



SPIRITUAL WORKOUT®

The Handbook

by
Steven Morrison, M.A.

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www.spiritualworkout.com

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GREETINGS, BEING!

The Spiritual Workout,™ is all about looking at life – any aspect of life whatsoever – through the lens of the following 15 ancient and universally spiritual concepts:

Be Compassionate • Beliefs Matter • Be Present

Choices Abound • Everything is Energy

Have an Attitude of Gratitude • Intentions Matter

Judgments Separate Us • Listen to Inspiration

Mind and Body Are Connected • Take Responsibility

The Law of Attraction is Always On

We Are All Connected • We Are Here for a Reason

We Belong to the Planet, Not the Planet To Us

If you are like most people I talk to, you'll say that yes, absolutely, you believe in these concepts – or they at least make sense to you on some level – and it's just hard to remember them when your boss is driving you crazy, your relationship is on the skids, and your finances are a mess. I know; I get it. And I also know that there is

no substitute for practicing. And practicing some more. And, yes, practicing even more. (Like with anything else.) So that's why the Spiritual Workout™ exists – to help us move from belief in these concepts to regular practice of them. That's it. So if you'd like to see how working with these concepts will tame your boss, deliver the right and perfect relationship to you, and solve your financial woes, then get thee to a Spiritual Workout!™ Until then, there's this handbook.

INTRODUCTION

Why would someone even want to look at life through the lens of these concepts? Because they help us live from a larger perspective – that of a spiritual being having a human experience. If there is one “prerequisite” for this work, that would be it: a sense that there is far more going on than what's going on. If you have that sense, you will likely find great value here. Another reason to look at life through the lens of these concepts would be to solve any and all problems or issues one may be having in life, once and for all.

I first had the idea for the Spiritual Workout™ years before I ever facilitated one. That's because I had been working with the concepts for quite some time – in my personal life and in my professional life as a psychotherapist – and saw how effective they were in solving the issues of everyday life. (Moreso, I must say, than the psychology-oriented approaches I'd been taking as a therapist.) My vision was for any number of people to come together in one room and for someone to say something about a specific problem or issue

s/he was having, and see right on the spot which of the concepts applied to the situation and how – all the while giving everyone else in the room the opportunity to see as well. I expected it to be dynamic, fun, and meaningful for anyone who participated. And as I enter my seventh year of facilitating this class (and variations on the theme in other classes, workshops, private sessions, and writing), I can report without qualification that the original vision of the class has been realized. Week after week, month after month, people who think these concepts make sense and who desire to remember to use them in their daily lives, have gotten better and better at doing so. And they report that their lives, in general, are easier and more fluid.

You will notice, I hope, that I didn't make these concepts up. All I did was skim them from a rather wide array of teachings I availed myself of in the mid-1990's in the form of reading some books, taking some classes, listening to some CD's, and attending some workshops. Nothing crazy, mind you, and not even a whole lot of any of it because before long, it seemed to me that they were all pretty much saying the same things – and they still are. (Whenever I remember where or from whom I learned something in particular, I will happily cite it.) My thought then – and now – was what if we stopped talking about and analyzing and reading about and studying these concepts and, instead, just integrated them into our daily experiences? Now there's a concept.

Well that's what I did, it's what I am still doing, and now my life makes perfect sense. It's not that I don't have my, ahem, issues, God knows, but now my issues – and I use the term loosely – don't rule my life. And not only do they not impede my overall happiness, my overall happiness exists because of having integrated these concepts

into my life. Somewhere along the way I became an expert at doing so and I derive great joy from helping others practice them as well. I have seen up close and personally how the angst and fog and habits of life's daily challenges prevent people from having a clue as to how to apply these 15 concepts to whatever is happening. "She starts in with me and the concepts go out the window." Yet I have also seen those same people get better and better at it, even when they thought it was impossible. I have seen depressions lift, anxieties subside, relationships heal, self-esteem increase, careers improve and, most importantly, the changes are, for all intents and purposes, permanent. It doesn't happen just because people sit in a Spiritual Workout,[™] of course; it happens because they practice.

There really is no substitute for experiencing the dynamics of a live Spiritual Workout[™] where different people talk about different issues and we get to see how the very same concepts get applied in countless ways. But we are here, alas, with a substitute – one I have been asked to create over the course of the years the class has existed. I will say this: The ways in which the concepts overlap is never ending and separating them is akin to separating a bunch of hard candy that has clumped together after being left in the hot sun. Ultimately, as you unstuck them, you can see that the red one is the red one and the yellow one is the yellow one, even if they have bits of blue and green and purple on them and that's pretty much how it happens here.

