Study participants who experienced an ischemic stroke prior to June 2006 and an equal number of control subjects matched for age, ethnicity and other factors. Blood samples collected between 1989 and 1990 were analyzed for plasma magnesium.

Subjects whose magnesium levels were among the lowest fifth of participants had a risk of stroke that was 34% higher than those whose levels were among the top fifth. Those whose levels were lower than 0.82 micromoles per liter had a 57% greater risk of total ischemic stroke, and a 66% higher risk of thrombotic stroke than women who had higher levels.

To authors Sally N. Akarolo-Anthony and her associates’ knowledge, the association between magnesium levels and ischemic stroke risk has been evaluated in only one other prospective study. They remark that although only 1% of the body’s magnesium exists in plasma, levels are strongly correlated with intracellular magnesium and could be a better indicator of the mineral’s status than dietary intake. They note that risk factors for stroke, including diabetes and hypertension, have been associated with reduced magnesium levels, and that there is evidence that magnesium could help protect against blood clot formation.

“The results of this study suggest that low plasma magnesium may be associated with increased risk of ischemic stroke,” the authors conclude. “If confirmed, our findings may have significant public health impact because magnesium deficiency is potentially modifiable.”

—Life Extension
Coal Plants Use As Much Water As 1 Billion People

Coal power plants use enough water to supply the needs of 1 billion people and that will almost double if all the world’s planned power plants come online.

Almost half the new power plants will be built in areas that are already in high water stress, a report commissioned by Greenpeace says.

“We now know that coal not only pollutes our skies and fuels climate change, it also deprives us of our most precious resources: water,” said Harri Lammi, a Greenpeace campaigner.

The research, released on World Water Day, examined the water usage of each of the world’s 8,359 existing coal power plants, as well as of all the proposed power plants that could be identified. It combined the water used in producing the electricity, as well as that used in mining the coal.

The research found 44% of current plants, and 45% of planned coal power plants, were in areas that were in a state of water stress—where water use is already considered to be having significant ecosystem impacts.

And about a quarter of the proposed new coal plants were planned in regions that were already running a freshwater deficit, where water is used faster than it is naturally replenishing—areas that Greenpeace put on a “red list”.

That figure was largely driven by China, where most of the world’s coal is used and almost half of the proposed coal fleet was in red-list areas. India and Turkey were next, each with 13% of planned coal power stations set to be in red-list areas.

The research uses more precise data, and provides more in-depth findings, but is broadly in line with figures released by the International Energy Agency in 2012, suggesting the amount of water used in electricity generation would increase by 85% between 2010 and 2035.

The agency noted that much of the increase in water use in future would, ironically, be driven by a move towards plants that produced less carbon dioxide.

More carbon-efficient technologies would actually make the water problem worse, since they generally use more water, it said.

The new report found that although coal mining used a significant amount of water, the vast majority from the sector came from energy production, which used 84% of the water.

Greenpeace concluded that coal expansion in “red list” areas should simply not go ahead. It also called for existing plants in those areas to be phased out and replaced with renewable energy like solar panels and wind.

It called for coal-fired power plants that are more than 40 years old to be shut, since they were often the least efficient. The country that would save the most water by doing that was the US, the report found.

“Governments must recognise that replacing coal with renewable energy will not only help them deliver on their climate agreements, but also deliver huge water savings,” said Iris Cheng of Greenpeace, who is the lead author of the report.

“It’s more urgent than ever that we move towards a 100% renewable future.” —Euractiv.com

US Gov’t Patents Marijuana as Anti-Oxidant, NeuroProtectant

The United States government has a patent on cannabinoids as anti-oxidant for auto-immune diseases, and as neuroprotectants for treatment of Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, HIV, and dementia.

Ironically, government policies are not in sync with realities on the ground and with its own scientific discoveries.

This only proves that government is indeed not in control of itself.

From US Patent 660507 B1’s abstract: “Cannabinoids have been found to have antioxidant properties, unrelated to NMDA receptor antagonism. This new found property makes cannabinoids useful in the treatment and prophylaxis of wide variety of oxidation associated diseases, such as ischemic, age-related, inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. The cannabinoids are found to have particular application as neuroprotectants, for example in limiting neurological damage following ischemic insults, such as stroke and trauma, or in the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease and HIV dementia. Nonpsychoactive cannabinoids, such as cannabidiol, are particularly advantageous to use because they avoid toxicity that is encountered with psychoactive cannabinoids at high doses useful in the method of the present invention.”

Being a neuroprotectant, this could also help with vaccine damaged autistic children. At the very least, the above patent says, “…limiting neurological damage following ischemic insults, such as stroke and trauma…” —Myeklinik.com
Earth Star Up Front

New Discovery of Mysterious Alignment of Black Holes

Deep radio imaging by researchers in the University of Cape Town and University of the Western Cape, in South Africa, has revealed that supermassive black holes in a region of the distant universe are all spinning out radio jets in the same direction. The astronomers publish their results to the Royal Astronomical Society.

The jets are produced by the supermassive black holes at the center of these galaxies, and the only way for this alignment to exist is if supermassive black holes are all spinning in the same direction, says Prof Andrew Russ Taylor, joint UWC/UCT SKA Chair, Director of the recently-launched Inter-University Institute for Data Intensive Astronomy, and principal author of the Monthly Notices study.

So what could these large-scale environmental influences during galaxy formation or evolution have been? There are several options: cosmic magnetic fields; fields associated with exotic particles (axions); and cosmic strings are only some of the possible candidates that could create an alignment in galaxies even on scales larger than galaxy clusters. It’s a mystery, and it’s going to take a while for technology and theory alike to catch up.

The finding wasn’t planned for: the initial investigation was to explore the faintest radio sources in the universe, using the best available telescopes—a first view into the kind of universe that will be revealed by the South African MeerKAT radio telescope and the Square Kilometer Array (SKA), the world’s most powerful radio telescope and one of the biggest scientific instruments ever devised.

UWC Prof Romeel Dave, SARChI Chair in Cosmology with Multi-Wavelength Data, who leads a team developing plans for universe simulations that could explore the growth of large-scale structure from a theoretical perspective, agrees: “This is not obviously expected based on our current understanding of cosmology. It’s a bizarre finding.”

—Science of Cycles Newsletter

How To Train Your Mind Not To Wander While Reading

Paying attention to what you are reading can be hard—especially in this age of endless distraction. Practising meditation can help improve your focus while reading, a new study finds.

Maintaining attention when reading can be difficult, as the study’s authors write: “It is challenging for individuals to maintain their attention on ongoing cognitive tasks without being distracted by task-unrelated thought. The wandering mind is thus a considerable obstacle when attention must be maintained over time. Mental training through meditation has been proposed as an effective method of attenuating the ebb and flow of attention to thoughts and feelings that distract from one’s foremost present goals.”

For the research, some people were sent on a one-month intensive vipassan meditation training program. They then took a reading test which had nonsensical sentences deliberately placed within it. Compared with a control group, those who had been practising meditation were better able to detect the gibberish, suggesting they were paying more attention.

The study’s authors write: “Meditation practitioners across both studies demonstrated greater levels of error monitoring following training, as measured by their ability to detect gross semantic violations in the text. This suggests that training group participants were more attentive to the story content and ongoing text, allowing them to better detect these salient text discrepancies.”

The study was published in the journal Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice (Zanesco et al., 2016).

—PsyBlog
n a shocking study it was recently revealed that 1 in 3 individuals in the United States tested had an active RFID in them, and they were unaware of it.

In a publication from the Wyoming Institute of Technology (WIT) “Analysis of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Chip Prevalence in 3 Discrete United States Populations”, it has been reported that doctors tested 2955 Americans from different geographic locations and walks of life.

The test subjects were stripped down and scanned bodily to see if RFID chips could be detected.

From the abstract: (emphasis ours) “Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Chips have been used extensively in wildlife ecology and conservation to identify and track individual specimens in a population. It has been unknown, however, how often RFID chips have been implanted in human populations for the tracking and identification of individuals. This study analyzed the prevalence of RFID Chips in 3 geographically discrete populations and found that, on average, 1 in 3 individuals carried an RFID Chip. Interestingly, there was a strong correlation with RFID Chip presence and previous dental work.”

Far from knowingly implanting the RFID chips in their hands as is often reported in the media, the majority detected by the researchers were from dental work—fillings, bridges, crowns, etc. The chips are often inserted during the manufacturing process, and the patient is never aware of its existence.

A general dentist without any special training or assistance from a laboratory technician can easily perform the incorporation of a microchip transponder in a denture and the procedure is extremely economical. Its inclusion offers many benefits in dental prosthetic labeling; allowing not only the storage of patient’s medical records on a searchable database, but also information on the materials used and so providing traceability. Ultimately the chip could play an invaluable forensic role in assisting with human identification.

In the end, the WIT researchers conclude, “Our work has shown that approximately 1 in 3 individuals in the United States is carrying an RFID microchip.”

Being implanted without knowledge or giving permission is not a new phenomenon. For years people have claimed to have inexplicable implants, but are often ridiculed or dismissed. Anthony Gucciardi from Activist Post writes about a man who took legal action against a government hospital for microchip implant:

A Danish man has filed a writ against Alexandra Hospital for secretly implanting a microchip inside of his body during a 1988 operation, which he says later caused him to hear voices.

Feeling constantly tracked and plagued by unusual medical problems, Mr. Honore felt a “perpetual state of apprehension and fear for the safety of his life.” Unable to hold his job and live a normal life, Honore returned to Alexandra Hospital in order to investigate his condition. The hospital turned him away, stating that they had no record of his stay.

In June 2011, Honore underwent an operation at Mount Elizabeth Hospital to remove the fragment.

The numbers of chipped individuals must surely be on the rise in the U.S. and worldwide, as tracking chips are being used in many various fields, and patients and their families are lining up to receive them.

—Before It’s News
onstructive progress can be made towards career or educational goals as the sun aligns in a flowing trine with Saturn on April 5th. Advice from an elder, a mentor, or authority figure could prove helpful. Being both practical and creative achieves best results now.

Venus leaves the water world of Pisces and joins the sun in fiery Aries also on the 5th (till April 29th), when creative artistic pursuits are favored. Emotions are more aggressively expressed with Venus in this ardent sign, and new romantic ties may be impulsively entered into.

Mercury enters earthy Taurus later on April 5th (till June 12) when practical, down-to-earth thinking prevails. Thoughts turn to ways and means of generating income, and issues relating to one’s personal values. Let your instincts guide you in financial matters.

A new moon occurs on April 7th, in 18°04’ Aries, underscoring last month’s vernal equinox theme of initiation and new beginnings. Launch new personal projects now. Communicate your new thoughts and views, most importantly, your moral compass, your game plan, and, most importantly, your motivations, and focus on tasks requiring patience in the meantime.

Distant Pluto stations Retrograde on April 18th, in 18° Capricorn (till Sept 26), heightening the potential for sudden events of great magnitude to take place for several days around this juncture. During the next five months while Pluto is in retrograde mode the wise will avoid power plays, as misguided attempts at domination or manipulation often accompany this transit.

The sun enters tropical Taurus on April 19th (till May 20), placing personal values and material resources in the spotlight, prompting the question: Are the resources already at your disposal being fully utilized, or appreciated? Maximize your assets now. Make more of an effort to get out into nature and reconnect with Mother Earth.

Emotions and passions will be running high when Venus square’s Pluto later on the 19th, so channel this energy into creative outlets for best results. Handle sensitive relationships with extra care. Thoughts may turn to improving one’s financial position.

When the full moon culminates in 07° Scorpio on April 21st, it also heralds the arrival of Wesak, the Buddha Festival, celebrating the annual reemergence of the Buddha energies on Earth, and is widely held to be the most powerful and spiritual full moon of the year. Meditate on love now. Be prepared for what you value highly to be put to the test, including your attachment to people, places, belongings or even habits. Be honest with yourself about your needs, and your means. Safeguard your income sources and assets.

Earthly Venus conjuncts electric Uranus precisely on the 22nd, in 22° Aries, when business or social connections may be made, or
severed, quite unexpectedly. The urge to socialize is strong now, so be sure to get out and network.

Mercury stations Retrograde on April 28th, in 04° Taurus (till May 22), so plans or arrangements of any importance should be implemented prior to this period. However, while Mercury is retrograde, you may safely make revisions or otherwise go over previously covered territory for inconsistencies or errors.

After Venus enters its primary home sign of Taurus on April 29th (till May 24th) money, possessions, and personal values are highlighted. Treat your home to a few new indoor plants. Resolve to get outdoors more often.

Imagination is inspired and one’s intuition sharp on May 1st, when the sun sextiles Neptune. Experiment with telepathy or lucid dreaming...try going to bed with the firm knowledge that you will receive an answer to a question in your dreams.

The sun trines Jupiter on the 3rd, when a desire to expand one’s horizons could manifest. This is a good time to plan a trip, and to review outstanding legal affairs or pending lawsuits. This alignment also portends a boost for educational studies and creative work.

May’s new moon occurs on the 6th, in 16° Taurus, and is a time in which to assess your need for material security—your comfort zone. How much or how little money or stuff do you actually need to feel comfortable and secure?

The sun trines Pluto on the 7th, when events that transpire could in some way have a transformational effect your life. Express your unique creative abilities through business or career activities...be enterprising.

After four months in retrograde, giant Jupiter stations Direct on May 9th, in 14° Virgo. Jupiter’s resumption of forward motion through the zodiac could bring sudden growth opportunities that can quickly propel one way beyond one’s preconceived limitations.

When the sun conjuncts Mercury later on the 9th, in 20° Taurus, get in touch with your thoughts and feelings about things that inspire you. Be alert to fleeting financial opportunities. Reevaluate a current fiscal arrangement, and if necessary, renegotiate terms.

Social activities could be particularly stimulating on the 10th, when Venus trines jovial Jupiter. Financial and educational activities are also supported now, while philanthropic or charitable activities could prove satisfying.

Improve efficiency wherever possible when Mercury trines Pluto on the 12th (and again on the 30th), a motivational transit that can give willpower a boost...but with Mercury still in retrograde don’t get carried away!

New business or partnership agreements and activities are favored when Mercury conjuncts Venus on the 13th, in 17° Taurus. Beautify your work place, or add a plant or two. Seek intellectual or cultural stimulation. Get outdoors if you can...take a hike.

Revitalize your financial or business practices when Venus trines Pluto later on the 13th. Seek greater harmony in all partnerships. Indeed, an intense relationship could begin for some around this juncture.

The sun enters versatile Gemini early on May 20th (till June 20), increasing mental activity and one’s natural curiosity during the next thirty days. A thirst for knowledge and fresh input may need to be assuaged, making this an appropriate juncture in which to begin a new course of study, attend a workshop or seminar, or to simply get more connected to one’s immediate environment.

Think before you act or speak your mind when May’s full moon culminates on the 21st, in 02° Sagittarius, make sure your communications and intentions are fully understood, especially by you! Emotional or intellectual independence may become an issue. This could be a time of relocation for some.

There could be a parting of the ways after a heated exchange when the sun opposes Mars, currently in retrograde, on the 22nd. Ego drives and motiving impulses are operating from unconscious levels now, so be prepared to be held accountable for your actions!

After Mercury stations Direct later on the 22nd, in 15° Taurus, mental processes emerge from the recent fog and begin to accelerate. Any sudden bursts of inspired thought should be recorded for later reference. Move ahead with plans or projects now, but refrain from making snap decisions, as there’s a tendency towards impatience and impulsive behavior. Nonetheless, communications are now getting back on track.

Venus enters Gemini on the 24th, till June 17th, and for the next four weeks emotions are subject to being cold-processed logically, via the mind, instead of percolating gently down to one’s conscious awareness, filtered through one’s feelings. There’s a greater willingness to travel in pursuit of pleasure and social activities while Venus resides in the sign of curiosity, conversation, and inquiry, while wit, charm and the gentle art of conversation will be highly desirable now.

Venus opposes Mars later on the 24th, when extreme emotional reactions could be triggered simply by a thoughtless remark. Avoid financial extravagance, as the urge to splurge could quickly drain precious resources. Sensuality is heightened now. One’s ability to cooperate with, or adapt to, the desires or wishes of another could be tested.

Jupiter forms a precise square to Saturn on the 28th, when it may seem especially difficult to make professional progress, or you may feel that your ambitions are being thwarted, either by a lack of opportunity or simply bad timing. If you find yourself vacillating between optimism and caution, you most assuredly won’t be alone. While this is not an ideal influence under which to begin a new venture, it can be quite helpful if you are in a position to expand a current business, as you would be more likely to do so with a higher degree of caution. The challenge here is to strike a balance between these two forces in order to maximize the considerable potential for achievement that is, nonetheless, available. For Jupiter, when all is said and done, is still the planet most associated with good fortune.

Following is a general overview of how the planetary trends for April/May, 2016 apply to each sun sign. If you know your rising sign (Ascendant), read that, too, for additional insights.
**ARIES** (March 20—April 19)

April’s new moon in your sign provides a significant boost to your energy levels, while also increasing your assertiveness factor a few notches. However, mid-April Mars, your sign’s ruling planet, commences a rare retrograde phase through June, during which time both your energy and assertiveness may be a little below par, making this a much better juncture at which to be more introspective, to do some inner searching, perhaps for the source of your current motivations. During May the emphasis shifts to finances, and ways to increase your bottom line. With Mercury retrograde in your second house of income through much of May, hold off on major purchases, and take at least a second look at any offers that might seem too good to be true.

**TAURUS** (April 19—May 20)

Your inspiration and creativity are soaring during April, so be sure to note any brainstorm or bright ideas for future action. With action planet, Mars, in retrograde in your solar eighth house of joint financial matters for much of this forecast period, it would be wise to hold off initiating any new ventures for a while, and instead concentrate on bringing greater stability and security to your long-term cash flow. Do what you can to protect your resources from attrition. Doing so will enhance your sense of security down the road. In May you could benefit from some especially good fortune. It may be possible to get a second bite at a particular cherry, as a personal opportunity you might have missed the first time around could now drop right into your lap.

**GEMINI** (May 20—June 21)

You could be especially busy with a partnership project during April, when your diplomatic skills and ability to get along with colleagues may be tested by the vicissitudes or procrastination of others. With Mercury, your sign’s ruler, in retrograde from the 28th to May 22nd, that challenge could be just a little trickier. Not to worry, as you will likely be equal to the task. Just don’t make any promises that you won’t be able to keep. During May take some time to ground yourself and to connect with your center, as it will help you to decompress from any work- or home-related tensions. It would be wise to maintain a tight grip on your purse strings, lest impulsive purchases get the better of your budget.

