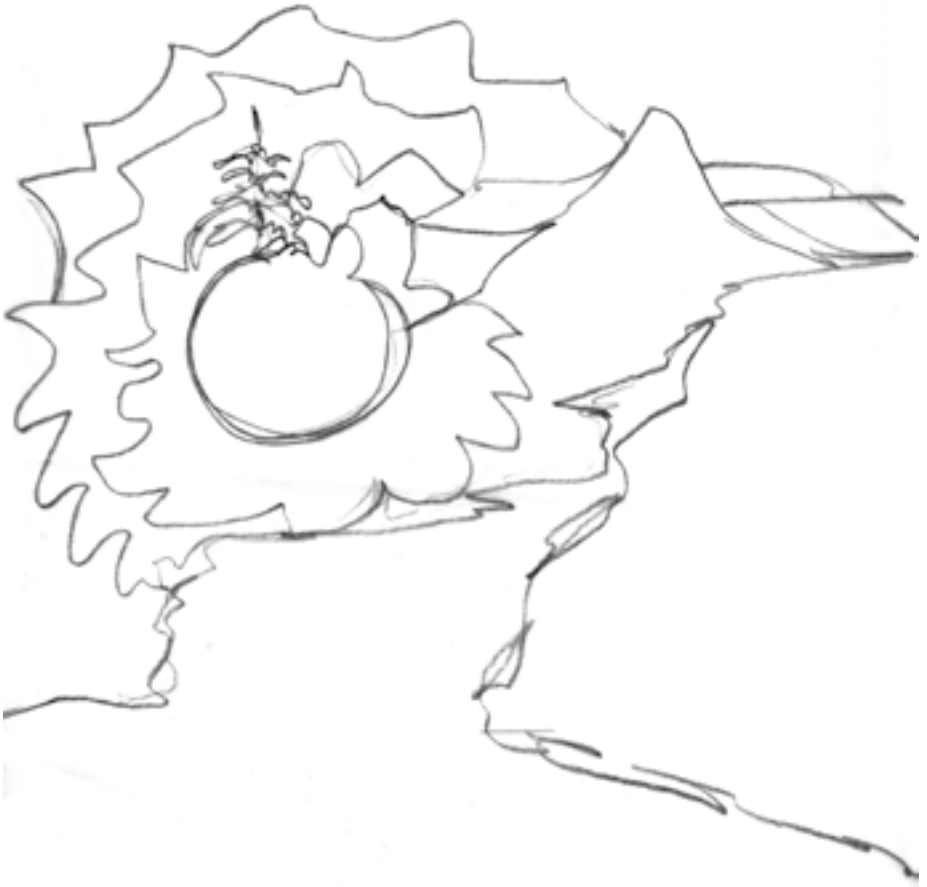
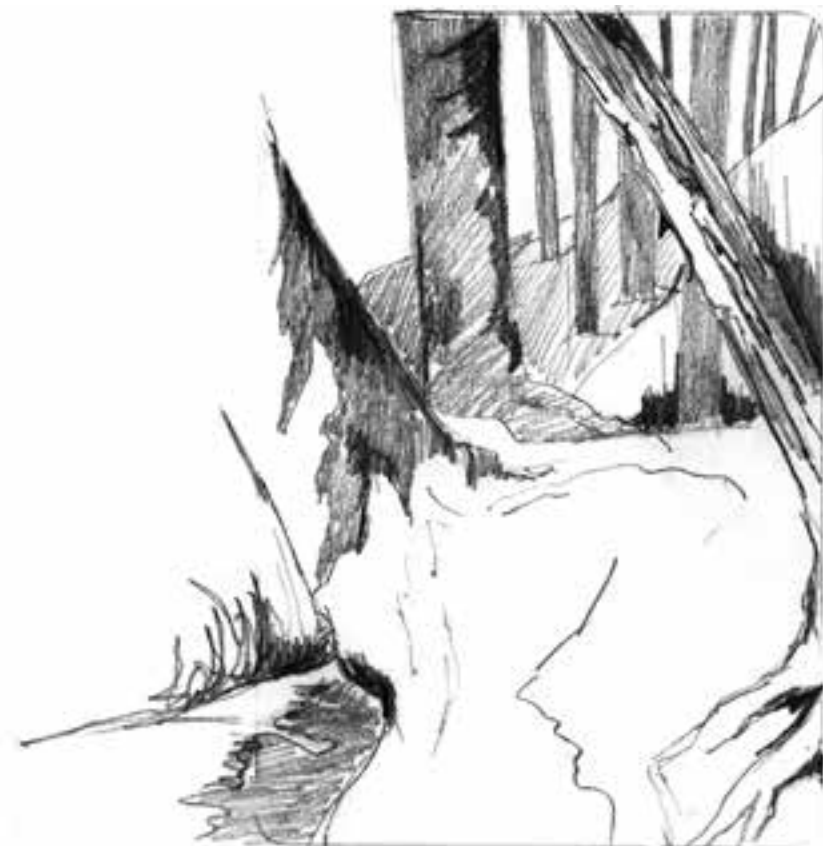


chapter one

# THE BEGINNING



*Great changes in life are the result  
of gradual and cumulative effects.*



# THE BREATH OF LIFE

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Everyone breathes.