Volumes have been written over the course of millennia on each of these concepts – so I am not here to reinvent the wheel. Rather, my intention for this handbook is to provide a sketch of what a Spiritual Workout[™] is all about and part and parcel of that is a sketch of what these concepts are all about. In real life, as it were, the

concepts continually and consistently overlap, but here I “unstick” each from the others as much as I can to discuss a little bit about its primary features as I’ve observed and experienced them during the last 15 years or more. I also include at least one example of the concept as it has been used in an actual Spiritual Workout™ (class or private session) and, for good measure, each section ends with some suggestions for how you can begin – or continue – practicing living these concepts on your own. For the record, they appear in the order they came to me as I began writing.

When I first stumbled upon this work and long before I knew it would be “what I do,” I had no idea why I was so compelled to do it, but I plodded along. Today, I am happy to report, it all makes perfect sense: human consciousness is taking a flying leap – upward! Everything is changing on every level and when it comes to us, humans, it’s all about authenticity or being more and more of who we really are each and every day we draw breath. Keeping this perspective is helpful and the concepts help us keep this perspective.

There is never one right way to apply these concepts to our lives. Ever! As such I encourage you, as you read this handbook, to allow your own thoughts to wander beyond whatever is presented here and see where they take you as you toss these ideas around in your own mind. And until we meet in person at a Spiritual Workout,™ here’s to our collective elevated consciousness.

P E A C E ,
Steven Morrison
Idyllwild, CA
November, 2010

(Updated, January 2013)

P.S. I think you have gotten the point by now that the Spiritual Workout is a trademarked entity so I shall refrain from beating that dead horse anymore.

Chapter 1

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Nobody has done anything to you. That, I'm sorry/happy to say is what take responsibility means, which also means that there is no more being a victim – of anything – plain and simple. In fact, it's not just that nobody or no thing has done anything to you but, rather, everything that has happened to you has actually happened for you. A big hard pill, I know.

Capital R

Most of us consider ourselves to be responsible people, more or less. We show up on time, we do our jobs, we pay our bills and take care of our kids. However, this concept as we use it in the Spiritual Workout is about being responsible to our souls, the being part of us – that whole living from a larger perspective thing. I call it taking responsibility with a capital R – and living in a spiritually responsible way.

It's Not Blame!

Taking responsibility has nothing whatsoever to do with blame.

Let me say that again: taking responsibility has nothing whatsoever to do with blame. I once heard it said that nothing is our fault, but everything is our responsibility. Makes sense to me, but only when I consider that there is far more going on than what's going on.

I grew up in a home environment that I never liked or related to very much, where communication was virtually non-existent and lack and limitation were pervasive. If I had to sum up my childhood experience in one word, it would be no. No, you can't have that; no, you can't go there; no, that's for company; no, because I said so. As such, I blamed my parents – champion deliverers of the no messages – for every misery in my life. They, obviously, were what stood between me and all the things I wanted or, more succinctly, my happiness. My anger fueled my childhood and adolescence, it permeated my college experience as I put myself through, and it became quite a detriment as I entered the world as a young adult.

Then I learned about this idea of being a spiritual being having a human experience and that I was responsible for the experiences I was having – not exactly what I wanted to hear, not least of all because it just didn't make sense. I hadn't asked to be born; I hadn't asked for my parents to be my parents and for my family to be my family; I hadn't asked to live of life of deprivation. But I began to play with the whole idea of taking responsibility and, in time, created a different story. I came to see that being so unhappy so much of the time actually helped me develop dreams and goals and aspirations that propelled me into my adult life. I saw that having childhood experiences that were so (seemingly) different from my peers, left me outside of the mainstream and the kind of groupthink that sets people on established paths where I, instead, was able to

carve one of my very own – even if I didn’t realize that that’s what was happening at the time. Did I have to have the experiences I was having in order to create those desires? I doubt it. But when we take responsibility, why questions pretty much dissolve because they just don’t matter. What mattered to me was that I found a purpose for my experience, I stopped blaming others for it, and life started getting more fun and more interesting.

Karma

Now I don’t usually like to throw the k word around because it is one, like so many, whose meaning can be so different for different ones of us. Yet there has to be something to the idea that we reap what we sow or that what goes around comes around.

So when we consider taking responsibility, karma is a breeze. Nobody did anything to me. And as I was saying earlier, if I didn’t create this experience here and now with my conscious mind, it is certainly possible that it was set in motion a long time ago – maybe in this lifetime or even in another one – and, again, does it really matter? When we choose to accept responsibility, the acceptance of the responsibility renders those other questions irrelevant. It’s never anyone or anything else. Ever.