**CANCER** (June 21—July 22)

Opportunities to advance your professional aspirations could be more plentiful in April; however, getting along with those with whom you work could pose challenges. Friends or colleagues could change their minds about an important matter, which might affect your own plans, and yet, in the interests of cooperation, you adapt and go with the flow. A new project or game plan could be conceived during May, though it might be wise to wait till the summer to get the ball rolling. With Mercury, Mars and Saturn all in retrograde now, your interests would be best served by reviewing your options, strategy, and even your associates.

**LEO** (July 22—August 23)

How can you enhance or leverage your financial position? Take some time now to count the ways. Put your keen intellect to work for you, while making good use of your business connections could also pay dividends. You would do well to avoid speculation for the time being, or buying in to a risky venture. If you have a new project on the drawing board wait till summer before you launch it. During May your professional prospects look even brighter, though it may yet be a while before any promises come to fruition. Steadily reinforce the financial foundations you’ve put in place, taking nothing, and no one, for granted. Trust only the tried and true, while keeping your options open.

**VIRGO** (August 23—September 23)

Activities around the home keep you busy in April, with some significant challenges to surmount. However, your innate flexibility and creative ingenuity will ensure that you rise to the occasion. This would be a good time to do some serious soul searching, about what it takes for you to feel secure. Issues concerning intimacy may also arise, particularly if you feel your needs are not being met. During May you might have the opportunity to expand your horizons in some way that could lead you closer to a cherished professional objective. Scrutinize all offers closely, however, and get everything in writing. With your ruling planet, Mercury, in retrograde through much of May take absolutely nothing, or no one, for granted.

**LIBRA** (September 23—October 23)

Some love-struck Librans may decide to formalize a budding relationship during April, while others may be considering a professional alliance that would allow you to express yourself through your favored creative medium. Partnerships forged now, while stimulating and with a hint of excitement around them, may yet need to stand the test of time. Pay attention to any health conditions that may be impacting your mobility or that in some way inhibit.
your outlook on life, as now is the time to seek solutions to any such lingering problems. May favors clearing out your emotional clutter… old baggage for which you no longer have a use or that has no relevance in your life today. You will eventually feel so much lighter for having done so.

**Scorpio** (October 23—November 22)

You have your work cut out for you in April, when a succession of niggling challenges can come your way. However, you learn much as a result of successfully dealing with each situation; knowledge that you would perhaps never have gained in any other way, and which may stand you in good stead down the road. Financial matters might be giving you a few sleepless nights, but your keen intellect and innate resourcefulness will ensure you find the right solutions. Support for your endeavors comes freely from your inner circle, be they partners, family or friends. You will need to be patient, as certain issues may take time to resolve. As a result of these protracted events your values and some priorities begin to change, and along with them your plans and objectives.

**Sagittarius** (November 21—December 21)

Initiative and creativity are your strong suits in April, and by combining the two in an innovative way you could advance your career prospects. While you may not be entirely clear about which direction your professional aspirations lay you are acutely aware that you need to maintain, and ideally increase, your present cash flow. An element of luck surrounds your activities now so make sure that you’re at the top of your game, not only to make the right impression on someone in a position to help you to get ahead, but also to be alert to subtle cues. A new work opportunity could come your way in May, but be sure to read the fine print on any contracts before accepting another position or taking on more responsibility, as there are likely to be elements involved that you might not have anticipated. On the other hand, if you were previously passed over for promotion, you might now get a second bite at the cherry.

**Capricorn** (December 21—January 19)

Home may be where the heart is but right now you’re keen to get away for a while and share some quality time with friends. If you’re not in a position to travel then have your friends come to you for an impromptu party. At the very least spend some quiet time by yourself to recharge, and to reflect on recent events. During May your creative juices are flowing freely, so be sure to note all the great ideas that come to mind, as some of them are likely to be fleeting. However, steer clear of unwise speculation; if something seems to be too good to be true, the chances are it probably is. Instead, consider your options for expanding your horizons, but wait until early summer before making your move.

**Aquarius** (January 19—February 18)

Progressive new ideas are flowing freely through your mind in April, when you could stumble upon what might be an ideal career path, and wonder why it hadn’t occurred to you before. Sometimes it’s purely a matter of timing, or that you just weren’t open to it previously. But with the skill sets you’ve acquired through training, experience and practical application, it might seem like a classic “no brainer” now. However, present domestic constraints or obligations may preclude you from changing horses in midstream and, given the retrograde activity in the heavens right now, that is probably a good thing. Better to wait until the summer before saddling up for your next bug adventure.

**Pisces** (February 18—March 20)

Professional responsibilities could be challenging during April, when you will need to be at the top of your game. But with a little help and encouragement from your inner circle, and a good measure of patience, you will eventually succeed with flying colors. Financial matters will also require your attention, with preserving cash flow a major priority. Once again, with perseverance, and some creative ingenuity, you will rise to the occasion and save the day. The recent challenges you’ve been facing will also prove to be educational, and highly stimulating to your keen intellect. Be sure to note the expansive new ideas that come to mind now, as some of them could prove to be the basis of a new outlook on life.
My new book draws a parallel between the outer ecology of the earth and the inner ecology of the human spirit, seeing the ‘balance of Nature’ in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. The Ecology of the Soul is about self-transformation. You may want to read my book because you want to change yourself for the better, to achieve that inner peace and power that you know to be your natural state of being, but which right now feels very far away.

In many self-help books, their message boils down to gaining control of your mind. Some of them talk about a global awakening of consciousness and humanity’s readiness for that evolutionary change, and most of them address the spiritual dimension, in that to change yourself for the better you have to understand yourself, by which I mean, your ‘Self’, your true, essential nature. And to do that you have to pay attention to what’s going on inside your head, to spend time in ‘introspection’, which leads very quickly to an awareness that there is much more to your essential Self than just what’s happening at the mind level. Call it spirit, call it Soul. You can’t embark on a journey of self change without awakening to the relationship between the physical and the non-physical—the spiritual—and indeed accepting the existence of the non-physical.

One of the basic facts of human existence is that there is always a dissatisfaction, an awareness that things—we ourselves and our circumstances—could be better. No one on this earth at this time can rightly say that they are completely fulfilled because that means perfection, and perfection is impossible in an imperfect world. You wouldn’t disagree that the world is imperfect, right? Could be better, right?

So if we have at least established that ‘most people’ feel there is something lacking, somewhere in their lives, either in their own personal makeup or in their situation (usually both), then we have established that there is a need to fix it. Whether you personally accept the existence of that need and choose to do something about it is entirely up to you. If you do, you are not alone. There are millions out there like you, which explains why self-
help, self-transformation and self-improvement books sell in their millions, why religion is still powerful and meaningful, and why there are so many courses and classes teaching yoga, meditation, t’ai chi ch’uan – a vast range of self-transformational or semi-spiritual, or even properly spiritual, knowledge and practices that demand you focus on your inner space.

The Seven Powers, Power Seeds and the Magic Minute

So my book will lay out the Seven Powers on which the Ecology of the Soul is based. Each power comes with seven Meditations, frameworks to transform your consciousness for new thinking, new awareness and new actions. By focusing on these separate aspects of the power, you gain a deep understanding of how it works within and outside you, and as your awareness reawakens, you find yourself going deeper and deeper through layers of insight. These are powerful concepts, and you can’t expect to plumb their depths all at once. We are creating a way of life here, after all. Discover that these powers are already within you. The way to reconnect to them and bring them into your daily life is blindingly simple. All you have to do is think about them.

As I’m sure you know, the kundalini snake rises from the bottom of the spine. So the Ecology of the Soul counts our powers upwards in the same order, focussing on the seven subtle nodes of energy in the body and reinforcing and emphasising those qualities associated with the chakras.

The Power of Nature: Muladhara, at the very base of the spine, honours sexuality, stability, security, courage and stamina.

The Power of Creativity: Swadisthana, in the bowl of the pelvis and governing womb, prostate or spleen, honours sexual desire, reproduction, creativity, harmony, joy and enthusiasm.

The Power of Endurance: Manipura, under the solar plexus, honours ch’i, the life force, digestion, personal power and growth.

The Power of Love: Anahata, the heart chakra, honours circulation, unconditional love for the self and others, passion and devotion.

The Power of Communication: Vishudda, the throat chakra, honours independence, fluent thought, security and safety.

The Power of Focus: Ajna, the ‘third eye’ chakra in the centre of the forehead, honours intuition, visual consciousness and clarity.

The Power of Connection: Sahasrara, the crown of the head chakra, honours meditation, universal consciousness, unity and spiritual connectedness.

The Ecology of the Soul is an attempt to explain and explore Soul Consciousness, the awareness and experience of your Self as a non-physical being, as taught in Raja Yoga by the Brahma Kumaris. But, as the book explains, the transition from physical to spiritual goes through the subtle realm, where each affects and has traction on the other. The point is to remember and rediscover your innate powers, and thus to arrive at the spiritual version of the balance crucial to any ecosystem. Generally speaking, we are way out of kilter, lost, looking for a sensible sense of Self.

Understanding the Ecology of the Soul—with more than a little help from the chakras—returns us to that balance.

Perfect? No, not in this world. A step—several steps—in the right direction? Very much so.


Aidan Walker has studied, taught and practised the BKS Iyengar system of Hatha Yoga all his adult life, including teachers’ classes with the Master himself. For six years he lived a fully committed celibate life as a member of the Brahma Kumaris, studying and practising Raja Yoga, whose core teaching of Soul Consciousness is at the heart of The Ecology of the Soul. The Ecology of the Soul is the culmination of a lifetime of spiritual experience.
It’s Never Too Late to Begin Again
Discovering Creativity and Meaning at Midlife and Beyond
By Julia Cameron with Emma Lively

Julia Cameron has inspired millions with her bestseller on creativity, The Artist’s Way. In It’s Never Too Late To Begin Again, she turns her eye to a segment of the population that, ironically, while they have more time to be creative, are often reluctant or intimidated by the creative process. Cameron shows readers that retirement can, in fact, be the most rich, fulfilling, and creative time of their lives. In this book, Cameron shows readers how cultivating their creative selves can help them navigate this new terrain. A twelve-week course aimed at defining—and creating—the life you want to have as you redefine yourself, this book includes simple tools that will guide and inspire you to make the most of this time in your life.

Tarcher Perigee. Paperback, $17.00.

Enso Morning
Daily Meditation Gifts
By Jacob Watson

Enso Morning: Daily Meditation Gifts presents over 160 Morning Blessing Letters to awaken, stimulate and deepen meditation and spiritual practice. In the tradition of Robert Frost and Wendell Berry, Jacob uses poetic images and personal experiences of New England nature, the birds, animals, woods, and beaches of coastal Maine, to awaken readers to begin their day nurtured and encouraged to be themselves, joined with like-minded souls. The personal letters in Enso Morning provide a friendly, comforting and accessible way to wake up and affirm the whole self. Each letter has seven brief paragraphs that offer a welcome to the day, a silent meditation, affirmations of body, heart and soul, a blessing and a gift for each day.


The Inefficiency Assassin
Time Management Tactics for Working Smarter, Not Longer
By Helene Segura

Author Helene Segura coaches real people in the real world to operate more efficiently during the workday, so they can have a life outside it. Her engaging time management program caters to diverse learning styles, offering case studies that allow readers to self-diagnose and zero in on the strategies most appropriate for them. Anyone wanting to streamline workflow and improve productivity can employ her wonderfully doable techniques. Thanks to Segura’s astute attention to personality, The Inefficiency Assassin meets readers where they are struggling and details quick and easy-to-implement strategies to, as Segura promises, “kick chaos to the curb.”

New World Library. Paperback, $16.95.

Earth Acupuncture
Healing the Living Landscape
By Gail Reichstein Rex, L.Ac.

Tracing her journey from initial vision and pulse taking to building a stone circle to open a major energy meridian of the Hudson, the author reveals how our rivers, valleys, and forests are capable of illness and healing just like a living being. She explains simple practices for attuning with the living landscape and responding appropriately to the messages and images received from the Earth’s intelligence. By making offerings of thanks and asking the land’s permission before every interaction, Gail Rex demonstrates the power of right relationship in action.


The Book of Ho’oponopono
The Hawaiian Practice of Forgiveness and Healing
By Luc Bodin, M.D., Nathalie Bodin Lamboy, and Jean Graciet

Based on an ancestral Hawaiian shamanic ritual, the healing practice of Ho’oponopono teaches you to cleanse your consciousness of negative memories, unconscious fears, and dysfunctional programming and grant yourself forgiveness, peace, and love. The process is deceptively simple—first you must recognize your own responsibility for creating the events in your life, then you are ready to apply the mantra of Ho’oponopono: I’m sorry, Forgive me, Thank you, I love you. Repeated several times over a dedicated interval, the negativity is replaced with inner peace, love, and harmony—and, as the stories in this book show, sometimes even miracles take place.


Stone Medicine
A Chinese Medical Guide to Healing with Gems and Minerals
By Leslie J. Franks

Detailing the properties of 200 gems, stones, minerals, and crystals, Leslie Franks explains the physical, emotional, and spiritual conditions each stone can treat and how their color, form, hardness, and energetic qualities affect us according to Chinese Medicine. Including a thorough primer on Traditional Chinese Medicine, this book explains how stones access our deepest layers. A comprehensive manual for using crystals, gems, and stones to address physical, emotional, and spiritual health conditions.

Healing Arts Press. Hardcover, $60.00.
The Children of Roswell
A Seven-Decade Legacy of Fear, Intimidation, and Cover-Ups
By Thomas J. Carey and Donald R. Schmitt

This is not just another book about Roswell. It’s not about any of the events surrounding one of the most famous UFO incidents of all time. It’s not even about any of the men or women involved in the recovery of a spaceship and its crew in the summer of 1947. Rather, it’s about the aftermath—the lifetime impact Roswell has had on the families who were forced to live with the truth while accepting the government’s account of the incident, then forced to face years of suppression and fear of reprisal from a government sworn to protect them. Parents who were present during or immediately after the incident may have passed on, but their children know what happened and have paid dearly for their knowledge. These are their stories.


Other Than Mother
Choosing Childlessness with Life in Mind
By Kamalamani

Choosing to have children is a private decision with global consequences. Other Than Mother explores the decision-making process around not having children. It is in three parts: Part I The Worldly Winds explores the backdrop to deciding whether or not to have children, including the cultural changes brought about by a rise in voluntary/intentional childlessness. Part II A Private Decision with Global Consequences explores the pros and cons in the decision-making process, including ecological and environmental considerations. Part III New Horizons and Baby-sized Projects explores living with the decision.


Don’t Be A Jerk
And Other Practical Advice from Dogen, Japan’s Greatest Zen Master
By Brad Warner

The Shobogenzo (The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye) is a revered 800-year-old Zen Buddhism classic written by the Japanese monk Eihei Dogen. In Don’t Be a Jerk, Zen priest and bestselling author Brad Warner, through accessible paraphrasing and incisive commentary, applies Dogen’s teachings to modern times. While entertaining and sometimes irreverent, Warner is also an astute scholar who sees in Dogen very modern psychological concepts, as well as insights on such topics as feminism and reincarnation. Warner even shows that Dogen offered a “Middle Way” in the currently raging debate between science and religion. For curious readers worried that Dogen’s teachings are too philosophically opaque, Don’t Be a Jerk is hilarious, understandable, and wise.

New World Library. Paperback, $16.95.

Sacred Geometry of the Earth
The Ancient Matrix of Monuments and Mountains
By Mark Vidler and Catherine Young
Foreword By Rand Flem-Ath

Through detailed maps, Vidler and Young show how the locations of megalithic monuments reflect and enhance a natural pattern on the Earth that connects its major features. The rows of standing stones at Carnac in France, for example, point to the summits of Mount Everest and K2, and Angkor Wat in Cambodia is on a straight line joining Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa and the tip of Cape Comorin in India. The authors examine the geography of many islands and each continent, including Antarctica, to show how the highest peak on each landmass falls on a line connecting coastal extremes. They reveal how circles of standing stones and man-made mounds mark intersections of these lines. They explore the connection between the Nazca lines in Peru and the Amazon, Nile, and Ganges deltas and explain how the locations of the Giza pyramids, Stonehenge, and Machu Picchu are integrated into the natural design on Earth.

Inner Traditions. Paperback, $18.95.

Marrying Bipolar
The highs and lows of loving someone with a mental illness
By Natasha David

Marrying Bipolar is the account of a wife’s struggle to understand the events in her husband’s life that would eventually lead to their marriage breakdown and his untimely death by suicide. Natasha’s experience watching her husband struggle with the complexity of mental illness, has led her to understand the deadly role denial has to play, for both sufferer and partners. In the process, the author addresses her own search of ways to address denial of the darkness that resides in all of us, and the compassion needed to heal and rebuild lives after enduring.

There Were Giants Upon the Earth: Gods, Demigods, and Human Ancestry: The Evidence of Alien DNA
By Zecharia Sitchin

In whose genetic image were we made? From his first book The 12th Planet, Zecharia Sitchin has asserted that the Bible’s Elohim, who said “Let us fashion The Adam in our image and after our likeness— were the gods of Sumer and Babylon—the Anunnaki who had come to Earth from their planet Nibiru. The Adam, he wrote, was genetically engineered by adding Anunnaki genes to those of an existing hominid, some 300,000 years ago. Then, according to the Bible, intermarriage took place: “There were giants upon the Earth” who took Adam’s female offspring as wives, giving birth to “heroes of renown.” With meticulous detail, Sitchin shows that these were the demigods of Sumerian and Babylonian lore, such as the famed Mesopotamian king Gilgamesh as well as the hero of the Deluge, the Babylonian Utanapishtim.

New World Library. Paperback, $16.00.

Expectation Hangover Overcoming Disappointment in Work, Love, and Life
By Christine Hassler

In Expectation Hangover, Christine Hassler has broken down the complex and overwhelming experience of recovering from disappointment into a step-by-step treatment plan. This book reveals the formula for how to process Expectation Hangovers on the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual levels to immediately ease suffering. Instead of wallowing in regret, self-recrimination, or anger, we can see these experiences as catalysts for profound transformation and doorways that open to possibility.

New World Library. Paperback, $15.95.