In fact, you probably only become aware of your breathing when attention is called to it. But did you know that learning to breathe well is important for your physical, emotional, and mental health?

***Deep breathing is a powerful relaxant  
as well as a rejuvenator.***

Breathing slowly lowers heart rate, metabolic rate, and blood pressure, and it eases muscle tension. Breathing deeply and slowly cleanses, refreshes, detoxifies, and energizes mind and body.

Becoming aware of your own breathing and taking time for deep-breathing exercises brings you in tune with your body, and also provides energy and calm for deliberate and productive thinking. In slowing down/calming down, our intuitive is clearer and stronger.

Children breathe naturally and deeply. Somehow we have unlearned that.

Today, notice how many times you hold your breath.

Each time you think of it, breathe deeply at least three times.

- Sit, stand, or, if possible, lie down. Keep your spine straight to get the feel of your belly's movement.
- Do not cross any limbs. Feel loose. Relax.
- Gently place your fingers—slightly interlaced and barely touching—on your abdomen, resting on your navel. As you inhale through your nose into the deepest part of your lungs, allow your stomach to expand as your fingers are pushed apart.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, pushing out as much air as possible.
- Try this again.

Whatever you are doing, try to be aware of how you are breathing.

Enjoy your breathing!

Once this feels comfortable, try exhaling from the bottom of your spine, extracting all the air out of your system. Open your mouth in a relaxed fashion and notice how air naturally comes into your lungs. Exhale again. Be patient—it is a subtle sensation. The breathing becomes the action of exhaling only, and the air comes in naturally on its own to fill the empty lungs.

## ***Breathing to breeze through your day***

Proper breathing awareness can be incorporated into your daily life in many ways.

Whenever you think about breathing, straighten your back, drop your shoulders, and consciously breathe deeply a few times.

Imagine a string holding you by the top of your head attached to the sky.

Do this at your desk, in your car, walking, reading, on the phone, to start your day, to end your day, or even in anticipation of a stressful experience. Do it before a meal, to begin a meeting, before a test, or in class. Do it whenever you want to calm or refresh yourself.

Start by paying attention to the way you usually breathe. Is it quick and shallow? When practising deep breathing, slow down if you begin to feel light-headed. Your body might not be used to all the oxygen it's getting. Like anything new, breathing deeply takes practice and getting used to.

If deep breathing is new to you, practise it before you combine it with other exercises and activities. When you set aside time for breathing, do so before meals or at least two hours after a meal, use a well-ventilated room or go outdoors, and wear loose clothing. This will help you to get the most benefit from your deep breathing.

Try giving yourself gentle reminders to breathe deeply until it becomes a habit. You could try Post-it Notes on cupboards or mirrors, or inspirational posters or artwork that remind you to breathe deeply and slowly.

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# CREATIVE PRACTICE

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## Getting in touch with your breathing

### *The posture*

- Sit relaxed, spine straight; shoulders back, down, and loose; with your hands on the arms of a chair or in your lap, not crossed; and your feet flat on the floor. Or, you can also stand, with feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. Or you can lie down, flat on your back.
- Place one hand on chest and one on upper abdomen, above your navel.
- Close your eyes to heighten awareness of how you breathe. Do you breathe into your chest or into your abdomen? Do you breathe quickly, slowly, or at a moderate rate? Do you breathe through your nose or through your mouth? Find your own rhythm — then slow it down, just a little bit each breath.

### *Try these steps:*

- With eyes closed, breathe through your nose, feeling the air move down into your lungs as your chest and belly slowly rise and your shoulders straighten.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth and feel your abdomen and then your chest deflate and your shoulders relax.
- Continue breathing this way for ten more breaths.

Concentrate. See if you can notice the slight temperature change between cool air entering your nose and warmer breath leaving your mouth. Follow your breath and imagine that you are travelling with it through your nose, nostrils, and swirling down into your lungs, then slowly pushing back out through your mouth.

Right now, know that all you have to do is breathe, nothing else. If your mind starts to wander, as it will, gently bring your concentration back to focus on breathing. You may need to do this often, and that's all right. It may have been a while since you have slowed down enough to be aware of your breathing. This quieter sensation of slowing your body down may seem unfamiliar.

Finish with a cleansing breath.

## CREATIVE PRACTICE

- Breathe in deeply through your nose to a slow count of four, then hold your breath for another slow count of four.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of four.
- Push out the last bits of air through your mouth, making puffing sounds.

Try this cleansing breath at the end of your exercise. Do this at least three times. Exhaling through your mouth is a stronger detoxifying breath than exhaling through your nose. Note: You can also do this cleansing breath with the exhale method mentioned on page \_\_\_\_.