As Spiritual Workouts are all about the mundane and the nitty gritty, here’s a quick example of how this concept really helped me one day when I was rummaging around in my basement and a large and heavy piece of furniture fell on my head. It hurt like hell and, even worse, scared the crap out of me with its suddenness. For a moment I wanted to yell and scream and blame someone for configuring things such that something could fall on my head that way and then, screeching halt, I just took responsibility. Period. No analysis, no who-what-where-why-when-how? Just me,

taking responsibility for everything in my experience, and moving on. Practicing this concept will eliminate a great deal of static and extraneous noise from your life – I guarantee it.

P.S.

Another thing I often notice about this concept is that it moves some of us into a kind of upside down place where we begin to take responsibility for things we are not responsible for and somehow avoid taking responsibility for what we are responsible for. It boils down to this: we are 100% responsible for ourselves and our experiences and zero percent responsible for the experiences of others. When we break up with someone, we are not responsible for their hurt feelings, even if we really, really wish their feelings weren’t hurt. We are, however, responsible for being authentic in our dealings with others.

In a Workout

In a private session, a client once started telling me a story about a dynamic that occurs between her and her boyfriend. I listened until I heard the words, “he always makes me feel like I’m not good enough.” Ouch. She wanted to keep going with her story, but one cannot intend to take responsibility and get away with uttering those particular words, so I interrupted her and asked if she would re-phrase the statement from a take responsibility point of view. She was at a loss (but only because she hadn’t had much practice), so I offered her this:

I have somehow created a dynamic whereby my own sense of not feeling good enough is reflected back at me, in this case by my boyfriend. If this is happening for me (and now that I think about it, it has happened with every boyfriend I’ve ever had), then I can see it is so I can heal this part of myself and wind up in a place where I

am even more of my authentic self.

She began to get it. (And, by the way, isn't it nice to hear someone, anyone speak like this? Yum. But I digress.) She began to see that it was about getting into the motivation of the soul, which, once again, has only one purpose for being here: expanded awareness/growth and development. Continuing on, I offered more:

And guess what? It's not my fault that I even have this sense of not being smart enough! I just picked it up as a young child and then swallowed it whole – just as every young child swallows what she sees and hears and experiences. It got programmed in me and so even though it's not my fault, I take responsibility for re-programming myself here and now, today.

As difficult as this concept can be to accept, the very good news about it is this: You are in charge. If there's something you don't like, you can change it. And only you can.

Major Benefit

The result of choosing to take responsibility for one's experience is an increase in personal/true/real power. The more responsibility we take for our experiences, the more genuinely powerful we become.

Watch for it in your own life and then watch out, world!

On Your Own

I think this concept is fairly easy to practice out and about when you remember that if you can see it, feel it, touch it, smell it, taste it, it's yours. It's you, a reflection of you. That asshole in traffic? You. That stunningly beautiful man/woman across the street? You. The polluted river? You. The gorgeous countryside? You.

Whenever you catch yourself blaming someone or something for

your circumstance, just hit the brakes, like I did when that stuff fell on my head. If you're in blame, you're not taking responsibility. Play around with feeling what it feels like to assume this particular position. Not once or twice, but many times. Feel the feelings associated with it. Is there resistance? Freedom? Some of each? Something else?

And let's not languish in all that does not work and is not, to your mind, beautiful. Make this your daily homework: to take note of the things in your life that you enjoy, that give you peace, satisfaction, meaning, contentment – and take responsibility for those things being in your experience as well! It is your experience, after all, you created it, you are responsible for it.

Phrases like "I do it" and "I decide" will be helpful when choosing to take responsibility. (I picked those ditties up in Harry Palmer's Avatar class.)

Chapter 2

THE LAW OF ATTRACTION IS ALWAYS ON

Like attracts like. That's pretty much what the law of attraction is all about. When we say the rich get richer and misery loves company, we are merely describing evidence of the law of attraction in action. When we see a phenomenon like *The Secret* make its way far into the mainstream, we know that there is something to the essence of the concept. I say it is always on to remind us that, in fact, it is always on! And we – in our human bodies – are always emitting a frequency, a vibration, to which The Universe is always responding. Thus, we experience those things for which we are vibrationally matches, so it is extremely important to be aware of what our vibration is at any moment. (My primary source of law of attraction teaching, by the way, has been Abraham-Hicks. Jim Self, creator of Mastering Alchemy, is another.)

One of two things can happen in this world: we can live in it by

default, believing everything is random and the result of dumb luck, or we can learn to engage the law of attraction in a conscious manner and actively co-create our lives with the living, breathing Universe. Either way, the law of attraction is always on.