Super Mind How to Boost Performance and Live a Richer and Happier Life Through Transcendental Meditation
By Norman E Rosenthal MD

Most of us believe that we live in only three states of consciousness: wakefulness, sleep, and dreaming. But there is so much more. In Super Mind, clinical psychiatrist and bestselling author Norman E. Rosenthal, M.D., shows how the incredibly simple daily practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM) can permanently improve your state of mind during the routine hours of waking life—placing you into a super-mind state of consciousness where you consistently perform at peak aptitude. In his most ambitious and practical book yet, Rosenthal shows how TM is more than a tool for destressing or for general wellness. It is a gateway to functioning physically, emotionally, and intellectually at levels we never knew we could attain. Written in Rosenthal’s trademark style of restraint and intellectual carefulness, Super Mind explores how we can aspire to so much more than we ever thought possible.

Tarcher Perigee/Penguin. Hardcover, $27.00.

Dying to Be Free From Enforced Secrecy to Near Death to True Transformation
By Hannah Robinson

In this compelling memoir, Hannah Robinson relates how she was injured in an accident while on holiday in Tenerife. While still “unconscious” she entered a “near-death experience”, where she experienced true peace and love. She also received the information she needed to come to terms with the biggest, negative issue she faced: the life-long rejection and enforced secrecy of her father, a Catholic priest. Increasingly struck by the contrast between her own spiritual experience and her treatment by the Catholic Church, Hannah examines the relationship between organized religion and near-death experiences and makes a good argument for love being the most emotionally, spiritually and psychologically healing power there is; one that transcends human belief systems and ultimately unites us all as one.


Secret Medicines from Your Garden Plants for Healing, Spirituality, and Magic
By Ellen Evert Hopman

Weaving together ancient wisdom, mystical folklore, and modern plant research, master herbalist Ellen Evert Hopman explores the many uses of flowers, trees, common weeds, and ornamental plants for food, medicine, spiritual growth, and magical rituals. She reveals the herbal lore surrounding each plant, drawing on traditional knowledge and remedies from around the world, including Native American, Celtic, and Egyptian traditions. She includes recipes throughout so you can make medicines from wild and domesticated plants easily found in yards, forests, meadows, and hedgerows, and she discusses what to plant to ensure you have leaves, berries, and flowers all year.


Play Life More Beautifully Conversations with Seymour
By Andrew Harvey and Seymour Bernstein

Play Life More Beautifully is a series of passionate and illuminating conversations between religious scholar, poet and teacher of mystical traditions, Andrew Harvey, and acclaimed pianist, composer and teacher Seymour Bernstein. Seymour Bernstein – 87 and going strong – has become an inspiration to thousands of people thanks to the hit documentary Seymour: An Introduction, directed by the actor Ethan Hawke. In the style of the bestselling and poignant Tuesdays with Morrie, this book covers everything from God, music, friendship, teaching, death and more. Through the conversation of these two dear friends, readers will learn more about themselves and their precious life on this earth. This is a must-read for those who want gentle guidance and honest advice about embracing and expressing their creativity, living meaningfully and following their dreams.

Clearing Emotional Clutter
Mindfulness Practices for Letting Go of What's Blocking Your Fulfillment and Transformation
By Donald Altman

Is emotional clutter blocking success in your personal and professional life? You’ve likely heard about the psychological benefits of clearing out the clutter in your surroundings, but how do you handle your emotional clutter—the psychological version of the jam-packed closet or impenetrable garage? Shutting away and trying to hide old pains and traumas creates toxic patterns that can keep you from having the life of your dreams. Integrating mindfulness and cutting-edge neuroscience, international mindfulness expert Donald Altman teaches how to modify entrenched habits and patterns with only a few minutes of attention daily.

New World Library. Paperback, $15.95.

Accidentally Overweight
The 9 Elements That Will Help You Solve Your Weight Loss Puzzle
By Dr. Libby Weaver

Accidentally Overweight is about what has to happen for a human to be able to access body fat and burn it. Essentially it is about weight loss and all of things that need to come together in our bodies for this to be possible. Many people eat well and exercise regularly yet their body fat does not reflect their efforts. Others have gained and lost the same 20 kilos for the past twenty years while for others they know they don’t eat well or perhaps they eat too much, yet they feel powerless to change. This book explains the biochemistry and emotions of weight loss.


Holistic Counseling
Introducing “The Vis Dialogue”
Breakthrough Healing Method Uniting The Worlds of Mind-Body Medicine & Psychology
By Moshe Daniel Block

Holistic Counseling - Introducing “The Vis Dialogue” is about a cutting-edge, revolutionary new process of counseling that helps the practitioner connect the patient’s mind with their body to establish the real root cause of illness and disease. This technique helps to empower the patient to understand how their body is a reflection of their mind and how their illness also reflects that. This counseling technique alone has often been enough to heal incurable and protracted physical diseases without drugs, supplements, or any other form of remedy.


The Art and Science of Hand Reading
Classical Methods for Self-Discovery through Palmistry
By Ellen Goldberg and Dorian Bergen

In this comprehensive guide to hand reading, based on Ellen Goldberg’s 40 years of teaching palmistry and the Western Mystery tradition, the authors make the powerful insights of the hand accessible in an inviting and user-friendly manner. The book presents the character traits and personality archetypes associated with each of the seven mounts and also examines other factors that enhance the qualities revealed by the mount types. The meaning of each major and minor line is described in detail. The authors also provide accurate timing guides for each line, making it possible to locate specific events and to see how your lines change over time.

Destiny Books. Hardcover, $35.00.

On the Other Side of Love
A Woman’s Unconventional Journey Towards Wisdom
By Muriel Maufroy

When life has lost all meaning, what do you do? You grab whatever comes your way. This, in short, is Marie’s story as drawn out of her memories, diaries and taped interviews. It takes the reader from Jerusalem to California, Paris, London and Turkey and is a very personal account. However, it also reflects a universal truth in which many will recognize their own story.


Sacred Trickery and the Way of Kindness
The Radical Wisdom of Jodo
By Alejandro Jodorowsky With Gilles Farcet

Known for his surrealist films, his unique approach to tarot, his symbolic comics, and his shamanic therapeutic method of psychomagic, Alejandro Jodorowsky has accomplished an extraordinary amount in his more than 80 years. In this book, we get an intimate look into the inner workings of the cult figure of Jodo. We get to see Jodo’s own reflections on the rich tapestry of his remarkable life, including the initiatory failure of the Dune film project, which combined the talents of a multitude of creative greats, including Moebius, Salvador Dalí, Orson Welles, Mick Jagger, and H. R. Giger. We learn about Jodo’s years with Marcel Marceau and with great masters such as Ejo Takata, and the mysterious Carlos Castaneda. whose sacred trickery reveals how intentions matter more than notions of “true” and “false.”

Inner Traditions. Paperback, $18.95.
1. Unclutter your life. You’ll feel a real rush of inspiration when you clear out stuff that’s no longer useful in your life:

- If you haven’t worn it in the past year or two, recycle it for others to use.

- Get rid of old files that take up space and are seldom, if ever, needed.

- Donate unused toys, tools, books, bicycles, and dishes to a charitable organization.

Get rid of anything that keeps you mired in acquisitions that contribute to a cluttered life.

2. Clear your calendar of unwanted and unnecessary activities and obligations. If you’re unavailable for Spirit, you’re unlikely to know the glow of inspiration. God will indeed work with you and send you the guidance—and the people—you need, but if you’re grossly overscheduled, you’re going to miss these life-altering gifts. So practice saying no to excessive demands and don’t feel guilty about injecting a dose of leisure time into your daily routine.

3. Be sure to keep your free time free. Be on the lookout for invitations to functions that may keep you on top of society’s pyramid, but which inhibit your access to joyful inspiration. If cocktail parties, social get-togethers, fund-raising events, or even drinking-and-gossiping gatherings with friends aren’t really how you want to spend your free time, then don’t. Begin declining invitations that don’t activate feelings of inspiration.

4. Take time for meditation and yoga. Give yourself at least 20 minutes a day to sit quietly and make conscious contact with God. I’ve written an entire book on this subject called Getting in the Gap, so I won’t belabor it here. I will say that I’ve received thousands of messages (including the one from Gail Beale, which I shared with you in Chapter 5) from people all over the world, who have expressed their appreciation for learning how to simplify their life by taking the time to meditate.
I also encourage you to find a yoga center near you and begin a regular practice. The rewards are so powerful: You’ll feel healthier, less stressed, and inspired by what you’ll be able to do with and for your body in a very short time.

5. Return to the simplicity of nature. There’s nothing more awe inspiring than nature itself. The fantasy to return to a less tumultuous life almost always involves living in the splendor of the mountains, the forests, or the tundra; on an island; near the ocean; or beside a lake. These are universal urges, since nature is created by the same Source as we are, and we’re made up of the same chemicals as all of nature (we’re stardust, remember?).

Your urge to simplify and feel inspired is fueled by the desire to be your natural self—that is, your nature self. So give yourself permission to get away to trek or camp in the woods; swim in a river, lake, or ocean; sit by an open fire; ride horseback through trails; or ski down a mountain slope. This doesn’t have to mean long, planned vacations that are months away—no matter where you live, you’re only a few hours or even moments away from a park, campground, or trail that will allow you to enjoy a feeling of being connected to the entire Universe.

6. Put distance between you and your critics. Choose to align yourself with people who are like-minded in their search for simplified inspiration. Give those who find fault or who are confrontational a silent blessing and remove yourself from their energy as quickly as possible. Your life is simplified enormously when you don’t have to defend yourself to anyone, and when you receive support rather than criticism. You don’t have to endure the criticism with anything other than a polite thank-you and a promise to consider what’s been said—anything else is a state of conflict that erases the possibility of your feeling inspired. You never need to defend yourself or your desires to anyone, as those inner feelings are Spirit speaking to you. Those thoughts are sacred, so don’t ever let anyone trample on them.

7. Take some time for your health. Consider that the number one health problem in America seems to be obesity. How can you feel inspired and live in simplicity if you’re gorging on excessive amounts of food and eliminating the exercise that the body craves? Recall that your body is a sacred temple where you reside for this lifetime, so make some time every single day for exercising it. Even if you can only manage a walk around the block, just do it. Similarly, keep the words portion control uppermost in your consciousness—your stomach is the size of your fist, not a wheelbarrow! Respect your sacred temple and simplify your life by being an exerciser and a sensible eater. I promise that you’ll feel inspired if you act on this today!

8. Play, play, play! You’ll simplify your life and feel inspired if you learn to play rather than work your way through life. I love to be around kids because they inspire me with their laughter and frivolity. In fact, if I’ve heard it once, I’ve heard it a thousand times: “Wayne, you’ve never grown up—you’re always playing.” I take great pride in this! I play onstage when I speak, and I’m playing now as I write.

9. Slow down. One of Gandhi’s most illuminating observations reminds us that “there is more to life than increasing its speed.” This is great advice for simplifying your life—in fact, slow everything way down for a few moments right here and now. Slowly read these words. Slow your breathing down so that you’re aware of each inhalation and exhalation.

When you’re in your car, downshift and relax. Slow down your speech, your inner thoughts, and the frantic pace of everything you do. Take more time to hear others.
Notice your inclination to interrupt and get the conversation over with, and then choose to listen instead. Stop to enjoy the stars on a clear night and the cloud formations on a crisp day. Sit down in a mall and just observe how everyone seems in a hurry to get nowhere.

By slowing down, you’ll simplify and rejoin the perfect pace at which creation works. Imagine trying to hurry nature up by tugging at an emerging tomato plant—you’re as natural as that plant, so let yourself be at peace with the perfection of nature’s plan.

10. Do everything you can to eschew debt. Remember that you’re attempting to simplify your life here, so you don’t need to purchase more of what will complicate and clutter your life. If you can’t afford it, let it go until you can. By going into debt, you’ll just add layers of anxiety onto your life. That anxiety will then take you away from your peace, which is where you are when you’re in-Spirit. When you have to work extra hard to pay off debts, the present moments of your life are less enjoyable; consequently, you’re further away from the joy and peace that are the trademarks of inspiration. You’re far better off to have less and enjoy the days of your life than to take on debt and invite stress and anxiety where peace and tranquility could have reigned. And remember that the money you have in your possession is nothing but energy—so refuse to plug in to an energy system that’s not even there.

11. Forget about the cash value. I try not to think about money too frequently because it’s been my observation that people who do so tend to think about almost nothing else. So do what your heart tells you will bring you joy, rather than determining whether it will be cost-effective. If you’d really enjoy that whale-watching trip, for instance, make the decision to do so—don’t deny yourself the pleasures of life because of some monetary detail. Don’t base your purchases on getting a discount, and don’t rob yourself of a simple joy because you didn’t get a break on the price. You can afford a happy, ful-

12. Remember your spirit. When life tends to get overly complex, too fast, too cluttered, too deadline oriented, or too type A for you, stop and remember your own spirit. You’re headed for inspiration, a simple, peaceful place where you’re in harmony with the perfect timing of all creation. Go there in your mind, and stop frequently to remember what you really want.

The Power of the Placebo is a documentary film about exactly that: Placebos; how they work, and how you can harness their healing power. The fact is “dummy pills” do indeed work, and sometimes far better than anyone could have imagined.

For example, trials show people often react to a placebo in nearly the identical manner as an actual drug. Placebos have been shown to produce dopamine release and other chemical responses, mimicking the effects of drugs without actually taking an active ingredient.

By definition, a placebo is an inert substance that has no effect on your body. In medical research, placebos such as sugar pills are used as controls against which the effects of experimental drugs (also in the form of pills) are measured.

However, the placebo-effect, in which a patient believes he or she is getting an actual drug and subsequently improves despite receiving no active substance at all, has become a well-recognized phenomenon. It also works with surgical procedures. Just like drugs, placebo or sham surgery has been shown to produce results that are equal to actual surgery, even though the physical problem is in no way addressed!

Research suggests this power of belief can be a potent healing force. Some studies into the placebo effect have even concluded that many conventional treatments “work” because of the placebo effect and little else.

Interestingly, more recent investigations reveal the placebo effect is growing in potency among Americans, and it’s having a dramatic impact on the development of new painkillers.

Drug companies are finding it increasingly difficult to get pain-reducing drugs through clinical trials, because as people’s responses to placebos are getting stronger, it makes it more difficult to prove that the drug actually works.

An unusual experiment featured in the film involved professional bicyclists. They were told they’d receive either a standard performance enhancing supplement containing caffeine, or a new supplement, expected to improve performance to a greater degree than the standard pill.

However, there was a twist. Both pills were placebo, containing nothing but corn flour. The racers were asked
to cycle at max capacity twice in one day. The first race was to establish their baseline max, and the second to evaluate the effect of the supplement.

Interestingly, even though the racers were tired and received no active performance enhancer, half of them were faster in the second race.

The placebo even made one cyclist break his own personal speed record. After hundreds of similar experiments on athletes, these kinds of results are actually typical.

In general, placebos enhance athletic performance by about 3 percent, which can translate into taking gold in the Olympics versus failing to place in the top. So while 3 percent doesn’t sound like much, it’s a very substantial improvement in the world of professional sports.

Fake Surgery Works as Well as the Real Thing

Many are quick to conclude that the placebo effect is responsible for the benefits of alternative treatments and natural supplements—the implication being that the treatment doesn’t really work, and any benefit is “all in your head.”

Few stop to consider the fact that many of the benefits of conventional drugs and other interventions are also due to the placebo effect. And, unfortunately, drugs have the added downside of causing very real and adverse side effects.

One of the most dramatic examples of this was a now classic knee surgery study3 published in 2002. Not only does this double-blind, placebo-controlled, multi-center trial definitively prove the power of your mind in healing, it also reveals that most knee surgery for osteoarthritis is a waste of money.

The results of this study show that it’s not the surgery itself that is responsible for the improvement; it’s all due to the placebo effect. More precisely, it’s the ability of your brain to produce healing when you believe it should be happening after receiving surgery.

As noted by the authors: “In this controlled trial involving patients with osteoarthritis of the knee, the outcomes after arthroscopic lavage or arthroscopic debridement were no better than those after a placebo procedure.”

Improvement Following Knee Surgery Is Due to Placebo Effect

Another study4 published in 2013 also found that arthroscopic knee surgery for degenerative meniscal tears had no more benefit than “sham surgery.”

At the post-operative one-year mark, all patients, regardless of whether they had real or sham surgery, reported equal amounts of pain reduction, which led the researchers to conclude that real knee surgery offers no better outcome than sham surgery (placebo).

Arthroscopic surgery on the meniscus is the most common orthopedic procedure in the US. According to this study, it’s performed about 700,000 times a year to the tune of $4 billion.

But according to these findings, any claim that surgery is “the best” or “only” option for osteoarthritic knee pain is plainly false.

So, please do consider these kinds of findings when you’re weighing your treatment options. Remembering that your mind is the real healer may help you find a safer and less costly alternative to going under the knife, which can have permanent adverse consequences.

Placebo Surgery Even Works on Fractured Spines

A similar sham surgery trial is presented in the featured film. Vertebroplasty is a procedure in which a fractured spine is repaired by injecting surgical cement into the bone. However, one doctor became aware of a strange anomaly.

Some patients, who for whatever reason received treatment on the wrong vertebrae, still received pain relief. So he decided to undertake a placebo trial. Some patients received the real procedure, and others received sham surgery.

Bonnie, one of the elderly patients in the study who had fractured her back during a fall, felt immediate pain relief. As noted in the film, “the procedure transformed her life.” With the pain significantly reduced, she became much more active. Within a week of the injection she was back to her daily golf game.

And yet nothing, except numbing the area and simulating the cement injection, had been done to her frac-
tured spine. Interestingly, Bonnie had real vertebroplasty done before, putting her in the rare position of being able to compare the outcome of both procedures. In her words, “they were both so successful, I could go ahead and do whatever I wanted to do without any problem.”

A total of 130 patients were included in this study. When the results were tallied, there was no statistical difference in the degree of pain relief between the real and the sham surgeries. Even more importantly, there was no statistical difference in the improvement of physical function between the two. More than one million Americans have received vertebroplasty over the past couple of decades, yet it is no better than placebo. Put another way, fake surgery works just as well.

**Other Examples of the Medical Placebo Effect**

Another excellent example of the placebo effect is that of antidepressants. Research published in 2010 suggests antidepressants work no better than a placebo for people with mild to moderate depression. An earlier meta-analysis concluded that the difference between antidepressants and placebo pills is very small—yet these drugs remain among the most prescribed drugs in the U.S. That hardly falls within the parameters of “science-based medicine.”

Considering the long list of side effects associated with antidepressants, including worsening depression, it seems reasonable to conclude that a placebo would be a far preferable option to the real thing. Placebos have also been found to work as well as the migraine drug Maxalt (rizatriptan) for recurring migraines.