Sometimes, unfamiliar experiences feel uncomfortable at first—like writing with your non-dominant hand or sleeping on the other side of the bed. Discomfort sometimes shows up as tiredness, giggles, or boredom. But after you have tried these new things a few times, they become comfortable and familiar. Like any skill, breathing properly often takes practice. In the meantime, you benefit right away, building your overall health.

There are many forms of moving and breathing exercises and relaxation exercises; for example, yoga, tai chi, qigong, and mindful walking. Join a group and enjoy a new awareness of your breathing and your body.

### ***Rejuvenating wake-up breathing***

- Sit comfortably in a relaxed position.
- Inhale to a slow count of six.
- Hold for one count.
- Exhale for a slow count of three.

Find your own rhythm. Be sure to breathe in longer than out, thus feeding yourself oxygen.

Repeat until you feel wide awake.

### ***Breathing to induce sleep and deep relaxation***

- Lie or sit in a relaxed position.
- Inhale for three counts.
- Hold for one count.
- Exhale for six counts.

As you breathe out, permit yourself to become increasingly relaxed by releasing the tension slowly out of your body with the exhaling breath. Repeat until you are relaxed or asleep.

## ***Breathing to get in touch with yourself***

Just as breathing can relax and invigorate our bodies, so, too, can it relax and invigorate our minds. That's why the practice of meditation begins with awareness of our breathing.

Meditation can take many forms and serve many purposes. It can be performed as a momentary stress reliever, or a way of life.

In meditation:

- You bring your awareness to your mind and your thoughts, become aware of your mind, and rest there.
- You let go of worry, fears, distress, and pain. Clear your mind of any desire. As you let go of these tensions, your heart will sense confidence and a growing understanding.

Meditation can be described as a state of "being":

Being present

Understanding

Being aware

Watching

Being awake

Stopping a while to listen

Paying attention to life

***Meditation can help you be more thoughtful and more in control of your thoughts. Meditation can help relieve stress and is used for pain management. By getting to know yourself in meditation, you can become the master of your happiness.***

Often my students worry about meditating "correctly." They think their minds must be empty of thought. Because we have a mind, we're always going to have thoughts and emotions. A lot of the time, our minds run unleashed and wild. We can be easily distracted by what's around us or by chatter in our minds.

Sometimes when I begin to meditate it feels impossible to slow my mind down. However, the very action of trying to slow down or unwind is beneficial. Meditation does not eliminate thought, but instead helps us reflect and consider the thought by eliminating chatter. As our mind relaxes and our thoughts slow down, the spaces between thoughts become longer. Lengthening these gaps is the real work of meditation.

Meditation can take many forms. The following meditative breathing practice takes two forms—moving and sitting.

### ***Moving breathing (qigong)***

Why moving? In moving, I am more in my body and less in my head.

## CREATIVE PRACTICE

Sometimes I need to move to slow down.

To help his warriors to increase their attention and focus, Marshall Yue Fei of the Song Dynasty used a series of moving breathing exercises. Follow the steps of this particular breathing exercise and enjoy the stretching of your arms and expansion of your lungs.

- Stand looking straight ahead, with your feet shoulder-width apart, your back straight in the pelvic tilt position, and your knees slightly bent. (To assume a pelvic tilt position, pretend you are about to sit. As you begin to sit, your pelvis will slightly rock forward, your buttocks will sink slightly and your balance will rest in the centre of your body.)
- Gently intertwine your fingers and bring your arms out in front of you as if you are hugging a barrel. Lower your arms, keeping them around the imaginary barrel. With your arms in this position, breathe in, still hugging the barrel while slowly raising your arms to shoulder height. As you exhale gently, lower your arms slowly back to your navel.
- Still in the hugging-the-barrel position, with fingers intertwined, breathe in and raise your arms above your head. Let your eyes follow your hands to the sky.
- On the exhale, gently separate your fingers and gradually bring your arms down in a wide arc. Follow this motion in your peripheral vision until your arms reach shoulder height. Looking ahead, continue to bring your arms down to your belly as you finish exhaling.

When you breathe in, concentrate on expanding your lungs as much as you can. When you breathe out, concentrate on contracting your belly.

Steps one to four constitute one set. Depending on instructors and styles, there are many variations. Take your time to work up to six sets of this exercise.

### ***Sitting breathing***

- Assume the posture we used when first getting in touch with our breathing: Sit relaxed; spine straight; shoulders back, down and loose; your hands on the arms of a chair or in your lap, not crossed; and your feet flat on the floor.
- Sit alone in silence. Balance your head, close your eyes, breathe in and out gently, and imagine yourself looking into your heart.