Thoughts and Feelings

For those of us in human bodies in 3-D on planet Earth, our vibrations are made up predominantly of our thoughts and our feelings. Every single one of them is responded to in one dimension or another and if we are wondering how or where we are vibrating, all we need do is take a look around at what we are experiencing. If there is tension and strife in your world, there is tension and strife in you; if there is beauty and light in your world, there is beauty and light in you; if the desire is for more and more beauty and light and less and less tension and strife, engaging the law of attraction in a conscious manner is how you can make that happen.

When I was an angry kid lamenting my world of no, I had no idea that my incessant thoughts of lack and limitation and, most importantly, my ever-present feelings of anger and frustration were, in fact, the very things that guaranteed I would experience more and more of all of it. That's what the law of attraction does: it responds directly to you, whoever you are, wherever you are, and to whatever it is that you are thinking and feeling (and/or to what you have thought and felt before). And all of this, by the way, is regardless of what you may want.

In a Workout

One night in class, a woman was quite upset about her financial situation. She talked about how her income stream had slowed to a trickle, at best. There was a pending lawsuit with someone who owed her money. There was stress and anxiety about re-structuring

her mortgage and the frustration of waiting on the phone on hold with banks for far too many hours on far too many days not to mention struggling to keep the house warm and constantly wondering if there would be enough food to eat and gas for the car. She was experiencing a pervasive lack of support and a growing sense of desperation.

Sympathetic and keenly aware of the notion that the law of attraction is always on, knowing that the more she talked about and felt her unhappiness and frustration and anxiety, the more of all of that she was guaranteed to get, I asked if I could interrupt her. I wanted to help her to shift her focus onto what she would prefer to experience because it was clear and obvious to her and everyone else what she was not wanting. I was eager to demonstrate the mechanics of shifting from a series of thoughts and feelings that were making her unhappy to a series of thoughts and feelings that would make her feel better – how to really do it in the moment. But she wouldn't have any of it. She would not let me interrupt; choosing instead to continue to lament all that was not working in her life.

A phrase I have been hearing lately is this: "We argue for our limitations" (Jim Self, Mastering Alchemy). Another one is "We are loyal to our suffering" (Byron Katie, The Work). However we might describe it, that's exactly where this woman was, but only because she didn't know better. She didn't know – or at least she wasn't really believing – that law of attraction means we can be, do, or have anything we want.

On Your Own

Observing how the law of attraction is always on is akin to taking responsibility as we take responsibility for whatever it is we have attracted into our experiences.

While out and about, watch for times where you are going on and on about something that you do NOT want to be experiencing. Notice how easy it is to find people to complain along with you. Realize that you are simply sitting in a stew of your own making, vibrating with others in similar situations, and practice offering a different thought if, in fact, you are wanting a different experience. Maybe if you're all whining about what a rip off it is that parking where you like to shop is so expensive, you might begin to offer a thought – whether or not you choose to share it with your friends – that you are grateful for the pleasure of being able to shop and to pay for parking when required. The law of attraction is about energy and vibration so feel what the new thought feels like and how you feel when you entertain it. Play around with attracting a different kind of experience to yourself.

This can also be done in reverse. Begin to notice people who come to you with their whining and complaining and such. How willing are you to join right in? What do/don't you like about this? What are you doing that has attracted this and can you find a way out? What would you have to change in your own vibration to have a different experience?

Chapter 3

INTENTIONS MATTER

What do you want?

Now wait, before you answer, let me ask you another way: In an ideal world where nobody can say no and money is no object, what do you want?

Armed with the knowledge that the law of attraction is always on and, as such, there are always opportunities to engage it in a conscious manner, intentions are how we do it. Setting intentions is about organizing our thoughts and feelings so that we can emit to The Universe a shiny, clear message and thus be about the business of creating a life that is to our liking vs. one that we may be living by default.

Low Level Dreaming

So what's it going to be? A cabin on a lake? Inner peace? A brand new car? Fulfilling work? New shoes for the kids? Vibrant physical health? A passionate relationship? (Notice, by the way, that what you want need not be a material possession.) Take note, as you be-

gin to answer this question for yourself, whether you are asking for something you really want or whether you are asking for something you think you can have because there is an enormous difference. The degree to which people struggle to answer this question never ceases to amaze me. Often, after they finally do, they don't seem to be very excited about what it is they supposedly want. And then, it turns out, that they really want something other than what we're talking about, they just don't believe that having what they want is possible – or appropriate. And it takes a lot of digging on my part to even figure all that out! Low level dreaming is diluting or even snuffing out a desire before it's born. But the law of attraction makes clear that everything is possible and everything is appropriate. The Universe, it turns out, is neutral. So dream big. All the teachings all tell us that if we can think it, we can have it.