Surprisingly, subjects reported pain relief even when they knew the pill they were receiving was a placebo, compared with no treatment at all. According to the authors, the placebo effect accounted for more than 50 percent of the therapeutic value of this drug. As explained by co-author Ted Kaptchuk, director of the Program in Placebo Studies and Therapeutic Encounter at Harvard Medical School:

“This study untangled and reassembled the clinical effects of placebo and medication in a unique manner. Very few, if any, experiments have compared the effectiveness of medication under different degrees of information in a naturally recurring disease. Our discovery showing that subjects’ reports of pain were nearly identical when they were told that an active drug was a placebo as when they were told that a placebo was an active drug demonstrates that the placebo effect is an unacknowledged partner for powerful medications.”

**How Does the Placebo Effect Work?**

We now know the placebo effect is real. But what causes it? How does it work? Writing in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology* in 2011, the researchers noted the following observations:

1. First, as the placebo effect is basically a psychosocial context effect, these data indicate that different social stimuli, such as words and rituals of the therapeutic act, may change the chemistry and circuitry of the patient’s brain.

2. Second, the mechanisms that are activated by placebos are the same as those activated by drugs, which suggests a cognitive/affective interference with drug action.

3. Third, if prefrontal functioning is impaired, placebo responses are reduced or totally lacking, as occurs in dementia of the Alzheimer’s type.

By using brain imaging technology during placebo tests, researchers have been able to show that even when a placebo is used, your brain still responds according to
expectations. For example, in trials involving placebos for pain relief, the participant’s brains release natural opioids that provide opioid-mediated pain control. So the placebo effect is tapping into the same pain control centers as opioid drugs.

Placebos can also trigger the release of many other natural brain chemicals, such as those involved in making us feel more energized, or those that help us sleep better. As noted in the film, “the placebo effect taps into our natural pharmacy.”

Drugs work because we have the receptors for the drugs, and that means we have brain chemicals that act on those receptors. Receptors have evolved to react to those natural chemicals.” In short, the placebo effect relies on chemicals—your own—which appear to be released in response to or in accordance with your mental or emotional expectations or beliefs.

So just how far can a placebo take you? Placebo trials on patients with Parkinson’s disease have revealed that even this serious condition can be ameliorated with a “dummy pill.”

Lack of dopamine is one of the factors producing the symptoms of Parkinson’s, and brain scans show that when Parkinson’s patients are told they’re receiving an active medication, the dopamine levels in their brains increase—even when there’s no active ingredient in the pill.

As noted in the film, a placebo can release as much dopamine as amphetamines in a person with a healthy dopamine system, so it’s a dramatic response.

Mind Over Matter

Typically, for a placebo to work you have to believe it’s a “real” drug. Why is that? Expectations, it turns out, play a crucial role in recovery from illness. There’s a link between your mind and your body, and when you expect a pill (or surgery) to do something, your body yields to your expectation by producing the requisite brain chemicals. Needless to say, the stronger your belief or expectation, the more likely you are to experience the desired result.

This was demonstrated in a study10 in which people with back pain who believed that acupuncture would be helpful actually got more pain relief from it, compared to those who were skeptical about the treatment.

According to study author Felicity Bishop, Ph.D.: “People who started out with very low expectations of acupuncture, who thought it probably would not help them, were more likely to report less benefit as treatment went on.” Factors that influence a person’s expectations include the size, color and price of the medication, whether it’s the real deal or a placebo. For example:

- Capsules are more effective than tablets
- Large capsules are more effective than small capsules
- Expensive medications are more effective than cheap medications
- Red pills are most effective for treating pain, while blue pills are most effective when treating anxiety—except if you’re an Italian male. Bright blue is the color of the Italian soccer team, associated with “passion, excitement, and heartache,” so for Italians, blue pills have the converse effect, according to the researchers in this film.

Interestingly enough, there’s also evidence showing that the placebo effect can work even if you know you’re receiving a placebo.

However, in these cases, the effects tend not to last as long. One woman suffering from irritable bowel syndrome was asked if she’d be willing to try a placebo. While highly skeptical, she agreed, and was astounded to discover she was no longer in pain after three days of taking the sugar pills. But as soon as she stopped taking the pills, the symptoms came back.

The study in question didn’t try to decipher why the
placebos worked, only whether they would work without deception, and in 63 percent of participants, they did provide relief despite the fact that the patients knew they were taking chemically inactive pills. One theory though, is that the mere act of seeing a physician and taking a pill twice a day somehow makes your body recognize that your intention is to get well.

**How to Harness the Placebo Effect For Your Own Health and Wellbeing**

The film also reviews the use of hypnosis—another treatment that has no “active influence” other than your own belief or expectation. In a way, hypnosis can be viewed as “a procedure that allows you to turn your own ability to produce a placebo effect.” In the film, this is dramatically demonstrated by a man who opts for hypnosis over anesthetic when getting a wisdom tooth extracted.

At no point did he rate his pain over a four on a scale of 0 to 10. That’s the power of placebo, and nothing but words were used to help him shift his expectations about what he was going to feel, allowing his brain to release natural painkillers.

Chances are, there will be occasions in your life where you can use your mind to help heal your body or reduce your reliance on conventional medical care, including medications. And when I say that, I mean that if you strongly believe you will benefit from something, you radically increase the chances that you will.

But there is one caveat: you may need to resolve any emotional blocks that are standing in your way first. Such a block could be the belief that the pain or illness cannot go away. Maybe a parent or relative had the same problem and they never recovered, so you probably “can’t” get rid of it either. Another block could be resentment that you have the disease or the pain, or even an unconscious desire to keep your ailment because of the attention you gain from it.

The Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) is an extremely powerful tool for getting to the root of emotional conflicts such as these. By releasing them, it may be easier for you to open your mind and harness the power of the placebo effect. It’s often possible to feel better just because your mind subconsciously believes it’s time, or your subconscious alters body processes in response to the placebo treatment without you even being aware of it.

As often as possible, try to use the placebo option first. This is a new way of thinking about healing for most people, but can be extremely potent, especially when combined with a healthy outlook and disease-preventive lifestyle.

**Dr. Mercola** is the founder of the world’s most visited natural health website, [http://www.Mercola.com](http://www.Mercola.com). You can learn the hazardous side effects of OTC Remedies by getting a FREE copy of his latest special report *The Dangers of Over the Counter Remedies* by going to his Report Page.

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**The Wonders of Avocados**

Scientists were looking to see how avocado consumption would influence blood sugar levels and insulin responses, satisfaction and further food intake. The researchers, from the Department of Nutrition at Loma Linda University found that participants who added half an avocado to their lunch reported a significantly decreased desire to eat by 40 percent over a three hour period and 28 percent over a five hour period compared to their desire to eat after a standard, non-avocado-containing lunch. Even more significantly, their satisfaction was long lasting. Three hours after eating participants reported increased satisfaction by 26 percent. And the avocados didn’t throw off blood sugar. According to Dr. Joan Sabat who led the research team “…there was no increase in blood levels beyond what was observed after eating the standard lunch”.

—*Critical Health News*
Recently I had dinner with an artist friend. Now 67, he still works daily as a writer, radio personality, and teacher. The conversation wandered to my current writing and my musing on the subject of retirement.

“Artists don’t retire,” he said simply.

It’s true. Tom Meehan, at eighty-nine, had two musicals on Broadway in one season. Roman Totenburg, an esteemed violinist and teacher, taught—and performed—until his final days, well into his nineties. Frank Lloyd Wright famously passed on with an unfinished building standing in Oak Park, IL. B.B. King toured until six months before his death at age eighty-nine. Oscar Hammerstein II lived just until *The Sound of Music* opened.

What do we all have to learn from this? Self-expression is something that does not—and should not—ever stop. Each of us is creative. Each of us has something unique to bring to the world. We have both time and experience on our side. Retirement is a time to tackle projects and unlock dreams, a time to revisit the past and explore the unknown. It is a time to design our future.

**Basic Principles**

- Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy; pure, creative energy.
- There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life—including ourselves.
- When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator’s creativity within us and our lives.
- We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.
- Creativity is God’s gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.
• The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.
• When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good, orderly direction.
• As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected.
• It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.
• Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

Excerpted from It’s Never Too Late To Begin Again: Discovering Creativity and Meaning at Midlife and Beyond by Julia Cameron and Emma Lively. Printed with the permission of TarcherPerigee/Penguin, a division of Penguin Random House. Copyright Julia Cameron and Emma Lively. ©2016, http://www.penguin.com

A Conversation with Julia Cameron
Author of It’s Never Too Late To Begin Again
Discovering Creativity and Meaning at Midlife and Beyond

What inspired you to write It’s Never Too Late To Begin Again?
I turned 68, officially a senior, and was often asked if I was still writing. My friend Daniel Region, a multifaceted artist, remarks, “Artists never retire.” I found my newly retired students particularly poignant, often ambushed by difficult feelings. I wanted to write a book that would give them grounding and hope.

What common obstacles dissuade retirees from pursuing creative ventures that interest them?
We have a mythology in this country which tells us that creative adventuring belongs to the young. Believing this, many seniors talk themselves out of creative endeavors. Writing their Memoir often connects people to long-buried dreams. The Morning Pages support them in taking action steps.

A common notion is that, if success in creative endeavors has not occurred by one’s forties, it won’t happen. How might those who have bypassed their fifties and are currently embarking on new creative ventures avoid being discouraged from such a message?

The toolkit of this book is specifically designed to energize and activate creative energies. Working with the tools, people find themselves daring to risk. They soon realize that their age and experience are creative advantages.

How might retirees discern their calling, and why is it important to do so?
Morning Pages and the Memoir are both tools which guide the practitioner into admitting their dreams. I think of this book as being like an elaborate game of “sleuth”—practitioners look for clues of their authentic lives. This authenticity leads to heightened self-esteem, and deepened sense of well-being. “To thine own self be true,” the pages encourage users.

What is the biggest block to creativity?
I would have to say that a fear of appearing foolish is probably the most potent block.

How will writing their memoir help retirees overcome their creative blocks?
“Julia, my life is boring,” students often say before they embark on their Memoir. As they revisit the stages of
their life, they encounter many buried passions. Far from being boring, every life has the embers of creativity just waiting to be stoked.

Our youth-oriented culture often makes those who are older feel unseen and replaceable. How does this perception impede creative recovery, and what can be done to overcome it?
Actor/Director John Cassavetes often spoke of the necessity of keeping what he called the “man-child” alive and well. He believed in passion, and it is passion that rekindles a sense of power and possibility.

How might retirees redefine productivity?
Many retirees find that in losing the structure of their days, they find themselves feeling lost. The tools of this book reestablish a self-initiated structure. As practitioners work with the tools, they find many clues to what will bring them satisfaction.

Among your retired students, is there an individual whose creative recovery has particularly amazed you?
I find myself thinking of my friend Daniel Region, a longtime Artist’s Way practitioner. He has been an actor, a director, a photographer, a novelist, and a website designer. He has done Morning Pages for over a decade and his many creative pursuits show me the rewards of creative adventuring.

Why should newly retired individuals consider getting a pet?
Pets bring unconditional love and playful antics which lift the spirit.

How might someone who is beginning creative recovery discover or establish a supportive community?
There are many ways to build community. Asking ourselves “Who mirrors back to me my power and possibility?” is a question that sorts our acquaintances into those who dare to dream with us and those who discourage our dreams.

Why is perfectionism the enemy of creativity, and how can we learn to overcome it?
Perfectionism allows for no rough drafts or practice shots. It tells us that only “perfect” work is worthy. Morning Pages dismantle the perfectionist impulse as practitioners use their pages to move past their Censor’s negative voice.

How does redefining our concept of God help with our creative recovery?
Many of us have been raised with a God Concept that is punitive and discouraging. After all, we have a creativity myth in which Adam and Eve were punished for daring to reach for the apple. When I work with students on their God Concept, I often have to dismantle a great deal of negativity and fear. When I ask them to design a “Creativity God,” the room palpably lightens as they say things like, “encouraging, supportive, humorous,” even “loves to cha-cha.”

What do you mean by “healthy selfishness,” and why are the newly retired so often reluctant to embrace it?
The tools encourage self-exploration and heightened self-love. “Healthy selfishness” is grounded in the increased self-esteem that comes from using the tools. We have a mythology that very narrowly defines the roles available to seniors. They are encouraged to overextend themselves in caretaking their adult children and grandchildren.

Why is it especially important for retirees to tap into their creativity and pursue their dreams?
Americans’ life expectancy is growing longer. Where
Once sixty-five was “old,” sixty-five may now be “vibrant and vital.” Retirees may face decades of healthy living. Dreams can be fulfilled in the ensuing years. I should put a word in here about the Internet, which empowers so many to connect with others, learn new skills, and pursue their dreams. No longer bound by strict structures that would deny them publication, many elders are writing and publishing on their own.

Julia Cameron is an award-winning writer, bestselling author, artist, and one of the most beloved teachers in the world of how to live a creative life. Her work includes more than thirty books, with such bestselling works on the creative process as The Artist’s Way, Walking in This World, and Finding Water. Connect with Julia online at http://www.JuliaCameronLive.com, on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/juliacameronlive, and on Twitter @J_CameronLive.

Plants Talk To Each Other Using An Internet Of Fungus

It’s an information superhighway that speeds up interactions between a large, diverse population of individuals. It allows individuals who may be widely separated to communicate and help each other out. But it also allows them to commit new forms of crime.

No, we’re not talking about the Internet, we’re talking about fungi. While mushrooms might be the most familiar part of a fungus, most of their bodies are made up of a mass of thin threads, known as a mycelium. We now know that these threads act as a kind of underground internet, linking the roots of different plants. That tree in your garden is probably hooked up to a bush several metres away, thanks to mycelia.

The more we learn about these underground networks, the more our ideas about plants have to change. They aren’t just sitting there quietly growing. By linking to the fungal network they can help out their neighbours by sharing nutrients and information—or sabotage unwelcome plants by spreading toxic chemicals through the network. This “wood wide web”, it turns out, even has its own version of cybercrime.

Around 90% of land plants are in mutually-beneficial relationships with fungi. The 19th-century German biologist Albert Bernard Frank coined the word “mycorrhiza” to describe these partnerships, in which the fungus colonises the roots of the plant.

In mycorrhizal associations, plants provide fungi with food in the form of carbohydrates. In exchange, the fungi help the plants suck up water, and provide nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen, via their mycelia. Since the 1960s, it has been clear that mycorrhizae help individual plants to grow.

Fungal networks also boost their host plants’ immune systems. That’s because, when a fungus colonises the roots of a plant, it triggers the production of defense-related chemicals. These make later immune system responses quicker and more efficient, a phenomenon called “priming”. Simply plugging in to mycelial networks makes plants more resistant to disease.

But that’s not all. We now know that mycorrhizae also connect plants that may be widely separated. Fungus expert Paul Stamets called them “Earth’s natural internet” in a 2008 TED talk. He first had the idea in the 1970s when he was studying fungi using an electron microscope. Stamets noticed similarities between mycelia and ARPANET, the US Department of Defense’s early version of the internet.

—SorenDreier.com
W ith the pace of life accelerating, in a world of change, it’s not easy to maintain our balance and sense of direction. Yet we strive to do so, because a sense of direction, toward a meaningful goal, may be the better part of happiness. In this pursuit, the journey may indeed matter more than the destination—but without a destination to aim for there is no journey; we can only wander.

We humans are goal seekers from infancy, drawn by the objects of our desire. But somewhere along the way, most often in the dilemmas and angst of adolescence, a sense of confusion obscures the simple desires of childhood. What we want is muddied by expectations about what we (or others) think we should do. We begin to doubt our desires, mistrust our motives, and wonder where we’re going and why.

In my first book, Way of the Peaceful Warrior, the old service station mechanic I called Socrates suggested that all seeking—for knowledge or achievement, for power or pleasure, for love or wealth or even spiritual experience—is driven by the promise of happiness. But the search only reinforces the sense of dilemma that sent us seeking in the first place. So he advised me to replace the search for future happiness with the practice of “unreasonable happiness” in each arising moment.

When my seeking ended and the practice began, I came to understand that what we all need, even more than a happy feeling, is a clear purpose—a meaningful goal or mission that connects us with other human beings. As Viktor Frankl wrote in his book Man’s Search for Meaning, this fundamental need for purpose and direction may be as important to our psychological growth as eating is to our biological survival.

By Dan Millman

I think the purpose of life is, above all, to matter; to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all.

— Leo Rosten
But the duties of our daily lives leave little time to contemplate life’s larger questions, except on rare occasions, in the silent hours or in times of transition or trauma when we are compelled to ask: What do I really want? How would I know if I had it? What would happen if I got it? Is getting what I want going to take me to where I want to be? And finally, What is the purpose of my life?

Maybe you’ve wondered why you’re here on Earth or what you’re here to do—what the French call your raison d’être, your reason for being, an organizing principle and sense of direction that gives shape and meaning to your life. History provides numerous examples of iconic figures like Joan of Arc, Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama, whose clarity of purpose drew others to their missions like moths to the light.

This book, which contains elements from my previous works, presenting them in their full context for the first time, was inspired by my own quest for a purpose in life. I once believed that my purpose was all about work, and I searched through my twenties and well into my thirties for a career and calling. It took another decade of exploration and introspection before I understood that career is only one of four primary purposes in life.

But why four purposes? Some might argue that our sole (or soul) purpose is learning to love — that whatever the question, love is the answer—or that spiritual awakening or surrender to God is our ultimate aim. Others point out that our primary biological purpose is family—bonding with a mate, and bearing and caring for children. Still others might propose three or five or more purposes, or even suggest that there are as many purposes as there are people. Yet just as we divide all the days of the year into four seasons, and points on a compass into four primary directions, sorting our experience into four fundamental purposes helps us to create a sense of structure to better organize our lives. These four purposes also prepare us for, and point toward, the ultimate or transcendental awakening promised by all the great spiritual traditions.

The first of four purposes we’ll explore in this book—learning life’s lessons—centers around the premise that Earth is a school and daily life is our classroom, and that our daily challenges (in the core arenas of relationship, work and finances, and health) bring learning, growth, and perspective. The value of our life experience resides in what we learn in the process. Difficult days may provide the most important lessons, helping us develop the awareness and self-reflection that lead to higher wisdom.

The second purpose—finding your career and calling—underscores the critical importance of self-knowledge, as well as integrating both logic and intuition, in making the wisest possible life decisions. This section also shows how the service you provide in the world can become a meaningful path of personal and spiritual growth.

The third purpose—discovering your life path—addresses a hidden calling you’re here to explore, a personal path that for most people remains obscure. The information in this section sheds light on the strengths you possess and challenges you face, highlighting a deeper mission you’re here to fulfill.