- As you slow your breathing down a little, slow your thoughts down a little.
- Be calm, focusing solely on breathing.
- Slow your breathing a little more—slow your thoughts a little more.
- If it's helpful, repeat a one-syllable word such as “love,” or “peace,” or another word that fulfills you. Or, if you like, count the breath. For example, “one” for the inhale, “two” for the exhale, “three” for the next inhale, and so on. Focus on that word while leaving all other thoughts behind. Slow the word down a little at a time. Now try to imagine the space before and after that word. Focus on the spaces. This takes practice and concentration. In time, the spaces will get longer. When you can achieve this calm space, you will connect with the truth of energy and the universe. At this level, it is said that you will find your highest thoughts, and your wisdom will come to you.

### ***How long do I need to sit meditatively?***

Entering a state of mindfulness is less about the length of time and more about the quality of time. Five minutes of wakeful practice is more valuable than twenty minutes of dozing.

Begin practising with short sessions. Inevitably, restless, busy thoughts will intrude. When this happens, gently bring yourself back to your focus. As you continue to practise, being in focus will come with greater ease.

Sometimes it may feel as if you cannot relax your mind or keep it focused. This is all right because being aware of your tense mind is part of being mindful. Stay present with your mind, and when your thoughts wander, gently bring them back to your focus. Allowing your breath to slow down will help your mind to slow down, too, a little bit at a time.

### ***Returning to everyday life***

***As you re-enter everyday life, let the wisdom, calm, insight, humour, compassion, and spaciousness you gained in meditation filter into your day.  
Be completely present in your actions.***

The true miracle of practising meditation is ordinary and practical. It is a subtle transformation of your mind, body, and soul.

## CREATIVE PRACTICE

Inspire yourself to meditate with candles, incense, artwork that lifts your spirits, music that feeds your soul, dew on a flower petal, sunlight through the trees, a clear blue sky, and rich velvet. Try different approaches. Slowly, you will become master of your own bliss with a collection of remedies that will delight, inspire, illuminate, and elevate your every breath and moment.

Just because you meditate, it doesn't necessarily mean you won't be running around, or that you will be calm all the time. It means that you'll be more aware and present because you stopped for a while to listen, to pause, to watch, and to understand.



# THINKING ABOUT TIME

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Time is everywhere, yet it eludes us.

Time haunts.

***We try to manage our time, prioritizing, organizing,  
cleaning, setting goals, and defining purpose;  
yet time teases us as it keeps moving.***

I am not asking you to reschedule your time but to think about it. Do in your life what is worthwhile; consider activities of value. Consider time and choices well spent and not time wasted.

Have you ever really thought about what it means to “take your time”? “I’m too slow,” moan some of my art students with a judgment of being “less than” and inadequate. When someone has worked quickly and easily to produce an interesting piece of work, the tendency is to negate the piece as of no value because it was not laboured over at that particular moment. In fact, some work ethics or belief systems disregard any talent or process done with ease. But the preamble to achieving such a piece or any work is often overlooked. Our strengths usually come with a sense of ease, enjoyment, and passion.

There can be such conflicts about time and value. In some situations, we are taught that “the time factor” equals “the dollar factor,” which equals “the success factor.” Speed and quantity seem to have great value in industry and business. Are you being harsh with yourself when measuring your value in dollars earned, or judging yourself in comparison with the achievements of others?

Often, in a group situation, if you are not keeping pace with the instruction, you feel slow and somehow inadequate.

For over thirty years as an instructor and painter, I have observed that we all work at different speeds for different tasks. Experience, tools, knowledge, confidence, headspace, physical capability, stress level, strengths, and time limitations are some of the factors that can affect our pace. Schedules, bells, and clocks are part of our lifestyle. Are time limits pressuring you?

Ponder this: in a day, most tasks are pressed into a specific time limit because yet another task awaits. The stress is in performing the current task while simultaneously planning the next. The experience is fragmented, unfocused, and not enjoyed.

Do all tasks have to be done by you today?

Is the time stress your responsibility?

How often do you consider taking extra time for at least some of the day's tasks? Becoming aware of time allotments and developing your own pace may require conscious effort and practice.

## ***Taking your time: setting your own pace***

When I began an intensive year of studying calligraphy with my instructor, American calligrapher Reggie Ezelle, he noted that if there was one thing he could teach us, it would be to slow down.

### ***What happens when you slow down?***

- Slowing down pulls you into the moment and into the experience by focusing your thoughts. When you hurry, you are looking ahead and working beyond the immediate task. In “hurry mode,” you are not present. Hurried time flies, leaving a blur and little sense of pleasure.
- When you feel pushed, it's all right to tell others to stop pushing you. And it's okay to say that to yourself. We each work optimally at different tasks with varying speeds.
- In slowing down, you experience each aspect of the task and the process. When you take your time, you delight in what you are doing. In the awareness, you are alive and in the present moment. You have the opportunity to respond to the environment with heightened awareness of yourself and what you are reacting to.
- In slowing down, you recreate inner harmony, entering a place of peace where time stands still, the soul is fed, and you feel connected to all that is.

***Take time to wander in detail;  
get involved in whatever you are doing.***

***Take time to sharpen your awareness of each tiny detail;  
feel your connection to your task and your relationship  
to your surroundings.***

Notice details and savour them.