Some Basic Mechanics

OK, so you're ready to get serious about creating a life you want to be living and you get that your intentions matter. You may have any combination of dreams, goals, wishes, hopes, desires, objectives – or any words like that – but in Spiritual Workout world, we call them intentions. Now you need to know the three key ingredients when it comes to the act of setting an intention: thoughts, feelings, and present tense. If you remember these, you will go far with the intention setting process.

Setting intentions, as I mentioned, is really all about organizing our thoughts and feelings so that our vibrations are what we want them to be. I really hope I meet a great guy because I kind of want to be in a relationship but my last one was such a disaster but maybe that was my fault because I'm really afraid of what might happen but yeah sure I would love to someday have one, really, as long as

it's not one like my parents' but yeah, to be in a great relationship would be nice, but does anyone ever get that? Not very organized, is it? So what can The Universe possibly do here? Simply respond to the scattered thoughts and the multitude of feelings associated with them.

Step into a Spiritual Workout with all of that and come out with I am with the perfect guy. Whaaaaa?! Well that's the desire, right? The wish? The hope? What's wrong, you don't believe it's possible? It feels too weird because it's just not true? Yet? That's ok, that's normal. But for now remember that if you say I hope I will meet the perfect guy, The Universe says yes! Yes, you really hope you will! And hoping is what you will experience. Yet when you say I am with the perfect guy, The Universe says yes! Yes, you are! And you're off and running. (Neale Donald Walsch explains this dynamic nicely in Conversations with God, Book 1.)

So we've got the thought and we've got it in present tense language. Now all we do is add feelings and stir. How do you imagine you will/want to feel when you are with the perfect guy? Safe, maybe? Excited? Adored? Ultimately, it's about embodying all of it – the thoughts and the feelings in the here and now – such that it becomes your dominant vibration and voila! Perfect guy at 10 o'clock.

Forget About How and When

That, of course, was a geographic reference, not a prediction of calendar time. For it is important to remember that when we are talking about setting intentions – thus engaging the law of attraction in a conscious manner – we are also talking about letting go of how and when our intentions will manifest. The juicy part of letting go of how a thing will show up is developing faith in the The Universe by seeing and learning more and more about how it

works – and how we can work with it. We exponentially expand our awareness by understanding, on deeper and deeper levels, that The Universe has infinitely more ways to respond to us than the very limited ways we can conceive of on our own. And the juiciness of letting go of when it happens is that we learn to live in the here and now.

Why Bother?

There are a few important reasons for setting intentions. First, it is with our intention that we give shape to the never-ending flow of Source energy that comes to and through us every moment of every day that we breathe (Gary Zukav, The Seat of the Soul). What will I do with it now? What about now? What about now? It is an acknowledgement that we co-create our experiences with the living, breathing Universe. So setting intentions connects us with our spirituality because it puts us in an ongoing conversation with our Creator. We state our intentions, It responds. And, like we just said, it expands our awareness – from the perspective of a spiritual being – of how things work in this world.

The second really important reason for bothering with setting intentions is that it brings up any and all thoughts/ideas/worries/doubts/anxieties etc. we may have about whether or not we can ever really have that which we are desiring. Because every thought is creative and responded to, we want to be sure that the ones we have are actually in alignment with our intentions, not canceling them out. Thus, setting an intention for a perfect relationship puts us in touch with any and all thoughts we have about why that might not be possible. Then, in a Spiritual Workout, we'll work right there with those thoughts, while keeping our intentions shiny and clear.

Then, with intentions firmly in place, we are better equipped to

make choices and decisions every moment of every hour of every day. In essence, setting intentions is the way out of confusion every single time. So if we are intending the perfect relationship and we are clear about how we want to experience relationship, those who show up offering it are easily evaluated against the intention. If feeling adored is part of the intention and three dates with potential Mr. Wonderful leave you feeling unsure and uncertain, you will be able to say no to the fourth date, holding fast to your intention. (The other option would be to compromise your intention, but that's an entirely different story. Hint: Don't do it!)

No Limits

For the record, there is no limit to how many intentions you may have. You may have them, as we've been discussing, for a relationship, your career, your financial life, your leisure life, your life in general, your retirement, your physical health – anything at all. They may be big-ish, like these, or much smaller, like an intention to get home safely after dinner with a friend, to maintain your sanity when visiting family members, to listen well during the course of a job interview. Not only are we not limited by the size or scope or number of our intentions, we are also free to change them completely or add or subtract things to and from them such that they evolve with us.