The fourth purpose—attending to this arising moment—brings the first three into sharp focus and down to earth, enabling you to integrate all the others with awareness and grace, here and now.

I wrote this book for anyone seeking deeper insight into themselves and their lives, but especially for those at a crossroads, facing a challenge or change, when “business as usual” no longer applies. Join me now as we explore the four key purposes that provide meaning and direction in a changing world.

The First Purpose

Learning Life’s Lessons

• Smarten Up • Grow Up • Wake Up

The wise learn from adversity; the foolish repeat it.

—proverb

Earth is a perfect school, and daily life is the classroom. This idea is hardly new, but what follows will help you appreciate the full value of your life experience. And once this central premise penetrates your psyche, you’ll stop seeking and start trusting—because you’ll confront a higher truth: You aren’t here on Earth merely to strive for success; you’re here to learn—and daily life is guaranteed to teach you all you need in order to grow, and
evolve, and awaken to your higher purpose here.

You are evolving even now—and there is no way to fail as long as you continue to learn. Like a stone slowly polished by the river’s flow, we’re shaped over time by the currents of life. The Indian saint Ramakrishna once observed, “If you try to open a walnut when the shell is still green, it is nearly impossible. But when the walnut is ripe, it opens with just a tap.” The classroom of daily life serves your ripening process.

Some years ago I received a letter expressing a dilemma shared by many: “Since reading your first book I’ve had a growing interest in spiritual practice, but how can I find the time when I have a wife and three children and a full-time job?” I wrote back to remind the writer that his wife and children and work were his most important spiritual practices—because true practice is not separate from daily life but rather its very substance. As writer Adair Lara put it, “And some, like me, are just beginning to guess the powerful religion of ordinary life, a spirituality of freshly mopped floors and stacked dishes, and clothing blowing on the line.”

Daily life, and the journey it represents, will remain your master teacher. This book serves as a map to help orient you along the way and guide you through the school of this world.

Here are some reminders about how the process of learning works in the classroom of daily life:

*Lessons repeat themselves until we learn them.* Sometimes we hear a wake-up call but prefer to pull the covers over our heads so we can slumber and dream a little longer. We may ignore, resist, rationalize, or deny reality for a considerable time. That’s okay—our schooling is entirely self-paced, but the lessons keep coming until our actions change.

*If we don’t learn the easier lessons, they get harder.* Resistance to learning (or change) reaps more dramatic consequences over time—not to punish us but to get our attention. As Anaïs Nin wrote, “There came a time when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

*We learn and grow through challenges, and every adversity has hidden gifts.* We’ve all experienced physical, mental, and emotional pain. Yet each challenge has brought a greater measure of strength, wisdom, and perspective. We may not welcome a challenge or embrace unexpected change, loss, or disappointment, but looking back, and over time, we come to appreciate the gifts of adversity.

Oh, please! you may think. I’ve heard all this before:

“When God closes a door, God opens a window.”

“Every cloud has a silver lining.”

“What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.”

But I will not spout platitudes or preach “positivity.” The fact is, pain and difficulty are no fun—I speak from my own experience.

Some years ago, when a motorcycle crash left me with a shattered thighbone, my recovery was difficult; it also changed the course of my life. I started asking bigger questions and opened to new paths that might have otherwise escaped my notice. And climbing out of that deep hole gave me the strength to scale inner mountains. I certainly don’t recommend fractures as a method of personal growth, yet I’ve learned to view every difficulty as a form of spiritual weight lifting—and we’re all in training.

My injury was one of millions of difficulties that people suffer every day on planet Earth, from debilitating illness to childhood abuse to soul-wrenching poverty. Yet the potential for growth remains. In the November 26, 2010, “Letters” section of the *New York Times Magazine*, Betty Rollin wrote:

35 years after my first mastectomy and 26 years after the second, I’m feeling oddly cheerful about the whole cancer experience—not that I’d recommend it. But I slowly came to realize that just because something is awful doesn’t mean you can’t benefit from it. Awful things happen to a lot of us, and it’s a happy moment when you start noticing some kind of payoff. Cancer survivors, for example, notice that they’re breathing, the way other people don’t. And because they’re breathing, they’re grateful in a way a lot of people aren’t, and grateful is a good place to wind up in life. It beats Poor Me.

We all slip into the “poor me” mode at times—like the person who once asked me, “Why does life have to be so difficult?” I answered, “You want life to be easy? Then don’t get married or have children; don’t take on any responsibilities or form any attachments; always do
the minimum, never volunteer; live small. Your life will then seem easier. But are we humans here on Earth to live the easiest possible life? Or are we here to grow stronger and wiser?” I believe that St. Augustine knew the answer, which is why he said, “Lord, I ask not for a lighter load, but for stronger shoulders.”

Of course we can find easier and more efficient ways to accomplish our goals—no need to seek out adversity or create unnecessary complications. But meanwhile, life will continue to serve up a varied menu of challenges that contribute to our growth and evolution. Events will arise that are neither predictable nor controllable; we can’t alter the waves that roll in, but we can learn to ride them. As my old mentor Socrates once observed with a shrug, “Sometimes you get the elevator, and sometimes you get the shaft.” Yet, as cancer survivor Betty Rollin and countless others understand, unexpected benefits can emerge out of great adversity, which is why we sometimes volunteer for it.

Voluntary Adversity

Choosing to train in sports or music, preparing for college or graduate school exams, acting, painting, and practicing other arts are all forms of voluntary adversity, as we must confront inner and outer obstacles along the way, facing self-doubt and frustration. The demands of training reveal our weaknesses and develop our strengths.

So commitment to any endeavor can become a path of personal growth.

Daily life provides other forms of voluntary adversity as well. For example, maintaining a long-term relationship and raising children, for all their pleasures and joys, present significant challenges; so do responsibilities in the business world and caring for elderly parents. There’s something for everyone in the school of daily life.

Many forms of adversity are involuntary: a drunk driver slams into us, we lose our job or a loved one, or we get a cancer diagnosis despite healthy eating and exercise. But we do volunteer for many, if not most, of our daily challenges—we sign up and step willingly into the fray. For example, you have chosen (or made choices leading up to) whom you’re with right now, where you live, and what you’re currently doing. By taking full responsibility for your past choices, you reclaim the power to make new ones. And as you make the best of your life, your life will also make the best of you.

As Socrates reminded me in Way of the Peaceful Warrior, “The way itself creates the warrior. We are all peaceful warriors in training, and every life is a hero’s journey.”

The School Rules

In addition to our core curriculum (which I’ll soon present), our Earth school has a clear set of rules, also known as natural or universal laws. These school rules reflect reality—the mechanics of our universe. They also provide guidance about how to function wisely and well in the course of our schooling. So the better we understand and respect these laws, the smoother goes our education.

In science, universal laws are described with mathematical precision, as in the equation E = mc2. In religion, these laws take the form of, for example, the Ten Commandments, the teachings of the Talmud or Koran, or the Golden Rule.

These laws, or school rules, are based not on moral concepts but rather on action and consequence. While some claim that morality comes from above, others suggest that morality is a human invention. Moral precepts differ from one culture or era to another, which is why philosopher Bertrand Russell proposed that “sin is geographical.” But the wise among us have observed that actions lead to consequences and lessons. Whether we learn these lessons—or whether they have to repeat themselves—depends on our current readiness and openness.

The natural world reveals and reflects universal laws in their purest form. Observe, for example, how trees need strong roots but flexible branches if they are to withstand powerful winds; how streams flow gracefully around obstacles, finding the path of least resistance; and how the seasons change in their natural order.

The school rules, revealed in the course of daily life, provide a reality-based approach to living that I call the peaceful warrior’s way. By observing and aligning our lives and actions to these laws of reality, we learn, grow, and evolve with amazing grace.
Humanity’s Curriculum

If Earth is a school, what courses do we need to pass in order to graduate? Some years ago, the answer came to me in the form of twelve core subjects—a specific curriculum hidden within (or behind) the activities of everyday life. These subjects include self-worth, discipline, well-being, money, mind, intuition, emotions, courage, self-knowledge, sexuality, love, and service, which I outline below in the catalog of “Required Courses.”

In this perfectly designed, fully integrated curriculum, all subjects are equally significant, and all are required. We may be tested in the area of health or money one day and encounter a pop quiz in courage the next. There are no grades, only pass or fail. A pass indicates progress; a fail provides an opportunity to learn and do better the next time. (So there is no permanent failure, only the need to repeat the course and continue with that line of study.) Bear in mind that spiritual life begins on the ground, not up in the air—even Olympians start with the basics. As your skills improve in each of these areas, you’ll begin to experience the true meaning of success in the form of higher states of clarity, energy, and action.

Required Courses

As you read the following summary descriptions of the twelve core subjects in life’s curriculum, reflect on your current progress in each, as well as on what improvements are still possible on the path to self-mastery.

Foundations of Self-Worth: Getting Out of Your Own Way

Life provides certain opportunities and choices, yet we allow ourselves to receive, achieve, or enjoy such opportunities only to the extent that we believe ourselves deserving or worthy of them. A well-known parable advises, “Ask and you shall receive.” The question is, what are you willing to ask for and strive for? As Ramakrishna put it, “An ocean of bliss may rain down from the heavens, but if you hold up only a thimble, that is all you receive.” So if we operate on the belief that “beggars can’t be choosers,” then few options appear. Low self-worth is a primary cause of self-sabotage. Few of us consciously sabotage our relationships or finances, but we may wonder at times, “Why did I say that? Why did I do that?” This first course in the school of life helps us to shift from holding up only a thimble and saying, “Oh, I really couldn’t accept that” to opening our arms and saying, “Yes! Thank you!” Realizing your innate worth expands your horizons and opens you to a larger life.

Roots of Will: The Practice of Self-Discipline

Most of us know the value of regular exercise, good diet, kindness, relaxation, and breaking unhealthy habits. Our greatest single challenge in every area of self-improvement is transforming knowledge into action—turning what we know into what we actually do. While some of us act without thinking, too many of us think without acting. Willpower isn’t a mysterious force that descends on us from above; rather, it is an innate power within each of us, waiting to be applied. We do so every time we accomplish a task (like taking out the trash or doing the laundry, office work, or schoolwork) despite a lack of motivation. So this subject, which you face daily, calls you to reclaim your will by following through with your goals. As your skills and understanding improve, you better appreciate that your life will be shaped largely by what you do each day—whether or not you feel like doing it.

Well-Being: Approaches to Health and Vitality

Your body forms the foundation of your earthly existence and is the only possession you are guaranteed to keep for a lifetime. Its care and feeding are key to all else.

An energized body enhances strength, mental acuity, healing, social interactions, and every other human capacity. While genetics plays a powerful role in health and longevity, you have wiggle room—it’s called lifestyle or daily choices. The previous two foundation courses in the school of life—self-worth and self-discipline—open the way to an energizing, healthful lifestyle. This course, over time and through your own experience, teaches the wisdom of regular, moderate
exercise, a balanced diet, and sufficient rest—amplifying energy for all other courses in the school of life.

**Money and Values:**

**Establishing Stability and Sufficiency**

Earning, spending, and saving money preoccupy many of us, who spend a good portion of each day working for more of it. But for those of us who have a religious or spiritual interest, money remains suspect—a topic of mixed feelings best expressed by the late boxing champion Joe Louis, who said, “I don’t really like money, but it calms my nerves.” We eventually learn that money is a form of energy that only makes us more of who we already are—it can bind us or free us, depending on how we manage it. This course cannot guide everyone to great wealth but rather shows the way to create sufficiency and stability, sometimes even leading to the deep satisfaction of philanthropy. As the Arabic proverb goes, “If you have much, give of your wealth; if you have little, give of your heart.”

**Exploring the Mind:**

**The Nature of Your Inner World**

This subject in the core curriculum helps us to understand the illusory nature of our subjective mind. Lao-tzu advised, “As soon as you have a thought, laugh at it,” because reality is not what we think. We perceive the world through a window colored by beliefs, interpretations, and associations. We see things not as they are but as we are. The same brain that enables us to contemplate philosophy, solve math equations, and create poetry also generates a stream of static known as discursive thoughts, which seem to arise at random, bubbling up into our awareness. Such mental noise is a natural phenomenon, no more of a problem than the dreams that appear in the sleep state. Therefore, our schooling aims not to struggle with random thoughts but to transcend them in the present moment, where no thoughts exist, only awareness. Our mind’s liberation awaits not in some imagined future but here and now.

**Introduction to Intuition:**

**Accessing Subconscious Guidance**

Whispering beneath our everyday awareness is a childlike consciousness—a shaman, a mystic, a weaver of dreams and keeper of instincts. Our subconscious mind (or body-wisdom) holds keys to a treasure-house of intuitive guidance and survival skills. It helps us to make fully informed decisions, and may save lives in times of danger. Daily life eventually teaches us the value of trusting intuitive messages and, in the words of Zen sword master Taisen Deshimaru, learning “to think with the whole body.” Nearly all scientific discoveries come from creative flashes of intuitive insight (later tested and verified using the scientific method). For this reason Einstein proposed that imagination is more important than knowledge. As we learn to let intuition become reason’s trusted adviser, we integrate reason and faith, building a bridge to wisdom and a new way of sensing our world.

**The Nature of Feelings:**

**Achieving Emotional Freedom**

Emotions play a central role in human life. Behind all seeking is the desire to feel good (happy, content, fulfilled, confident) more of the time—and to feel bad (anxious, sad, angry, fearful) less of the time. In the United States and abroad, people spend billions of dollars on self-medication and buy countless books offering to replace bad feelings or thoughts with good ones. Meanwhile, emotions continue to rise and fall like waves on the sea, of their own accord, passing like clouds in the sky. But over time, the school of reality teaches us to accept, value, and learn from our emotions without trying to fix or control them—and without letting them determine our behavior. Life reveals that we have more control over our behavior than we do over transient emotions or thoughts. This realization helps us liberate our lives from reactive or confused soap operas and establish stable, mature, and responsible behavior. We learn to ride the shifting tides of emotion like skillful surfers as we grasp the great truth that we don’t need to feel compassionate, peaceful, confident, courageous, happy, or kind—we only need to behave that way.
Fundamentals of Courage: Confronting Our Fear

In this subject area we confront the primal emotion of fear, which can lead to paralysis or power, and can end a life or save it. Fear can warn us of genuine danger; it can move us to prepare well, take precautions, or avoid a situation. It can also burden our lives with anxiety or self-doubt. How many of us avoid opportunities due to fear of the unknown? We may also fear rejection, failure, and even success. In the classroom of daily life, we learn to listen to fear’s counsel when our physical bodies are at risk. But when we experience a more subjective fear of embarrassment, looking foolish, or feeling rejected, we feel the fear but act with courage. Courage is not the absence of fear but the conquering of it. Heroes feel the same fear as cowards; they just respond differently.

Knowing Yourself: Finding Wholeness in the Shadows

In childhood, our power and charm come from authenticity—our actions are undiluted by subterfuge or hidden agendas. But as the years pass, we learn to tell social lies and use pretense to please or placate others while disowning the disapproved-of parts of our psyche. In this way, we create a shadow persona constructed from fragments of our full identity and potential. But as we mature and begin to grasp that we are often the cause of our own difficulties, we begin a process of compassionate self-observation leading to deeper self-knowledge—denial gives way to authenticity as the light of awareness penetrates our shadow. We come to accept ourselves (and others) as we are rather than as we might want ourselves (or them) to be. And as we embrace the full scope of our humanity, we open the way to genuine growth and transformation.

Your Sexual Life: Understanding the Pleasure Principle

Our drive for sexual intimacy is as natural as thunder-showers or the changing seasons. But if we suppress or exploit our sexual energy, we create obsessions, compulsions, and guilty secrets. This course of study in the realm of relationship shows us how to observe, accept, enjoy, and channel sexual-creative energy rather than merely indulging or denying it. Whether we are young or old, sexually active or not, an abuse survivor or “perfectly adjusted”—and no matter what our sexual orientation—we all have areas to explore. Sexual issues are rarely about the sexual act. More often than not, our complications stem from unrealistic beliefs, fear, insecurity or jealousy, and issues of identity. Our coursework in life includes, but also goes beyond, our physical drives into areas of awareness, balance, trust, openness, honesty, and the courage to achieve true intimacy.

The Mastery of Love: Awakening the Heart

Despite the efforts of poets and philosophers through the ages, love defies definition. It may appear as sentimental infatuation or as a chemically induced hormonal state, sexual pleasure, familial devotion, or anything that makes us feel good. We know that the word love can be either a noun or a verb, and that love is something we can feel and also something we can do. Our life experience reveals the evolving nature of love as it changes from an emotion that happens to us, rising and falling out of our control, to an art we can learn—from something we receive to something we give. As we mature, this practice of love liberates us from dependence on the changing tides of emotion. We gain the capacity to show loving-kindness to others even when we don’t feel like it. This is the power of love and the heart’s education.

Service and Meaning: Completing the Circle of Life

We all know that service is a good thing—that serving others lifts us out of exclusive preoccupation with the self and turns our attention out into the world. But service is not only something we do for others; it is also an act of self-transcendence—anything we do without regard to self-interest. This final course in our schooling
provides an essential link that fulfills all the others. Service is a form of yoga, a catalyst of friendship, an affirmation of our common humanity. Even the smallest gesture of self-sacrifice—giving of our time, energy, or attention—shifts our focus from “What’s in it for me?” to “What is for the highest good of all concerned?” Every service we provide for others represents the fruition of our spiritual maturity, completing both our curriculum and the circle of life. In service we find the master key to a meaningful, purposeful life that connects us to one another, and to our world.

Before you move on to the second purpose, take a few moments to appreciate what you’ve already accomplished in each of the twelve subject areas in Earth’s core curriculum—self-worth, discipline, well-being, money, mind, intuition, emotions, courage, self-knowledge, sexuality, love, and service—all the tests you’ve taken and lessons you’ve learned. But don’t get so wrapped up in the twelve subjects we’ve covered that you lose sight of the larger purpose—learning life’s lessons—which leads to greater wisdom, perspective, and appreciation for the value and significance of your daily life.


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Iceland’s Slow Motion Town

The East Iceland district of Djúpavogshreppur, population less than 500, is the only municipality in Iceland with a Cittaslow (Slow Town) status. The area was featured in The Guardian last weekend, but, unlike what The Guardian claims, the Cittaslow status was granted three years ago.