### ***How can you slow down?***

There are many ways to slow down. Try different ways and discover which is most comfortable and works best for you today. It could be something



else another day.

- What about a nap?
- Will you try tai chi?
- How about a walk in the woods or a nearby park?
- Why not give a friend a long hug? Notice his/her breathing.
- Can you step outdoors and still your rushing mind by breathing slowly for a while?
- Feel like hopping on a bike?
- Chanting?
- Mindfully watch yourself pour a cup of tea.
- Meditating?
- Watching the flame of a candle?
- How about a soothing bath?

You choose and you orchestrate. You are in charge of yourself.

When you feel your environment speeding up around you and your chest tightening, make a deliberate effort to slow down and reclaim your

peaceful inner landscapes.

Cancel some appointments and invitations. Quiet the chatter and the fury. Turn down the volume and turn down the throttle.

We all need to recover the spaciousness in our lives and to reconnect with the rhythms of nature. Sometimes less is more.

Sit in the dark. Calm all your senses.

***Slowing down means discovering the time you already have  
—that priceless prize of time called life.***

Take time to pause. That's another way of slowing down. It's in the pauses that life can also reveal itself.

Life gets an opportunity to catch up to us in those pauses. There is greatness in a pause.

A pause can create a calm waiting room for decisions. Deciding to wait can be your decision and your choice.

How often do you run past your goals, your dreams and opportunities?

Are you so busy whirling around stirring up dust that you can't see what the universe has for you?

It is in pauses that we can truly listen—especially to ourselves.

Practising patience is another way of slowing down.

Start by turning these pages slowly. Read slowly. Think about what you have read. Savour the moment. Savour your gifts.

***Feeling safe***

If it has been a while since you have truly slowed down, sat quiet, totally relaxed, the process may make you feel anxious, teary, or agitated. Other symptoms might show themselves as exhaustion, boredom, or giddiness. This is normal, as feelings and issues may come to the surface in the slowing-down process. Remind yourself that you are in control of your mind and body. Be gentle with yourself and soothe your breathing. Go as deep as you feel comfortable.

## ***Resting***

Now and then, give yourself permission to slow down and rest. Take a nap. Be totally unproductive for a while—perhaps even for one whole day. When I don't regularly slow down, I feel worn out, I make mistakes, I'm clumsy, I accomplish less, I am less patient and less satisfied.

***Rest is not a luxury.  
It is a necessity for the healthy maintenance  
of your mind and body.***

For a moment, stop planning how you are going to accomplish a goal or use your talents.

Try to just be.

Enjoy being.

In my moments of slowing down, I have learned to see, to listen, to understand, and to grow.

As I learned to understand myself, I gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of my family and my world. I felt that I had become a part of creation again, instead of just bouncing around on the outside looking in.

- Take time to appreciate yourself, your family, and friends.
- Count your blessings.
- Count one blessing at a time . . . slowly, gratefully.



# THE POWER OF THOUGHT

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***We have these choices: how and what we think; how we respond; and what we choose to imagine. Thoughts can affect situations and the people around you. Each thought has energy of its own, and it is thought that leads to action.***

Prayer is one example of thought in action that can affect people profoundly. Humans are very sensitive to the energy of prayer, to the energy of a thought, whether negative or positive. Many of us can remember feeling the thoughts, warmth, love, and healing that have been sent our way. We sense support—or not. If we are aware, we often can sense the essence of a room, a situation, or a place. In turn, we can affect the room, the situation, and others with our thoughts.

Have you ever been so lost in thinking about someone that what you are doing seems suspended? Then, to your astonishment, the telephone rings, and it is the person you were thinking about? Sometimes, thoughts can be so strong that it is possible to hear sentences, see visions, and even feel the touch of another.

It is equally important to be able to filter thoughts that you do not want—such as dark or fearful thoughts.

***Being committed to awareness and understanding of your thoughts is important and powerful. Like any skill, it takes time and practice.***

More on managing and understanding thoughts and feelings will be discussed in **chapter \_\_\_\_**, **page \_\_\_\_**.





## ***Thinking patterns***

### ***Berating ourselves***

It is amazing how often we scold ourselves, while others may see a confident, tough, or funny individual. Few of us are confident no matter how secure we may appear, how blunt, tough, or funny we think we are. Deep inside, we are still sensitive, caring individuals.

***Often we are too critical of our own behaviour,  
and if we aren't, then we may be  
allowing someone else to be.***

### ***Worrying***

Are you making a hobby of worrying? Worrying is thinking about things that have not happened yet. Worry does not change things. Worry is being afraid and could be considered *negative meditation*. Being afraid begets negativity. Consider the fear that causes you to worry. With careful reflection, transform your worrying into a constructive form of caring and action.