In a Workout

I'd like to continue with the example of our friend from class who was so caught up in lamenting all that was not right that she couldn't even hear – at least in that particular moment – the suggestion that she move as quickly as possible into thinking about what she would prefer to be experiencing or, as we say, what her intentions were. When making this inquiry, it is often helpful to sim-

ply begin with what isn't working. For her, that night, what wasn't working was her financial life. So I asked her, eventually, what her intentions were for her financial life. "What do you mean?" "I mean, how would you prefer it to be?" "Well, what do you mean?" "What do you want?" (I told you, it's not always so easy.) "I don't want to have these financial hardships! I don't want to always be anxious and afraid!" OK, great! Now because we're talking about intentions, we'll want to remove any negatives so, again, I asked, what does all that look like? She couldn't do it, stuck as she was, arguing for her limitations, bless her little heart. I, on the other hand, was aiming for something in this neighborhood:

My financial life is thriving. There is always enough money for me to do whatever I want to do whenever I want to do it. When my bills come, I am thrilled to be able to pay them the very same day. I love having more than I need. It's exciting and fun to be financially free. I feel enthusiastic and fearless. My joy is boundless.

Of course, this is a brief sketch and I would work with her to flush it out in much greater detail so it reflects, of course, what she wants. Most likely, it would be written down and she would then use it each and every day: reading it, taking the time to actually feel the feelings – remembering, of course, that the law of attraction is always on – beginning to give and then build upon energetic momentum for what it is she's wanting and, ultimately, embodying it such that she would and could clearly articulate to anyone at any moment what her desire was. This, of course, would clear the way for The Universe to deliver, with her standing ready to receive.

On Your Own

You will be presented with opportunities all day every day to practice setting intentions. I find it very useful, as I suggested earlier, to

get in the habit by setting intentions for “small” things. I intend to treat the cashier with dignity and respect. I intend to practice having an attitude of gratitude for the next hour. I intend to get to my destination safely. Watch for how your awareness of the intention helps you to stick to it.

“If you don’t know where you’re going, it doesn’t matter what road you take.” That is the essence of having an intention – to know where you are going. You may, then, want to ask yourself, What intentions do I have for my life? You may think they are obvious or, quite likely, you will realize that you’ve never really thought about it before.

As you set intentions, remember to look for those pesky thoughts that come up in the form of “yeah, but” and “yeah right” and “oh sure.” They will almost certainly be, drumroll please, beliefs.

Chapter 4

BELIEFS MATTER

Beliefs matter because, for all intents and purposes, they create the experiences we have and will have. The inquiry we took with the law of attraction applies here as well: If you would like to know what it is you believe, take a look at your life. What would someone have to believe in order to have the experience(s) I’m having? When we ascribe to or align with a particular belief, it is as though we are signing a contract for a particular experience.

The Ever-Present, Ultra-Powerful Subconscious Mind

I notice that when people begin to look at whether or not their beliefs match their experiences, they often complain about an apparent glitch in the system. They might say, “I do honestly and truly believe I can be a professional dancer, but dancing opportunities continually evade me.” They say it’s as if The Universe is saying no, no you can’t be a dancer. Or they say, “I have been working on changing this belief for months – or years! – and nothing’s happening.” Well that’s because of a little bugger called the subconscious

and by little bugger I mean a part of our mind that is astonishingly more powerful than the conscious mind – think tip of the iceberg (conscious) vs. the vast unseen majority of that iceberg (subconscious). The subconscious (and, for our purposes here, the unconscious is the same thing) does so many wonderful things, but we're only concerned here about what it does to our beliefs and what it does to our beliefs is hold on to them as though its life depended on holding on to them – especially the ones we form as very young children without even realizing that we are forming them. (The Spontaneous Healing of Belief by Gregg Braden and The Biology of Belief by Bruce Lipton are excellent books on this subject.)

(This is what I referred earlier when I urged my client with the boyfriend who “made” her feel a certain way to come around to It's not my fault that I even have this sense of not being smart enough. I just picked it up as a young child and then swallowed it whole – just as every young child swallows what it sees and hears and experiences. Her subconscious was holding a belief that she was not smart enough so regardless of what she did with her conscious mind, the subconscious was running the show so boyfriends who made her feel stupid kept showing up. They couldn't not.)

So it's not that there is a glitch in the system – it's that there is a difference between a conscious belief and a subconscious one. When we dig up the subconscious ones, we can see very clearly how our beliefs do create our experiences. For example, the dancer soon discovers that her subconscious belief, formed when her grandmother laughed at her as she played ballerina and told her that serious people don't dance for a living, was I won't be loved if I dance (iceberg) and that one was far more powerful than I believe I can be a dancer (iceberg tip).

Really Good News

The really good news is that the conscious mind is an extremely powerful tool when it comes to overriding the subconscious mind.