The slow movement’s aim is to calm down the pace of life by reconnecting distinctive areas with their food, nature and their craft producers to protect them against homogenized, globalized culture. Djúpavogshreppur is a community where artists thrive and their workshops are very visible. There is a showroom in town for a company which makes handcrafted apparel and accessories from animal and fish leather, horn, wool and horse hair. Furthermore, the area has a rock museum, a wilderness center and a large sculpture consisting of 34 large-scale egg replicas, which represent the 34 bird species in the area.

Now you’re wondering, “Why am I learning about this Cittaslow status three years after the fact?” The answer is simple: everything travels slowly in the town of slow motion, even the news.

—Iceland Review
At a lecture I attended two years ago, I was shown age-reversal case histories that I had never before witnessed. The lecture was called “Reversing Alzheimer’s.” The medical case histories were compelling. Many of the underlying mechanisms of reversing dementia were long ago postulated in this magazine.

This lecture was not put on by a neurologist, but by a charity consisting of three educated women who volunteered their time. They presented evidence that unhealthy diets, nutrient/hormone deficits, inflammation, and avoidable toxins were causing people to needlessly develop Alzheimer’s disease.

Right around the time of this lecture, researchers from UCLA and the Buck Institute for Research on Aging announced the results of a study in which nine out of ten subjects diagnosed with dementia saw meaningful reversals of memory loss. The protocol used included many of the healthy dietary choices long advocated by this magazine (and by the three charitable women who presented at the lecture I had attended).

The unprecedented results from the UCLA/Buck Institute study drew widespread media coverage. No “drug” had ever achieved this level of cognitive improvement.

The UCLA/Buck Institute study author admitted, however, that the program’s downside is its complexity. While supplementing with melatonin, fish oil, coenzyme Q10, methylcobalamin, and vitamin D3 were easy, the dietary/lifestyle changes were so difficult that none of the ten participants were able to stick to the entire protocol.

That was year 2014. Move forward to 2015 and the results of two larger human trials revealed easier methods to prevent Alzheimer’s and protect cognitive function even into our advanced years.

You are about to learn how even modest dietary changes can slash Alzheimer’s risk by 35% when a healthy diet is consistently followed.

Normal aging is associated with mild cognitive impairment that too often progresses to full-blown Alzheimer’s.

By the time a typical American reaches age 85, their risk of displaying clinical indications of Alzheimer’s rises to a startling 45%.

No one has yet ascertained how this nation’s already strained health care resources will deal with this impending epidemic.

The fantastic news is that decades of human and animal research has led to nutritional approaches that aging individuals can adopt to drastically reduce their senility.
risk. This means that nursing homes don’t need to fill up with demented individuals who have lost their cognitive and functional independence.

**Powerful Role of Diet on Brain Health**

Diet is a powerful environmental factor that affects our thinking abilities in youth and impacts whether we develop dementia as we age.

Study data published in 2015 corroborates the brain-boosting benefits that occur in response to healthier dietary choices. I suspect most of you reading this have been following at least some of these beneficial eating patterns.

What impressed us about these new clinical studies is that they showed reversals of cognitive dysfunction mostly in the elderly. These individuals would have been expected to already suffer permanent neurodegeneration that was considered “incurable.”

In one study conducted at Rush University, the average age of the subjects was 81, showing that it may never be too late to alter one’s dietary patterns to protect brain function.

**The Rush University Project**

Researchers at Rush University studied over 900 participants, ages 58 to 98 years, and followed them on average for 4.5 years. Three different dietary interventions were evaluated, including the Mediterranean diet, the DASH diet, and a hybrid of the Mediterranean-DASH diets called the MIND diet. The researchers then looked at the effects of these three diets on the risk of Alzheimer’s disease.

The MIND diet emphasized the nutritional components linked to neuroprotection and dementia prevention, uniquely specifying the consumption of polyphenols from berries and green leafy vegetables.

Researchers at Rush University comprehensively adjusted for potential confounding factors in their dietary intervention study analysis such as age, sex, education, APOE4 (genetic risk factor for Alzheimer’s disease), pre-existing cardiovascular problems, physical activity, and total dietary energy intake.

Results of their study analysis showed remarkable benefits for each of the diets, in particular for those subjects who closely followed the MIND diet with its emphasis upon polyphenols from berries and green vegetables.

The highest level of compliance with the MIND diet conferred a highly significant 52% reduction in the rate of developing Alzheimer’s disease compared with participants with the lowest level of MIND dietary compliance.

**Benefits Found for Other Healthy Diets**

Although not as highly significant as the results achieved with the MIND diet, participants with the highest level of compliance with the Mediterranean diet also had a significant reduction in Alzheimer’s risk in comparison with the lowest level of Mediterranean diet compliance. For the DASH diet, the highest level of compliance resulted in a 40% reduction in Alzheimer’s disease risk that very nearly achieved statistical significance.

Even study subjects with “middle-of-the-road” compliance with the MIND diet, such as ingesting just some of the constituents of a brain-healthy diet like berries, had their dementia risk reduced by 35%.

These huge risk reductions in response to healthier eating patterns represent game changers as it relates to the dire predictions of tens of millions of Americans suffering agonizing dementia-related deaths.

The problem is that relatively few people can stick solely to healthy dietary patterns. The encouraging news is that it may not matter because just ingesting some of the constituents of the MIND diet was shown to confer considerable protection against neurodegenerative disease.

These findings are revolutionary and physicians should wake up to the fact that dementia is not always an irreversible disorder.

**Brain-Destroying Eating Patterns**

It took many decades for the multiple dangers of tobacco smoking to be realized, along with its economic costs to society.
The carnage from making the wrong dietary choices may exceed that of tobacco. Yet there is little talk of banning the advertising of toxic foods and no requirement to warn consumers that ingesting them increases dementia risk.

It is up to individuals to educate themselves about which foods protect against neurodegenerative diseases and the dietary patterns that contribute to brain destruction.

The Magnitude of the Difference

Certain foods like polyphenol-rich berries (blueberries, strawberries) and leafy green vegetables provide benefits for the brain. Foods typically consumed in Western diets, as you will see on the next page, are proving harmful.

The new studies I discuss in this editorial corroborate previous reports showing the devastating impact of poor dietary patterns throughout the body.

What is remarkable, however, is the magnitude of protection conferred when following the proper nutritional program. By adhering to healthy dietary patterns, one researcher was quoted as saying during a 2015 scientific presentation:

“It was about the equivalent of being 11 years younger in age.”

This represents an enormous percentage of cognitively proficient time that elderly individuals can enjoy.

Constituents of the MIND Diet

When creating the “MIND” diet, researchers sought to identify the constituents of the well-studied Mediterranean and DASH diets that possessed the greatest neuroprotective properties.

The MIND diet consists of fifteen dietary components shown to powerfully impact neurological function for the good or bad.

The ten brain-healthy food groups are:

1. Green leafy vegetables
2. Other vegetables
3. Nuts
4. Berries
5. Beans
6. Whole grains
7. Fish
8. Poultry
9. Olive oil
10. Wine (moderate drinking)

Consuming lots of the ten healthy food groups above conferred significant protection against Alzheimer’s and mild cognitive impairment.

The five dangerous food groups are:

1. Red meats
2. Butter and stick margarine
3. Cheese
4. Pastries and sweets
5. Fried/fast food

By reducing one’s intake of the five brain-damaging foods listed above, significant protection against Alzheimer’s and mild cognitive impairment was conferred.

This does not mean one can never consume any of the five bad food groups. Individuals can still follow a MIND diet if they reduce consumption of these brain-damaging foods listed on the next column:

Brain-Damaging Foods

Here are the five brain-damaging foods to reduce or avoid:

1. Pastries and sweets to under five servings per week
2. Red meat to under four servings per week
3. Cheese to under one serving per week
4. Butter or margarine to under one tablespoon per day
5. Fried/fast foods to under one serving per week

On a personal note, I don’t find the above restrictions confining, and I don’t think many readers of this magazine will either.

Components of the MIND Diet

The name of the MIND diet study is: “MIND diet associated with
reduced incidence of Alzheimer’s disease.”

It investigated the role of diet in the development of Alzheimer’s disease in 923 people ages 58 to 98 years for an average period of 4.5 years.

Similar to the Mediterranean and DASH diets, the MIND diet emphasizes natural plant-based foods and limited intake of animal and high-saturated-fat foods. Some of the unique aspects of the MIND diet are that it specifies the consumption of berries and green leafy vegetables, but does not suggest high fruit consumption.

Researchers found that greater adherence to the MIND diet resulted in a markedly slower rate of cognitive decline. The incredible finding from this Rush University study was that strict adherence to the MIND diet reduced Alzheimer’s incidence by 52%.

These findings reveal the robust impact that dietary choices have in maintaining brain health.

MEMORY LOSS ASSOCIATED WITH ALZHEIMER’S REVERSED FOR FIRST TIME

In the introduction of this editorial, I briefly described a study of ten elderly people that showed memory loss associated with Alzheimer’s disease could be reversed.

This is of particular significance to those already suffering from early- to mid-stage Alzheimer’s dementia.

The approach used in this UCLA/Buck Institute study was personalized to each patient, based on extensive testing to determine what is affecting the brain’s plasticity signaling network. Here is a sample of some of the strategies used on the therapeutic program to reverse memory loss in nine out of ten of the patients:

- Eliminating all simple carbohydrates, gluten, and processed food from the diet, and eating more vegetables, fruits, and non-farmed fish
- Meditating twice a day and beginning yoga to reduce stress
- Sleeping seven to eight hours per night, up from four to five
- Taking melatonin, methylcobalamin, vitamin D3, fish oil, and coenzyme Q10 each day
- Optimizing oral hygiene by using an electric flosser and electric toothbrush
- Reinstating hormone replacement therapy, which had previously been discontinued
- Fasting a minimum of 12 hours between dinner and breakfast, and a minimum of three hours between dinner and bedtime
- Exercising a minimum of 30 minutes, four to six days per week

The one patient that failed to show improvement was unable to comply with all of the components of UCLA/Buck Institute protocol. Nine out of ten people in this study who did comply showed reversals in measurements of memory loss.

The lead researcher of this study admits that the program’s downsides are its complexity and that the burden falls on patients and caregivers to follow it.

It’s interesting to note that three of the dietary supplements used in this study (CoQ10, methylcobalamin, and melatonin) were first introduced to Americans by Life Extension®.

The more encouraging news comes from the study done at Rush University on a much larger group of elderly people that shows even modest improvements in dietary patterns dramatically reduce Alzheimer’s risk.

Overcoming Compliance Difficulties

Strict adherence to either a MIND or Mediterranean diet produced enormous benefits, such as a 50% or more reduction in Alzheimer’s incidence.

Since most Americans ingest a wide range of foods, some good and some bad, the researchers were concerned that their findings would have little real-world value to the general population because of compliance difficulties.

Researchers then scrutinized the components of various “healthy” diets to identify which foods provided meaningful protection against age-related cognitive deficits and Alzheimer’s disease.
They then sought to identify if ingesting only isolated constituents from Mediterranean or Mind diets would be effective. They were not able to identify specific components of the Mediterranean diet that were effective in isolation.

The researchers did discover that by ingesting just modest amounts of the MIND diet constituents, such as berries, a significant (35%) reduction in Alzheimer’s disease risk was observed.

The brain health benefits of berries (like strawberries and blueberries) have been demonstrated in other large human observational studies such as the famous Nurses’ Health Study.

These findings are also corroborated by a number of rodent studies showing better memory performance and brain protection in response to eating berries.

**IMMEDIATE DELETERIOUS BRAIN IMPACT OF CONSUMING UNHEALTHY FOODS**

We usually think it takes a lifetime of poor dietary choices to impair our neurological function and brain structure. A recent study found significant indicators of brain damage occur just four weeks after eating the wrong kinds of food.

This study evaluated seventy-eight older adults and first fed them a diet high in simple sugars and saturated fats (a high-glycemic index/high-fat diet). After only four weeks, study subjects experienced impaired measures of cognitive function and higher spinal fluid markers indicating brain damage and development of Alzheimer’s pathologies (such as tau protein).

When these same individuals were put on a diet low in simple sugars and saturated fats (a low-glycemic index/low-saturated-fat diet), measures of cognitive function and spinal fluid indicators of brain damage/Alzheimer’s improved.

These findings corroborate observational studies showing that high consumption of simple carbohydrates and saturated fats are risk factors for pathological brain aging and symptomatic mild cognitive impairment.

These findings also help substantiate the remarkable data obtained from the MIND diet study (2015), the UCLA/Buck Institute for Research on Aging study (2014), the 2014 presentation made by the three women from the Sharp Again Naturally (sharpagain.org) charity, and what has long been espoused in this and other health publications.

The take-home lesson from these studies is to follow a dietary pattern consisting of a high intake of berries, monounsaturated and unsaturated fatty acids, and fish, combined with a low intake of simple sugars and saturated fats (especially those derived from beef and dairy).

**Not Everyone Can Afford Blueberries**

Buying blueberries in stores can be quite expensive. A prime factor keeping prices high is the shipping of the heavy blueberries and the high rate of spoilage if they are not sold and eaten quickly.

A more cost-effective way of obtaining the active components in blueberries is to take a standardized blueberry extract supplement each day. These are remarkably inexpensive because spoilage and high shipping costs are not an issue.

After I wrote this article, several more studies were published showing markedly lower dementia risk in those who adhered more to a Mediterranean diet.

The incredible message is that senility of the brain is largely optional. If people follow even modestly healthy dietary patterns, the risk of losing their mind can be greatly reduced.
The Emerald Tablet describes the existence of two realms of reality, the above and the below, but also predicates the notion that both of these realms arise through the mediation of The One. As we have said, this labelling is not helpful in our considerations because restrictions and limitations are bound to arise.

Nevertheless, we do need to clarify our thinking in relation to the cosmogony of one dimension and two realms of reality, as defined on The Emerald Tablet, in order to avoid confusion. The labels we have chosen to use involve an entirely separate dimension; one that, paradoxically, can have no label because it is not available to our consciousness and because there can be no limits or restriction associated with its existence. It is the dimension from whence The One Source of All Things originated and which continues to house that consciousness. Our labels for the two mediated realms of reality that arise from this source dimension are ‘the material realm’ (substituted for ‘below’) and ‘the subtle realm’ (substituted for ‘above’).

The material realm is the easiest one for us to understand because it is represented by the experiences that our five senses encounter in our everyday existence. We are, to some extent, able to see, hear, touch, taste and smell all that is around us and we take for granted, and accept the existence of the material that provides the encounter with those senses. Even that which we cannot necessarily see or hear etc. is often explained, by science, as being the product of processes involving materials and/or the five senses.

For those who do not wish to acknowledge that there is anything beyond that which our senses can encounter, which includes many scientists, atheists and humanists, the material of our universal reality is all that there is and generally speaking, for them, nothing else exists. This is usually because any need for anything else to exist is not perceived.

This point of view has gained much ground since scientific endeavour has succeeded so spectacularly well in partly uncovering the patterns of reality that govern our material existence, resulting in a strengthening movement towards
a form of scientific modern atheism and/or materialism.

But for many others this view does not fulfill a human need to acknowledge the many, so far unexplained, phenomena that are experienced through means that appear to be beyond the reach of our senses. The existence of a subtle realm of reality seeks to validate these unexplained phenomena and also attempts to provide a vehicle by which the material realm could come into being.

The word ‘subtle’ is used to label the realm of a ‘transcendent otherness’ in the sense that it alludes to something that not only is delicate, precise and difficult to describe, but is a mystical mystery. Mystical because it seeks to describe something that is symbolical, allegorical and is beyond normal human comprehension.

Questions such as ‘Why is there something, rather than nothing?’ —the answer to which has been the ultimate quest of human intellectual endeavour. Other questions arise from this quest such as ‘What is intuition and how does it work?’ and ‘When encountered, how can we explain the unexplainable?’

The cosmology proposed in my book, *The Book of Becoming* seeks to provide a format that allows everything possible to become a reality, but before we proceed to delve into what we can describe as a transcendent form of mysticism, we must recognise that the subtle realm exists everywhere. It is not in any place as we understand place to mean, it is every-where and every-when, simultaneously, and is contiguous with everything that exists in our material reality. The subtle realm may be said to have no boundaries other than those which arise from its expression within the material realm.

This is why labels such as ‘alongside’, ‘without’, ‘above’ etc. do not help us to understand the nature of its existence. Labels such as these suggest that there is a physical place where we might find the subtle realm.

There is not!

This is not an easy concept to understand. In *The Book of Becoming* the reader will come to see that everything in our material realm automatically contains a mystical element of the subtle realm and that there is a very close, symbiotic relationship between the two realms brought about through various layers of consciousness.

Perhaps the easiest way to envisage the subtle realm might be as an analogy with a normal radio, where, simply by turning a knob or dial, we can change the frequency to obtain a different programme, from the exact same equipment in the same space. That is not to say that the subtle and material realms operate at different frequencies whilst occupying the same space/time facilities, but this analogy is one that will serve us in trying to understand the relationship between the two realms. This relationship is one of mutual dependence for its means of expression, as we will see as we progress through our proposals.

So to be clear, our model proposes three realms of reality. A dimension that encompasses all other realities, the character of which is unknowable to everything outside of its existence and which is the Source of all other realms and dimensions and everything within them. The Cosmos, as we currently perceive it, is made up of this Source dimension and two other realms, the subtle realm of Ideas and the material realm of our Universe.

*Excerpted with permission from The Book of Becoming, published by O Books, http://www.o-books.com*

Ron Meakin lives in Devon, England, with his artist wife Annie, and has taken up writing since retiring in 2010 from a life in the construction industry. Having always had an interest in esoteric studies, he embarked upon a Theology/Philosophy degree in 2003 followed by a Masters Degree in 2006 at Exeter University, specialising in shamanism, supplemented by travel to parts of the world with a spiritual history.
Clearing Emotional Clutter

By Donald Altman

It’s no surprise that emotional clutter from our past can stick to us like Super Glue to such an extent that we often consider it inseparable from our sense of self and personal identity. What may surprise you, though, is how easy-to-use daily practices can dissolve away all that toxic, sticky, clinging clutter — whether it is old emotional wreckage from your childhood or new emotional clutter that you take on every day.

What is emotional clutter? Emotional clutter could be an old childhood experience of being rejected by others, which may convince us we aren’t really lovable. It could be an old family wound that still cuts deep. Or it could be an insensitive statement from a high school English teacher who once looked you straight in the eye and told you, “You can’t make an ‘A’ student out of a ‘B’ student.” This last instance of unkind emotional clutter happened to me! Thankfully, I had other wonderfully supportive English teachers, and I didn’t let this personal emotional clutter stick to me, though I was stunned and saddened by the comment at the time.