***Worrying can be a habit that puts  
your thoughts into a dark hole.  
It will take determination to redirect them  
and fill your mind with more constructive thoughts.***

### ***Being real***

Look at the situation for what it is. This may sound simple, although many times I see how stress, anger, fear, worries of failure, habits, and past experiences distort how we look at a present situation.

***The most powerful thinking is NOW thinking.  
Be in the moment.  
See what is in front of you.***

### ***Manifesting our thoughts***

Do you ever notice that when you purchase a new vehicle, suddenly there are lots of similar ones on the road? Women notice this phenomenon when they become pregnant. Suddenly there seem to be so many pregnant women around.

This is common. If our brains registered and acknowledged each detail that we come across in an ordinary day, they would become overloaded

with information. Our brain readily connects with the familiar. This is one of the reasons why positive thinking works.

***By thinking positively, you are programming your brain to recognize positive opportunities that are around at all times.***

We all live in one world, and we can either choose to see and experience the opportunities and the gifts or focus only on the misfortunes and misery. We can accept the cup as half empty or half full. It's the same cup, the same life.

To help you manifest your wishes, visualize what you want for your life. Then write it down. Go one step further and take a small action toward that goal. Now, instead of just wishing, you're on your way.

Our thoughts are like magnets. Positive thoughts attract, recognize, and evoke positive effects; they clump together to form positive happenings. "Feel-good" attitudes also bring about more "feel-good" situations. This is why practising gratitude is so powerful. The more we practise being grateful the more we have to be grateful about.



*One thought + faith + commitment  
= manifestation of that thought.*

*More time invested in a thought equals  
more energy toward that thought. Timing,  
faith, and clear intent can take a thought  
to instantaneous manifestation.*



# CHOOSING YOUR STATE OF MIND

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***You can choose how you think and what you think about.  
You choose what you want to imagine.***

Work with the supportive ideas and creative practices throughout this book to guide your mind toward its highest potential. Your happiness depends on your state of mind and the choices you plan and carry out. We will talk more about strengthening your happiness in chapter eight.

Your state of mind includes your attitude, thinking patterns, and habits, as well as your emotions. Only you have control of how you think and what you choose to think about. You can rethink, retrain, and develop your thinking habits. You can expand joy in your mind, and that ripples out into your life.

Try and take some quiet time each day to reflect on how you feel and what you have been thinking about. During the day, in different situations, be aware of your thoughts. Are they reactive, angry, fearful, or insecure? Or are your thoughts pleasant, positive, and visionary? Some thoughts may surprise you when you take stock of them. Be non-judgmental; just note them and acknowledge them for what they are.

As you become aware of the quality and direction of your thoughts, you will be able to evaluate their tone. This could be the time to reflect on the source of those thoughts. What inspires you? What bothers you? What can you do? What is the opportunity, here?

Are your thoughts busy, cluttered, confused, negative, scattered, or repetitive? Often we think the same thought over and over. That's when it is time to houseclean and organize thoughts. Just like anything else, your central thinking place needs regular cleaning and care to function. The exercises on slowing down and resting will result in awareness and retraining.

***You are the master of your brain.  
Take charge.***

My studio used to be downstairs from my dwelling area. In my walk down the steps, my mind did not automatically enter the creative mode. So, on reaching the art studio, I often used breathing and music to transport my mind to my creative zone.

I begin my day with my own personal daily practice. This practice is a conscious effort to set a positive, grounded tone for the day.

All day, different activities keep me grounded, creative, and open to possibilities. If my daily practice isn't enough for what life brings me, I increase my self-care routine, perhaps by taking longer walks, by dancing, music, and/or humming. I work with whatever tools I seem to need that day to keep me calm and connected to the present. In chapter eight, more is discussed about daily practice.

## **Choices**

You can choose what you put into your mind.

Like the rest of your body, what you put in comes out. Be selective in what you listen to, what you watch and read, what you do, and what you attend to. Seek out those persons in your life who have a positive manner and attitude. Imagine being free of endless commercials and just having music that fortifies your soul, and theatre and movies that build your mind and spirit. Choose positive feelings, positive speech, and positive actions.

Remind yourself that only you can select positive stimuli to enhance your precious life. And why would you do otherwise?

Make some choices today to add warmth and thoughtfulness to your life with music, tapes, CDs, language, and visual oases. While you cannot always make the choices you would prefer in your personal and professional world, you can definitely choose your attitudes, your responses, your actions, and your imaginings.