Changing Beliefs is Easy and Getting Easier

“It's really, really, really hard to change beliefs” is something I hear from people all the time. Setting aside for a moment the fact that that is a belief in and of itself and, for those who ascribe to it, a guarantee that that will be their experience, the truth is that it isn't hard to change beliefs at all. In the close to 20 years that I have been actively working with this concept, I have come across an increasing number of techniques to work with changing beliefs and new ones keep coming. Still, if you believe it's hard it will be. My own belief about changing beliefs is it gets easier and easier. I'm also fond of saying that not changing a non-serving belief and living with the ramifications of that is much harder than changing the belief. But that's just me, I guess.

Truth Has Nothing to Do with It

You may have noticed that in the previous paragraph I wrote, “the truth is that it isn't hard at all to change beliefs.” And that's an important thing to remember about beliefs – they have nothing to do with what is true. A belief can also be true, but the point is we experience life based on the beliefs we have regardless of what is actually, technically true.

Imagine that you see a couple at an outdoor café and they are deeply engaged in what most of us would consider to be a fight. They're agitated, animated, and it seems like they are struggling to contain and control their emotions and their decibel levels, given that they are in public. Their fight, ultimately, bums you out. People

fighting with one another – in any form – is, let's say, an issue for you and you know it. So before long, you go to “that place” of yours and replay all kinds of things from your own experiences of people fighting, emotionally now tied in to all the things that helped you to develop that particular issue in the first place, and you're off and running. The fact that this couple were actors and that their staged public fight was part of a greater public performance, that truth, is utterly lost on you and is completely, at this point, irrelevant. Your belief – that they are fighting – is all you need to have your experience, truth be damned. And we all do it all the time.

What a Belief Sounds Like

Of course, before we go about changing beliefs, we have to know what they sound like. Sentences containing the words always, never, can, and can't, for starters, will almost always be beliefs, but they need not have those words at all. Here are a few examples: I get a cold every January. My relationships always end in disaster. I can get any job I want. I never win anything. Doctors are smarter than I am. I can't cook. Things don't work out for me. You can't fight city hall. I can be anything I want to be. People always disappoint me. I'm too old. It's hard. I'm amazing. Beliefs are conclusions we make. If you are not already accustomed to what they sound like, you will be soon because I promise you, you will notice them when others say them.

Below the Surface

Beliefs are also the root of the low-level dreaming we talked about earlier. It generally takes a bit more practice to suss out what the beliefs are that cause us to aim low, but they are always what does it.

Chicken/Egg/Chicken

People often tell me about how they believe things because of the experiences they have. I never win anything. It's not a belief, he

says, it's just the way things are. Fair enough. (Though if I had a desire to win something, an intention, I would probably say it's the way things have been – just to start the ball rolling.) But let's look at this a bit more closely because isn't it also possible that prior to having years of experiences of not ever winning anything and, thus, creating the belief I never win anything, that there was a subconscious belief formed at oh, let's say age two or so, picked up from a father who, for whatever reason, unknowingly “implanted” a belief in his young son that people in their family never win things? His father didn't, he doesn't, and so of course his kid won't either. On a conscious level, this guy absolutely believes that his belief came from his experiences when, very possibly, it was a subconscious belief that created the experiences in the first place. A classic chicken/egg situation. So the question is, which came first? The answer is, who cares? The next question is, what do you want?

Serving vs Non-Serving

Finally, I would urge you to remember that beliefs are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong, they just are. When, however, they are placed in the context of an intention, they either serve us or they don't. Thus, a belief that I will never have enough money is, by itself, really nothing. It's just a thought vibrating where it vibrates. Placed, however, in the context of a desire – or intention- to be a billionaire or, more modestly, to always have enough money, the belief clearly does not serve as it vibrates in a very different place than I always have enough money. Then, of course, all we have to do is transmute I will never have enough money into I always have enough money and a non-serving belief becomes one that serves.

In a Workout

A gentleman spoke up in class and began talking earnestly about a

health challenge he was having. Within thirty seconds he had conveyed the seriousness of a recent medical diagnosis, which included a stern life-or-death warning from his doctor. One could feel the energy in the room, the holding of breath and the zillion different directions in which people's minds were going – mostly away from him. As is so often the case, I had two immediate glaring applications of the concepts, one for him and one for the class. I chose the one for him first.

I asked him to tell me what it meant to him that he had received this diagnosis. It was difficult for him to answer that on the spot, not surprisingly. Yet things only ever mean what we make them mean. Even big things. And because beliefs matter, the moment anything happens – or as soon after it happens as we can possibly muster – it is essential to stop and see right then and there what meaning we are making of it. An example of something he might have been thinking is, I'm going to die. Now on the one hand, that may be what he is being told. On the other hand, everything we experience is based on what we believe. Times when we receive medical news are times when, more often than not, we create beliefs on the spot. The numbers are up, that means a, b, c; the numbers are down, that means, x, y, z; there was a complication, that means l, m, n, o, p. We do it all the time and, often, without realizing it. But the only real question here is, does it really mean what I am making it mean? One thing is for sure: people in life who "beat the odds" don't beat them by believing in them. They believe something else and so they experience something else. And sometimes, in our quests to change our beliefs – our programs – things happen anyway that are not in alignment with our new, conscious belief. And all that means is there was more to go because, as we've said, the unconscious, subconscious mind is way more powerful than the conscious mind. But

one thing's for sure, nothing changes without a thought.