In fact, the cutting-edge science of epigenetics shows that emotional clutter affects us at the cellular level, turning on and off genes related to our immune system and aging. It even suggests that painful emotional clutter may travel across generations. As shocking as that seems, it means we may be adversely affected by ancient family or cultural injustices, such as codependency, slavery, war, or the Holocaust.

One thing is certain: we all carry around some form of emotional clutter, baggage, trauma, adversity, or pain from the past. Whether the adversity is the result of what others have done to us or what we have done to others—or even the harm we have done to ourselves—the result is clear. Old emotional clutter directly affects our ability to regulate emotions, experience joy, and have a fulfilling life. It even affects our physical well-being by putting the brakes on the immune system.

Emotional clutter from the past is like old boxes of emotional stuff that fill up the attic of our minds. If what’s in the attic leaves us feeling perpetually powerless, defensive, betrayed, sad, and unhappy, it can block
us from recognizing the good and decent things in life. By contrast, the ability to be healthy, happy, and well balanced—and to live a meaningful and fulfilling life—could be defined by how well we clear out this attic. To do this we need to recognize, adapt, buffer, and regulate all the emotional junk that threatens to derail our goals and dreams.

In addition to clearing out old emotional clutter, we also must clear away all the new clutter that keeps trying to cling to us. It’s similar to how tartar builds up on your teeth: accumulating new emotional clutter is a natural process, and it never stops. For many of us, though, being faced with new and seemingly never-ending clutter is frustrating and exasperating. If you think there are people who manage to avoid that clutter, think again. Not even Buddha could avoid emotional and mental clutter. However, the emotional clutter he encountered as a young man motivated him to find liberation from it—including the emotional clutter that arises in the moment due to craving and unhealthy desire.

What are the daily stresses that pull your life into chaos and create new emotional clutter? Real or even perceived danger in the environment can hijack the part of your brain that is focused on survival. The result? Your brain’s emotional clutter processor — the amygdala — goes into overdrive. The pace of modern life and the number of things requiring our attention are probably greater today than at any time in all of history. We face information overload from email, news, the internet, and the increased complexity of living — such as the need to make decisions about insurance, school, transportation, health care, where to live, and how to pay for it all.

Concerns about major life transitions can create all kinds of emotional debris, too. One client, Richard, was constantly worried and anxious about his upcoming retirement. “I’m more prone to fear-based thinking than ever before in my life, and I don’t know what to do about it,” he lamented.

It’s not just the big life transitions. Even making a small decision—such as where and how to buy a book—can require many choices: Internet or retail store? Independent bookstore or chain? Price or convenience? Digital book or printed book? Standard shipping, two-day shipping, or overnight? Cash, PayPal, credit card, or debit card? In fact, brain science tells us that the more choices you are forced to make during the day, the more your brain’s energy gets sapped and depleted. It’s no wonder that the never-ending small decisions of life can leave us feeling exhausted.

If your brain gets a constant download of emotional clutter from any of these sources, take a nice deep breath right now. That’s because you’re going to get an entirely different kind of brain download in this book — one that draws upon modern science and ancient practices and is designed to regulate your emotions, help you feel safe, and enrich your life.

If you want to manage your emotional clutter, the best place to begin is by managing your brain.

Getting Daily Discontentment Down-to-Size

Physical clutter has been a topic of great interest lately. The TV show Hoarders depicts the sad and damaging effects of obsessively refusing to let go of material goods and possessions. But as bad as physical clutter can be, emotional clutter is more pervasive, tragic, and debilitating. Imagine what it would be like to hoard your worst memories, fears, anxieties, and worries until they blocked out the reality before you—even the good things? Yet many of us live like this and don’t even know it because we can’t “see” the clutter such as when you walk into a hoarder’s home.
Emotional clutter is anything from your past or present that causes emotional upset, imbalance, and dis-harmony—in other words, emotional dysregulation. While many things can toss us off balance, perhaps none is as pervasive as the clutter of daily discontentment.

Let’s look more closely at discontentment. Certainly, there’s more than enough of it to go around. There’s the critical inner voice of discontentment that tells us we’re not good enough and which diminishes our accomplishments. Sometimes, this inner discontentment stems from comparing ourselves to others—thus producing negative emotions like envy and jealousy. Then there are the external events—things outside of us—that can easily produce a state of discontentment. Examples of these could be fixating on what is missing from our life, such as that better car, that more luxurious living space, or that promotion or relationship that would make everything just “perfect.” The problem with external clutter is that after a while we habituate to it, and then often want more…and more.

Plato used the word pharmakon to represent something that was simultaneously a poison and a remedy. The unquenchable craving for more and the desire for newness and novelty might be considered a pharmakon to some extent. Much advertising strives to get us to discount what we already have in favor of something new. In other words, to sow the seeds of discontentment.

This is not to suggest that desiring a better car, house, or the latest fashion leads to discontentment. Wanting a house for your family can motivate you and your family to save and work hard for that goal—not to mention it being a good investment. It can be wise to replace cars, clothes, and mechanical devices that are wearing out and are costly to repair. But when does desire cross the threshold into producing a never-ending cycle of suffering and dis-content? When do novelty, newness, and the need for more reach the tipping point of becoming a pharmakon?

This all begs the question, When is enough really enough?

Lifestyle Discontentment Clutter Practice: Here is an easy practice that can counter the daily build-up of discontentment clutter.

Notice where you find discontent in your day. What thoughts keep repeating that tell you, "this is not good enough, or I need something else to feel better or be happy"? Jot these down.

Next, rediscover the value and usefulness of that object or situation you would reject. How did you originally feel about this situation or object? Reconnect with those positive feelings of appreciation and excitement you once had. Write these down.

At the end of the week, review the various clutter thoughts around discontentment that you’ve had. Also, review the new ways of aligning with the positive aspects of what is in your life right now. Have you noticed a shift in how discounting the clutter and re-appraising what you have in your life makes you feel?

Lastly, make a point of sharing your new perspectives with others. You may find that this could be a daily practice that others in your household or life can find useful. Consider, for example, discussing this at dinner-time as a way to focus on the good things in life. Best of all, sharing your experience of removing discontentment from your life with others can be motivating, inspiring, and bring new meaning into your day and life.

By using these four easy steps, you can overcome the corrosive effect of dis-contentment. The simple act of re-valuing and appreciating what is in your life today can change how you feel, think, and act. And best of all, this clutter-free practice is free.

Q & A with Donald Altman
Author of
Clearing Emotional Clutter

What is Emotional Clutter and why should we worry about it? Is it as bad as “hoarding” for example?
You can think of emotional clutter as hoarding thoughts. Just like a hoarder holds onto all kinds of physical clutter, emotional clutter fills up our minds with all kinds of things that make it difficult to respond in the here and now. Imagine holding onto all your past fears, worries, and anxieties. Your mind is so cluttered that you can’t really be present in the here and now.

Isn’t it normal to remember negative things and worrisome things so we don’t have to repeat making the same mistakes?
I think for some people that is normal. But is it healthy? It’s okay not to forget things that caused you pain in the past in order to not repeat history. But, if you are constantly dwelling on the worries, bad memories, and anxieties about the future, then you’re stuck in a rut. Your brain is filled up with those thoughts like an attic filled with old junk. You can’t really think clearly until you move all that out of the way.

You talk about getting off the emotional elevator. What do you mean by that?
You can think of your emotions like an elevator that take you up and down. What moves the elevator? What old programs are running in your head that push the buttons on your elevator to that it moves you up and down? Something good happens in your life and the elevator goes up. Something bad—even a perception of something being bad—and the elevator shoots down. But what if you could control that yourself? This book helps you decide who and what your are going to let push your emotional elevator buttons. Letting others push our mood elevator buttons can be exhausting. We’re not in control of our own elevator. Clearing away clutter means you get free from old emotional clutter programming and ways of thinking.

You use a term called “Inner-Facebooking.” What do you mean by that and how can it help?
Facebook is a wonderful way to post and put up for others what’s happening in our lives. In the same way, we are constantly putting up posts in our minds—through our thoughts and beliefs—that represent a kind of second Facebook: An Inner-Facebook, which shapes how we experience the world, ourself, and others. If your Inner-Facebook posts are unhappy and unflattering, no wonder you feel bad and depressed. I have a whole chapter about noticing your Inner-Facebook posts so you can be more aware. Inner-Facebooking is a skill that helps you to emotionally regulate. Then you can change your Inner-Facebook posts to be more positive and accurate.

Suppose your Inner-Facebook reactions are true and you really do have weaknesses. Are you saying that we should ignore negatives and only be positive? Like positive thinking?
Of course we all have weaknesses. What I’m suggesting is that we be more accurate and real about our thoughts. It’s easy to focus on weakness and not notice our strengths. I’m saying, you probably have more strengths than you imagine, and you can post those on your Inner-Facebook account as well.

The idea of finding your strengths is a thread through your book. Can you expand on that a little? Why are strengths important?
That’s a good question. I think we’re such a critical culture that it’s easy to find what’s wrong. Sometimes, we take for granted the good things we do—thinking that’s just our routine and not giving ourselves credit. Suppose you did something that you do every day like get up and climb in the car and go to work. You don’t think that’s a strength, but it required several skills—if you had exercised or had something to eat in the morning, that’s the strength of self-care. If you took your dog out for a walk, that’s the strength of kindness. If you made it to work on time, that’s the strength of timeliness and respect for others. It goes on and on. Even remembering where you parked your car at the mall is the strength of memory!
How many strengths are there? Is this something that you can actually practice?

Over 108 strengths have been identified. There is a lot of research in the psychology field that shows that if people practice applying one strength a day that it significantly reduces depression. It can be that simple a practice.

You say that transitioning from one place to another can produce emotional clutter. Can you expand on that a bit?

There are many kinds of transitions, and each one—whether it transitioning from home to work, home to school, between tasks, or even going to bed a night, can produce emotional clutter and anxiety. That’s because when we transition we are uncertain about exactly what’s going to happen next. That uncertainty increases feelings of anxiety. A lot of people don’t know how to transition skillfully.

What’s one tip for transitioning that can help?

Well one thing anyone can do is to cut down on the number of daily transitions if possible. So if you had a list of five things to do after work, do three of the ones that are closest to each other. Save the other two for the next day. Another thing is to connect with those you are close to before leaving and when coming home. In this way we stay connected and feel safe and included.

You talk about developing friendships as a way to clear emotional clutter. What do you mean by the three seeds of friendship?

Research shows that having friends is the key to a happier life. The three seeds that make friendship grow and mature are the seeds of trust, acceptance and empathy. Trust is essential, and that takes time to develop, so you need patience and real mutuality in a relationship. Acceptance means not being so demanding. It means accepting that everyone has flaws. Sometimes you need to let things to as a foundation for friendship. Lastly is empathy. Empathy is what lets you really feel connected to a friend. Develop these and you’ll develop friendship.

You say that listening is important to removing clutter. Could talk about that? You also have an acronym called HEAR.

Talking can be clutter that sometimes blocks understanding and deeper meaning. If we are to remove clutter in the moment, we need to be present with all our senses, especially listening. The acronym you mentioned is one that is designed to help us when we’ve stopped listening—like during an argument, when we’re caught up in our own opinion. It goes as follows:

H-Hold All Assumptions. Empty your ego and get curious
E-Empathy to Engage, Not Enrage
A-Absorb and Accept. Understanding, with Openness
R-Reflect, then Respect. Insight, with a Respectful Response

If you had just one word for reducing clutter, what would it be?

Breathe. Slowly. That’s two words, but breathing is one of the best tools that we possess for slowing us down and bringing the body to a state of relaxation and ease. From there, it’s easier to do almost anything.

Donald Altman is the author of Clearing Emotional Clutter, One Minute Mindfulness, and several other books about mindfulness. He is a practicing psychotherapist and former Buddhist monk. An award-winning writer and an expert on mindful eating, he teaches the neurobiology program at Portland State University. Visit him online at http://www.mindfulpracties.com
There Were Giants
Upon the Earth

By Zecharia Sitchin

And it came to pass, When men began to multiply on the face of the Earth and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose.

There were giants upon the Earth in those days and also thereafter too, When the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men and they bare children to them—the same Mighty Men of old, Men of Renown.

The reader, if familiar with the King James English version of the Bible, will recognize these verses as the preamble, in chapter 6 of Genesis, to the story of the Deluge, the Great Flood in which Noah, huddled in an ark, was saved to repopulate the Earth.

The reader, if familiar with my writings, will also recognize these verses as the reason why many decades ago, a schoolboy was prompted to ask his teacher why it is “giants” who are the subject of these verses, when the word in the original Hebrew text is Nihilism—which, stemming from the Hebrew verb Navel, means to fall down, to be downed, to come down—and in no way ‘giants’.

The schoolboy was I. Instead of being congratulated on my linguistic acumen, I was harshly reprimanded. “Sitchin, sit down!” the teacher hissed with repressed anger. “You don’t question the Bible!” I was deeply hurt that day, for I was not questioning the Bible—on the contrary, I was pointing out the need to understand it accurately. And that was what changed my life’s direction to pursue the Nefilim. Who were they, and who were their “Mighty Men” descendants?

The search for answers started with linguistic questions. The Hebrew text does not speak of “Men” who began to multiply, but of Ha’Adam—“The Adam,” a generic term, a human species. It does not speak of the sons of “God,” but uses the term Bnei Ha-Elohim—the sons (in the plural) of The Elohim, a plural term taken to mean “gods” but literally meaning “The Lofty Ones.” The “Daughters of The Adam” were not “fair,” but Tovoth—good, compatible . . . And unavoidably we find ourselves confronting issues of origins. How did Mankind happen to be on this planet, and whose genetic code do we carry?
In just three verses and a few words—forty-nine words in the original Hebrew of Genesis—the Bible describes the creation of Heaven and Earth, then records an actual prehistoric time of early Mankind and a series of amazing events, including a global Flood, the presence on Earth of gods and their sons, inter-species inter-marriage, and demigod offspring . . .

And so, starting with one word (Nefilim), I told the tale of the Anunnaki, “Those who from Heaven to Earth came”—space travelers and interplanetary settlers who came from their troubled planet to Earth in need of gold and ended up fashioning The Adam in their image. In doing so I brought them to life—recognizing them individually, unraveling their tangled relationships, describing their tasks, loves, ambitions, and wars—and identifying their inter-species offspring, the ‘demigods’.

I have been asked at times where my interests would have taken me were the teacher to compliment rather than reprimand me. In truth, I have asked myself a different question: What if indeed “there were giants upon the Earth, in those days and thereafter too”? The cultural, scientific, and religious implications are awesome; they lead to the next unavoidable questions: Why did the compilers of the Hebrew Bible, which is totally devoted to monotheism, include the bombshell verses in the prehistoric record—and what were their sources?

I believe that I have found the answer. Deciphering the enigma of the demigods (the famed Gilgamesh among them), I conclude in this book—my crowning oeuvre—that compelling physical evidence for past alien presence on Earth has been buried in an ancient tomb. It is a tale that has immense implications for our genetic origins—a key to unlocking the secrets of health, longevity, life, and death; it is a mystery whose unraveling will take the reader on a unique adventure and finally reveal what was held back from Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Sumer, it is now known, was the land of a talented and dexterous people in what is now southern Iraq. Usually depicted in artful statues and statuettes in a devotional stance, it was the Sumerians who were the first ones to record and describe past events and tell the tales of their gods. It was there, in the fertile plain watered by the great Euphrates and Tigris rivers, that Mankind’s first known civilization blossomed out some 6,000 years ago—“suddenly,” “unexpectedly,” “with stunning abruptness,” according to all scholars. It was a civilization to which we owe, to this day, virtually every ‘First’ of what we deem essential to an advanced civilization: The wheel and wheeled transportation; the brick that made (and still makes) possible high-rise buildings; furnaces and the kiln that are essential to industries from baking to metallurgy; astronomy and mathematics; cities and urban societies; kingship and laws; temples and priesthods; timekeeping, a calendar, festivals; from beer to culinary recipes, from art to music and musical instruments; and, above all, writing and record keeping—it was all first there, in Sumer.

The philological recognition of Sumerian began, as we have illustrated, not through the discovery of the Sumerians’ own tablets, but through the varied use, in Akkadian texts, of ‘loan words’ that were not Akkadian; the naming of gods and cities by names that made no sense in Assyrian or Babylonian; and of course by actual statements (as that by Ashurbanipal) about the existence of earlier writings in ‘Shumerian’. Though virtually everything that we consider essential to a developed civilization has been inherited from the Sumerians, many people still respond with a blank “Who?” when they hear the word ‘Sumerian’. . .

There Were Giants Upon the Earth by Zecharia Sitchin © 2016 Bear & Company. Printed with permission from the publisher Inner Traditions International http://www.InnerTraditions.com

Zecharia Sitchin (1920-2010), an eminent Orientalist and biblical scholar, was born in Russia and grew up in Palestine, where he acquired a profound knowledge of modern and ancient Hebrew, other Semitic and European languages, the Old Testament, and the history and archaeology of the Near East. A graduate of the University of London with a degree in economic history, he worked as a journalist and editor in Israel for many years prior to undertaking his life’s work—The Earth Chronicles.

One of the few scholars able to read the clay tablets and interpret ancient Sumerian and Akkadian, Sitchin based The Earth Chronicles series on the texts and pictorial evidence recorded by the ancient civilizations of the Near East. His books have been widely translated, reprinted in paperback editions, converted to Braille for the blind, and featured on radio and television programs.
Consciousness has been compared to the ocean—vast and deep, almost boundless. According to this analogy, the ordinary waking state is like the surface of the ocean, which may be joyful and lively, as when sunlight sparkles off the ever-moving waves. But the sea’s surface can also be menacing, roiling with breakers, powerful and dangerous. So it is with our waking state and all its moods and contemplations, hopes and fears, triumphs and disasters. It varies! And of course, when we sit down to meditate, wherever we are is always the point at which we begin—our waking state, whatever it happens to be on that particular day, at that particular moment.

So now it is time to meditate, and we sit down comfortably and prepare to take time away from the ocean’s surface with all its turmoil. We think our mantra as we have been taught to do, and like a diving bell, the mantra takes us deeper and deeper into our innermost self—at depths to which we may never have given much thought. Down there it is utterly still, and the agitations of daily life are transient. Both body and mind can rest in a special way—different from sleep or other types of rest. Such is the state we call transcendence, the fourth state of consciousness.

When you emerge from this state, you may feel rested in a particular way—one that not only energizes you, but also helps you organize your priorities and focus with renewed enthusiasm.