***Being aware and vigilant about  
the choices we make gives us a sense of  
purpose and empowerment.***

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# CREATIVE PRACTICE

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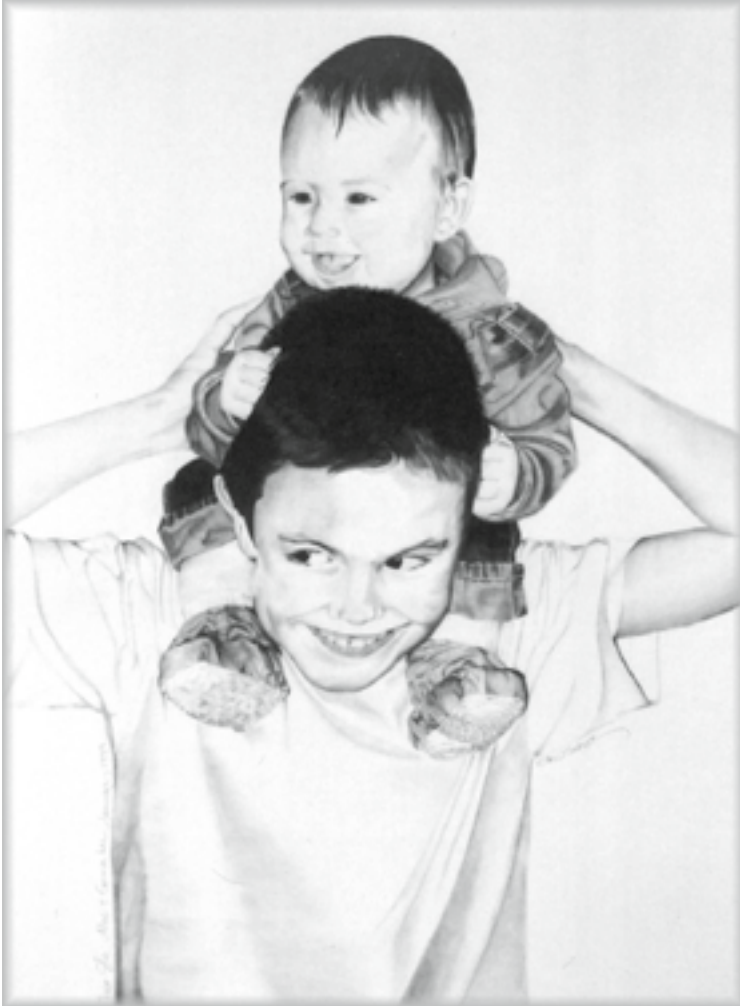
## Smiling meditation

I have used this simple meditation in high-stress times. It has been so successful that it rubbed off onto the people around me.

The “Inner Smile” meditation comes from the sixth century B.C. Taoist tradition. These eastern masters regarded emotions such as fear, worry, anger, and sadness as low-grade energy. As we know from experience, these emotions drain us, causing stress and uncertainty in our minds. The true smile, they believed, produces high energy or high vibration or high life condition, energizing and healing our internal organs and nervous system.

The concept of smiling into your own body is warm and loving. Memorize this exercise and share it with a friend. Let each process flow from one body area to another.

- Begin by closing your eyes. Feel your eyelids touch.
- Be aware of your lips and how they touch.
- Slow your breathing down.
- Recall someone or something that brings a genuine smile to your mind. Let the positive energy from this smile turn up the corners of your mouth, lift your cheeks, and crinkle up the corners of your eyes.
- Let the smile radiate into your eyes, and into each ear. Let the smile permeate your head.
- Imagine this smiley feeling in your mouth. Send the smile down your throat.
- Smile through your heart. Feel your heart smile.
- Smile into your lungs. Slowly let that smile ripple into your other organs.
- Smile into your back and muscles; smile into your bones.
- Feel the warmth of this smile radiate energy throughout your body and to any area that needs a little help today.
- Finish by smiling into your eyes again.
- Take a few moments to jot down any sensations and thoughts you had while doing this meditation.
- Maybe write a short poem . . .
- Begin each line with:  
A smile is . . .  
A smile is . . .



# FREEDOM YOUR IMAGINATION

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Imagination is an amazing tool. By unleashing your thoughts, letting them wander, sometimes to just daydream, you can conjure up anything. Your imagination is private and has no limits. You are the creator of these productions.

How can fantasy visions be useful?

***Imagination can provide you with infinite choices.***

It is here that you can explore, invent, and preview possibilities, scenarios, and prototypes of situations. By visualizing and analyzing, you can safely reflect and perhaps discover answers to your quests, your dreams, problems, and hopes.

There in your imagination, you can try “wild” if you are usually not; you can try “quiet” or you can try “freestyle.” By occasionally just letting your mind wander freely, inspiration will reveal itself.

In your imagination, the impossible can happen, and it is there that solutions and ideas are free of any constraints. Formulate your dreams, fearlessly follow your desires, and take your time to explore whatever you want to experience. Be impulsive. Fantasize without boundaries.

Your imagination can give you revenge, fame, satisfaction, and more.

Your imagination can give you new perspectives.

Your imagination can give you hope.

***Your mind is a canvas ready for any medium,  
special effects, fantasy, or state of mind.***

By allowing a free flow of imagination without judgment, any possibility can present itself. Discriminating too soon could thwart the creative genius that we all possess.

Sometimes, let the scenes play out. Something imagined does not need to be acted upon. Other times, you may just need to do some mind housecleaning to reveal the creative essence under the rubble.