For those of you who have meditated, these descriptions probably strike a resonant chord. For those who have not, imagine: one minute you are sitting on a chair or couch, and the next minute . . . peace and quiet. Your mind feels perfectly settled and all encompassing, suffused with joy and indifferent to sorrow—all at the same time. That’s how it was for me.

By Norman E. Rosenthal, MD,
when I first experienced transcendence. It was a state both thrilling in its novelty yet strangely familiar. In retrospect, I should not have been surprised, since the state we access during TM is simply a deep part of ourselves. Perhaps we have seen flashes of it from time to time, or fallen into it accidentally for brief spells. We may not have identified it or given it a name, but once we reexperience it, it is easy to recognize.

As you can imagine, while we are experiencing these profound psychological changes, major shifts are taking place in both brain and body. I am glad to report that we have a good deal of information about these changes—so much so that I have devoted the entire next chapter to discussing them. At this point, however, I wish simply to remind you that everything we experience at the level of the mind is supported by corresponding changes in the circuits of the brain and the workings of the body. With the expected arrival of new imaging techniques and other technological advances, along with more powerful computer systems to analyze the data, we can look forward to exponential growth in neuroscience—including our understanding of meditation. These are exciting times for those of us intrigued by the development of consciousness.

What, then, are the usual elements of transcendence? That was the question I asked a group of students, at Loyola University’s Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago, who had learned to meditate. They replied with gusto: stillness, quiet, no boundaries, no thoughts, and bliss. In short, they captured the essential spirit of the state.

Maharishi explained how easy it is to enter transcendence: “To go to a field of greater happiness is the natural tendency of the mind,” he wrote. “[T]he mind finds that the way is increasingly attractive as it advances in the direction of bliss.” All that was needed to accomplish this goal, he taught, was the regular practice of TM.

In hand reading most information comes from the seven mounts and six major lines. The mounts—pads of flesh that rise and fall over the surface of the palm—vary in each individual hand. The most developed mounts in a hand show the dominant character traits of the individual. Each of these mounts represents an archetype; a personality pattern repeated since the dawn of time. The lines of the palm are the rivers of energy in the map of the hand. Each line represents a specific quality such as intelligence, vitality, and emotional capacity.

Many interesting variations in character are told by other factors such as those found in the fingers, skin, and nails. These are known as basic modifiers, which indicate variety and individuality within the mount types. Although we will cover each mount and line in depth, here is a simplified overview to get started.

Introduction to the Mounts

The names of the seven mounts mirror the seven celestial bodies of the ancients, gods of Greek and Roman mythology. When a mount stands up from the palm high and full, its influence is strong. Generally there are two dominant mounts that have equal influence on the personality, and the individual is a combination of the traits of both mounts. These interesting blends produce endless variations in human nature. The table below provides a summary of each mount.

The Lines of the Palm

There are six major lines and numerous minor ones. In this brief overview we will cover only the major lines. Both will be covered later in detail. Usually every hand has Head, Heart, and Life Lines.
The lines of Saturn, Apollo, and Mercury, while considered major lines, appear less frequently. When judging a line, the depth of the channel it cuts and the clarity of the line determine its strength. When a line is deep and clear, the aspect represented by the line is functioning well. When a line is thin or broken, that aspect of the individual is weak or challenged. Do not be frightened by a delicate line. Lines change more easily than any other part of the hand. They are there for guidance and change as we change. Their ability to change shows us that fate is fluid.

### The Major Lines

**The Heart Line** indicates the physical state of the heart and the emotional capability of the individual. The line begins near the Mount of Jupiter and runs across the hand. When the line is deep and clear the person is steady in their emotions, devoted, and reliable. When the line is thin or broken the individual is more fickle, sentimental, and changeable.

**The Head Line** is indicative of one’s intelligence and ability to concentrate and focus. It begins under the Mount of Jupiter, close to the beginning of the Life Line. When the line is clear the individual can think clearly and concentrate and has a good memory. When the line is thin or broken, mental power is weakened and the individual may experience confusion and lack of focus. If the Head and Heart Lines combine, this is a Simian Line and indicates that the head and heart function as one, that thinking has an emotional quality to it.

**The Life Line** encircles the thumb in a wide arc. It provides information about an individual’s vitality and ability to resist illness. It does not tell the length of one’s life but records how long energy is a gift. When the line is deep and clear, the person’s energy and recuperative ability is strong. When the line is thin or broken energy runs low and the ability to withstand illness is diminished.

**The Saturn Line** is also known as the Line of Security and the Line of Fate. It represents how secure the individual feels. This can be based on internal or external factors. The line begins near the wrist and runs upward toward the finger of Saturn. Every change in the line indicates a new cycle of life. When the line is deep and clear, the person feels secure and conditions are favorable for any undertaking. When the line is missing or defective, the person must work twice as hard. Many people who are “self-made” have no line of Saturn.

**The Line of Apollo** is also called the Line of Art or the Line of Recognition. This line appears rarely, but when it does it confers creative ability and the possibility of recognition in the person’s chosen field. This line runs from the wrist upward toward the Mount of Apollo.

**The Line of Mercury** is also referred to as the Line of Health. This line appears in less than 50 percent of hands. One can have excellent health with or without this line. The Mercury Line describes certain distinct health issues mostly dealing with the digestive system and the liver. If it is deep and clear, it will confer good health and improve even a delicate Life Line.

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**The Art and Science of Hand Reading by Ellen Goldberg and Dorian Bergen © 2016 Destiny Books. Printed with permission from the publisher Inner Traditions International.**

Ellen Goldberg, primary author, is a psychotherapist and an internationally renowned teacher of Tarot and Palmistry. She is the founder and director of the School of Oracles and has been on the faculty of the New York Open Center since 1986. This book is based on her 40 years of teaching Palmistry and the Western Mystery tradition.

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Feeling lonely is an increasingly common experience, and yet loneliness is a condition that’s often misunderstood. Many consider it an unpleasant, but not terribly serious, feeling that dissipates over time. For those who’ve felt lonely only during times of transition—when leaving home or moving cities, for example—loneliness can seem no more significant than homesickness or nostalgia.

But research indicates that loneliness is not only becoming increasingly common—one in five Americans regularly suffer from loneliness, and that number is continually rising—it’s physical and psychological consequences are much more serious than we once believed. The negative health repercussions of loneliness are on par with obesity, alcoholism, and smoking.

If this doesn’t sound like the loneliness you’re familiar with, you may have some outdated ideas about what loneliness looks like. Let’s discuss the top three myths about what causes—and what reduces—the feeling of loneliness.

Myth #1: Loneliness is caused by a lack of people in one’s life

There is no more pervasive myth about loneliness than the notion that people get lonely because they are alone. In reality, some people can spend long bouts of time alone and never feel lonely, while other people can feel desperately lonely despite having many people in their lives.

The idea that loneliness is caused by having fewer relationships has been thoroughly discredited through many scientific studies. One study that aimed to figure out if it’s really “lonely at the top” concluded that though leaders in general have less friends and confidantes than non-leaders, they suffer lower rates of loneliness. Why? Because they feel good about the few relationships they do have.

In other words, loneliness is not caused by a lack of relationships, it’s caused by a lack of positive feeling about one’s relationships. As the authors of the study concluded: “Being alone is not the same as feeling alone. You can have thousands of friends and feel lonely, or have only a single friend and feel connected.”
Myth #2: Lonely people are socially awkward

When we imagine a chronically lonely person, most of us picture a reclusive bookworm or a nerdy outsider, but these stereotypes are just that—stereotypes. Not only does loneliness affect a far wider population than just “loners,” it’s also been proven that people who suffer from chronic loneliness actually have better social skills than people who don’t.

In a recent experiment conducted at Franklin and Marshall College, psychologist Megan Knowles discovered that lonely people detect social cues—such as facial expressions and tone of voice—better than their non-lonely counterparts. Unfortunately, despite the lonely participants being more socially adept, they also tended to worry more about saying the wrong thing in social situations. They tended to “choke” socially.

So what does this mean? It means that lonely people do indeed know how to interact with others. They simply put more pressure on themselves socially. Lonely people tend to value their relationships a great deal, and because they actually care more about garnering good relationships, they often psych themselves out.

Myth #3: Loneliness is not a serious condition

Most people realize that mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety have a serious impact on one’s health. Because loneliness is not classified as a mental health disorder, it’s often considered less detrimental to health and well-being than these similar conditions.

In fact, the negative physical consequences of loneliness are known to be extremely significant. Studies have shown that chronic loneliness increases mortality, inhibits one’s immune system, increases blood pressure, worsens sleep patterns, and has negative health consequences on par with obesity, alcoholism, and cigarette smoking. It’s even associated with dementia in older adults.

Time Magazine recently ran a piece entitled, “Why Loneliness May Be The Next Big Public-Health Issue.” Doesn’t that sound like a phenomenon worth taking seriously?

If you are one of the 60 million Americans who struggle with loneliness, isn’t it time to consider how loneliness may be impacting your life?

Myth 1: Love Is a Reliable Solution to Loneliness

You may have been wondering why I have yet to mention love in our discussion of loneliness. Isn’t love a perfectly good solution to loneliness? Isn’t love the deepest, strongest bond we can have with another person? Isn’t love the basis of all relationships that matter?

The answer is the same to all these questions: yes and no. Love absolutely brings people together. When someone who’s been a stranger becomes a lover, in our eyes he becomes infused with an almost surreal importance. It can be hard to tell where you end and he begins...and you both like it that way.

But the majestic, heightened state of love has a flip side, one with which we’re all too familiar. Love is fickle. You could fall in love with someone who’s completely inappropriate for you. You could fall in love with someone who’s not available. You could love someone who doesn’t love you back. You could love someone passionately for a short period of time and then watch the relationship fizzle for reasons you don’t fully understand.

And it’s not just romantic love that’s largely outside of our understanding. Expectant parents will attest to the fact that we can love someone before he’s even born. We can love people after they die. Whom we love (and for that matter, when, where, how, and why we love) is largely outside our control. The notion that love is a reliable solution to loneliness is a myth because, simply put: love is a mystery. Closeness, however, is not.

We can pick up methods for creating closeness because we know what generates closeness between people and what doesn’t. I don’t think anyone can say the same about love. Love certainly reduces loneliness, given the right circumstances, but it also increases lone-
liness under unfavorable ones. Closeness, unlike love, always works toward reducing loneliness. Closeness is useful in a way that love is not. If you do certain tangible things with a receptive partner, you will see tangible results. The more effort you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

There’s also a specific way in which closeness is a handier solution than love: it opens up the possibility of less loneliness at work. It’s generally deemed inappropriate to love anyone at work. Even if you do have a strong connection or friendship with a colleague, it’s easy to see how calling it “love” makes the relationship instantly sound unprofessional.

But most of us spend a great deal of time at work, and there are likely lots of people we know professionally with whom we could build a meaningful relationship. Closeness gives working relationships the opportunity to matter as much as strictly personal ones.

The fact is, you don’t have to be lonely just because you’re not in love. And if you are in love, closeness makes that love that much more stable and reliable.

I see evidence for this point in the ample research that’s been done on marriage and divorce. The overwhelming majority of people who get married, at least in Western developed countries, say that they are doing it for love. In our culture marriage is seen as the ultimate expression of committed love. Most who commit to marriage also expect that the love that brought them together will last a lifetime.

Let’s pair this fact about how marriages begin with what we know about how they end. The Divorce Mediation survey conducted by Lynn Gigy and Joan Kelly found that 80 percent of divorced people said their marriages broke up primarily because they “grew apart.” This cause trumped all others, including the one we generally think of as the main marriage killer: affairs. Only 25 percent of respondents said an affair played any part in the decline of the marriage.

So what does this tell us? Marriage is all about love and divorce is all about distance. Even the relationships that are most filled with love will fall apart without closeness. Closeness is the foundation for all satisfying and long-lasting relationships because love really needs closeness in a way that closeness doesn’t need love.

You can feel close to someone you’re not in love with. And if you’re in love but can’t access your partner’s inner world, it’s inevitable that the relationship will slide down the spectrum to distance.

That being said, love relationships—particularly marriages—are excellent opportunities to create closeness. The great advantage marriage has over other relationships is that it’s an explicit commitment. It’s one of the few times (maybe the only time?) when you expressively choose a partner and they choose you back. This creates an environment of deliberateness—of conscious choosing—that is very conducive to creating closeness.

But don’t wait for a love relationship to find you before you can stop feeling lonely. You can create so much fulfillment and connection with others without waiting for love.


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Why is loneliness such a problem for everyone nowadays?
The primary reason loneliness is an increasingly common problem for people is that our contemporary social environment is working against the development of close relationships. In other words, people these days have a reduced number of natural opportunities to get close to one another.

Some of the environmental obstacles to closeness are part of larger social shifts. Today, people relocated all the time and each time they do they’re faced with the challenge of losing stable relationships and forming new ones. People are delaying marriage longer than they ever have before, and living alone is rapidly becoming the most common living situation. In fact, most adults would say living alone is much preferable to living with parents or extended family.

These factors, among others, lead to people experiencing more loneliness now than they likely would have in the past.

Why do you think loneliness is an especially big problem for millennials?
Millennials are experiencing high levels of loneliness because they are the generation most entrenched in what I see as the greatest obstacle to closeness—personal technology. While personal technology has afforded Millennials amazing levels of independence, it’s also made them much more disinclined towards in-person interaction.

For example, Millennials no longer need to go to a class to get an education. They no longer need to go to an office to maintain a job. But these are the places where opportunities to form close friendships exist. Millennials often feel no need to interact with people in person because they have texts, chat, and social networks. These technologies, while amazingly efficient, hinder people from getting to know each other in organic ways.

You say that the answer to loneliness is more closeness. What do you mean by that?
Closeness, as I’ve defined it, means direct access to another person’s inner world—his or her needs, values, dreams, passions, stories, etc. You create closeness with another person by getting to know him or her and then showing him or her that you care. Through these two, complimentary acts—“knowing” and “caring”—your inner world and the other person’s inner world become, metaphorically, close enough to touch.

Closeness works as the antidote to loneliness because loneliness is not necessarily caused by a lack of people in one’s life. Many people have a phone full of contacts and still feel lonely. Loneliness is actually sadness caused by the feeling of internal distance—mental and emotional distance—from others. Closeness reduces this internal distance and the sadness that comes with it—loneliness.

What distinction are you making between love and closeness?
The main distinction I make between love and closeness is that love is a mystery and closeness is not. Meaning, we understand what generates closeness between two people—the feeling of being known and cared about—but we really cannot say the same thing about love.

Expectant parents will tell you it’s possible to love someone before they’re born. We can love people after they die. Love is transcendent—there’s no doubt—but it is also unpredictable and impossible to conjure at will. Closeness, on the other hand, has predictable outcomes and can therefore act as a reliable solution to loneliness.

Why is closeness so important in relationships?
Closeness is an extremely vital aspect of all relationships, whether they be friend, family, business, or romantic relationships. Closeness is important because
it is responsible for that sense you sometimes have that another person understands you on a deep level and cares about you.

Knowing and caring, taken together to make closeness, communicate to another person, “Not only do I see your truest self, I’m also invested in keeping your truest self well.” When this message is communicated in a relationship, the relationship feels stable, satisfying, and authentic. Without this message, the relationship can easily feel hollow, shallow, forced, or—at its worst—like a burden.

Can closeness be learned? If so, how does one do that?

Definitely. Creating closeness in your life is a skill that’s learned just like any other. The first step to learning how to create closeness is to understand that you are in control of your loneliness—that you are already empowered with what you need to feel less lonely.

Once you believe this, the work of creating closeness is to find like-minded people with whom you could potentially develop a close relationship. Once you’ve found a potential close friend or partner, start using the “knowing” and “caring” techniques outlined in Stop Being Lonely. These include gaining access to that person’s inner world, asking her inviting questions, empathizing with her deliberately, and demonstrating attentive interest in her.

What should someone start doing right now to feel less lonely?

The first step to feeling less lonely is to understand that you are not to blame for your loneliness. Oftentimes, people who struggle with loneliness feel that if they just “put themselves out there” more, their loneliness would fade. From my experience, loneliness is not a personal trait, it is not a character flaw, and it is often not for a lack of trying.

In Stop Being Lonely, I talk about the idea of separating yourself as a person from the problems in your life. To start feeling less lonely now, try separating yourself from the problem of loneliness. You are a precious human deserving of closeness, and loneliness is a resolvable problem that lives outside of you. When you think about it this way, the problem is much easier to tackle.

What are your thoughts on the relationship between technology and loneliness?

Technology influences the way we see the world—and the way we see other people. Those of us who have grown up using personal technology could say that it’s one of the main conduits through which we learned about the world. It was, and is, an important teacher of lessons.

Unfortunately, some of the lessons that technology teaches us are not helpful for creating closeness. For example, technology teaches us that mediated interaction—interacting through a device—is a reasonable substitute for in-person interaction. But those of us who struggle with loneliness know this is not the case. I can’t feel what another person is feeling through Instagram. I can’t really understand what matters to my friend through Facebook. Mediated interaction, almost by definition, is not direct access to each other’s inner worlds.
How are our devices influencing how we interact with one another?
Many of us view technology—particularly our phones—as tools to make life more efficient. In fact, efficiency is of utmost importance when it comes to designing personal technology products. If it’s not efficient, it’s not a good technology product.

The problem is that, the more we interact with technology—perfect tools of efficiency—the more we develop a “technology mindset” that isn’t well trained for dealing with interpersonal nuances. In other words, the more we interact with our phones, the less patience we have for interacting with people.

You say closeness can help businesses as well. How does that work?
While closeness requires getting to know another person and demonstrating investment in that person’s well-being, there’s nothing inappropriately “intimate” about closeness. You can absolutely be professional at work and still get close.

In fact, many recent studies have shown that the more managers get to understand their employee’s deeper motivations—an act of “knowing”—the more productive the relationship becomes. And, the more managers can be emotionally responsive to their employees—an act of “caring”—the more engaged both people report feeling at work.

What does this indicate? Closeness is not just appropriate at work, it actually improves productivity and helps businesses thrive.

Can you give us a few last practical tips to help a person feel less lonely?
First, notice whom you’re interested in getting to know better. It could be a distant family member, and acquaintance at work—anyone. Keep your eyes open for potential closeness partners in all areas of life.

From there, pick a person you’re interested in knowing better and ask her to meet up in real life. Once you’re together, take the opportunity to ask questions that deepen the conversation beyond projects, hobbies, and activities.

For example, instead of just asking what she’s working on, ask how she feels about what she’s working on. When she tells you she wakes up at 6AM every morning to run, ask what motivates her to do this. These are the conversations that lead to deeper understanding and that get the closeness ball rolling.

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