Imagination can help you to recall particular memories of vision, taste, feeling, sound, and smell. Such imagery can evoke physical and mental responses. For example, a particular smell could evoke a memory, then a response, and so on. Imagery can enhance your learning and accomplishments by fine-tuning your awareness.



Many forms of prayer and meditation use imagery as a tool to focus and to gather energy. Prayer and meditation are the first steps to put thought into action.

I use imagery in the breathing sessions that I introduce my art and creativity workshop with. My students inevitably discuss how this helps them to experience heightened learning and higher successes throughout the class and the rest of the day.

## ***Getting results***

If you are not getting the results in life that you want, then perhaps it is time to change your tack.

***Everything  
you need and want is  
within you and around you.***

What changes could you make in your thinking, or in your way of doing things, to get the results you want?

If you think you have run out of possibilities, be still. Just imagine. It will come.

Learning to free your imagination and to use it as a tool for thinking and planning will also help you to increase your awareness of your own life and all that is around you.



# YOUR SPIRITUAL SELF

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Awareness of your spiritual self begins with curiosity—the sense that there is something more and greater than just yourself. Like a flower, which begins with a seed and unfolds into beauty, curiosity flowers into an intensity of awareness followed by wonder and profound appreciation.

Continued and deepening reflection intensifies all these stages and is accompanied by a growing sense of “mindfulness”—increasing perceptive awareness of detail in everything we do and see and feel.

Developing spiritual awareness connects each of us to energy within ourselves and beyond ourselves. Spirituality is connected to meditation and being mindful.

Nurture, inspire, and revitalize your spiritual self with mindful reading, participating in caring projects for others, stimulating your mind with uplifting song and music, and with quiet meditation. Your spiritual body gets hungry, too, just as does your physical body.

What is it to be “mindful”? One way to describe “mindfulness” is retaining an alert state of mind, with a heightened sensitivity to each detail. It is a way of being present. In being alert, you are acutely aware of:

- Yourself on many levels—your reactions, responses, thought patterns, physical body, morals, and so on
- Your surroundings—other people, home, your community, and nature
- A heightening of all your senses

Each spiritual path is deeply personal.

It is important to listen to your heart. Follow your heart.

Your life is worth it.

***To be spiritual is to be aware.  
As we are acutely aware,  
we connect with something outside of,  
and greater than, ourselves.***

# DEFINING YOUR PURPOSE

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Having a purpose makes life worthwhile.

Setting goals and priorities that reflect our purpose keeps us focused on our purpose. I personally find that this makes it easier to follow my heart when making decisions. My purpose keeps my head clear and focused.

As you clarify your purpose in life, there will be a growing conscious sense of self. Actions and choices will become more deliberate.

Setting goals and expressing wishes helps them to come true. You can intuitively create circumstance and act on opportunities that will bring you closer to those goals.

Setting priorities generally keeps me happier and lowers my stress level. This is true whether I am prioritizing my life, my family, or just today's to-do list. Priorities can also pull us in opposite directions. There can be consequences, family obligations, cultural expectations, and so on. Priorities involving others requires balancing, compromises, boundaries, timing, and consultations.

No matter how we strive to be aware and focused, daily life still happens in ways that defy plans or goals. If we each accept our path and remain continuously open to seeing possibilities and obstacles as opportunities, then they can be readily turned into probabilities.

Always listen to your heart. It is your passion.

When you have a big load, take time to quietly reflect and consider your options. I have experienced this time and time again: When I have a plan, I end up with time to spare. When I take quiet time and plan, life usually flows neatly into place. Not taking that planning time, especially when I think I cannot spare a minute, means that everything seems to take longer, my stress increases, and often the end result is not as successful.

When life feels misaligned and chaotic, it is a signal to pause, slow down, and reflect.

Prioritizing is critical. Especially when the best-laid plans are thrown into a loop by life.

How do the daily chores suddenly overrun you with stress? Are you doing too much? Are you doing the easy tasks first? Are you leaving the tough, longer jobs for last? These are ingredients for unnecessary and avoidable extra stress.

We all know that planning and prioritizing each day eases the strain of time deadlines and provides a sense of satisfaction. Let's do it! Write a

list. Decide what is most important for the moment and do it first. Mark it off with a huge check mark, and the rest will follow.

Honest.

## My Prayer



Help me  
accept the miracle of my body, mind and spirit,  
to open myself to endless possibilities,  
to encourage goodness to permeate me,  
and to radiate from me.

Help me welcome  
my obstacles,  
for they are the true friends  
of growth and resource.

Help me be unafraid and  
remember that I really am  
good enough.

Help me realize that I am becoming  
who I am my whole life long.  
and I am born to play, carefree abandon all my right.

Help me remember that I am well taken care of  
and that I can take care of myself.

Please remind me that we are all connected  
and that my thoughts and actions affect  
that surrounds me.

Remind me to share my gifts.

And most of all, help me remain  
grateful for the gift that is my life.

Thank you.    thank you.

thank you.