By the way, this question – What does it mean to you? – was not specific to this man and his circumstance. It's the same question I asked another client who came in and was rather upset and agitated about something his neighbor had done. It's the same question I ask just about anyone just about any time anything is happening because it gets us to beliefs. And beliefs matter, once again, because they create our experiences. So right off the bat, it's helpful when something happens to simply stop and consider, what does this mean to me? What am I making this mean? What experience am I signing up for? What contract am I about to sign? With practice, the time between when something happens and when we are aware of the meaning we're making of it shortens and shortens.

On Your Own

The first thing to do with beliefs is to start listening for what they sound like. If this is new for you, you will likely find it easy to start hearing beliefs in the words of others. The next thing to do, as we were just discussing, is to begin to see how you create beliefs on the spot – by assigning meaning to the events of your life. This is something that applies wonderfully when your child is upset and crying. It will be tremendously helpful if you can find out from him what he is thinking (i.e., believing) that is creating his experience of woe. If you can help him to narrow it down to what is – he cut his finger – vs. what is being made up on the spot – my dad will be mad at me; I won't be able to go on the field trip; I'll get AIDS – you are teaching him in the moment how his beliefs create his experiences. And you're getting to know him better, too.

Discovering a non-serving belief is an essential part of the process of consciously creating your life. Having a more serving belief at

the ready to replace the non-serving one will help you to transcend the vibration – and experience – of the non-serving one. So if, for example, you are working on changing I never get a parking spot into I always get a parking spot and there you are, driving around looking and looking and thinking to yourself, I never get a parking spot and then you catch yourself thinking that old belief, just turn it around right then and there on the spot. Tell yourself something like oh yeah, that's my old belief. No analysis necessary. No beating-up-of-self necessary. My new one is, "I always get a parking spot" and repeat that new one a bunch of times. You will feel the difference right then and there. You are actually transmuting the energy of the non-serving belief into the energy of the one that serves. And if, by chance, you notice that you are working so hard on changing the old belief into the new one and nothing seems to be happening, listen to what beliefs you are creating about the process itself.

Chapter 5

JUDGMENTS SEPARATE US

A judgment is basically putting a label on something, calling it anything at all. Good, bad, right, wrong are all judgments. "It's fantastic" and "it sucks" are judgments. When we look at a tree and call it beautiful, that's a judgment, too. That kind of judgment, though, probably won't cause us many problems. When we are having an issue with a friend, on the other hand, and call her an ignorant slut, well that's the kind of judgment that can get us into trouble.

The concept is that judgments separate us and here's how that happens. Once I've called my friend an ignorant slut, I've separated myself from her because I am no longer really relating to her nearly as much as I am relating to the entire notion of ignorant slut. I'm thinking now about all the other ignorant sluts I know and how much I don't like ignorant sluts and how much better the world would be without ignorant sluts and in no time my issue with my friend who did me wrong – whatever it was – is obfuscated by my judgment.

You'll know exactly what I mean if you can recall a time when somebody may have put a judgment on you. I know that in the wake of my partner's death, when I was processing my way through the experience, people would consistently throw the heartbroken judgment at me. You must be so heartbroken. In fact, I wasn't experiencing heartbreak the way they were thinking of it (my book on the subject, grief and loss from a Spiritual Workout perspective, can be found [here](#)). And while I didn't blame them for putting that out there, so to speak, it was remarkable to see how very removed they were from me because of the judgment they'd thrown out. Heartbroken. As they involved themselves in heartbroken, assuming they knew how it was I was feeling, I was actually pretty much left out of the picture. They were intending to console me and probably thought they had but, in reality, it was their own judgment that separated them from me and actually prevented me from feeling consoled. Can you say ironic?

Flip a Coin

Now here's a case where I simply cannot leave a concept all by itself for I find it impossible to talk about how judgments separate us while leaving the notion of being compassionate out of the conversation. It seems to me that compassion and judgment are two sides of the same coin. You can be in one or you can be in the other, but I have yet to see how and where someone can be in both at the same time (and I'll trust you to let me know if you ever do have that experience).

Everything Just Is

Eventually, I promise, we get used to leaving judgment out of the equation. Imagine you have boarded a plane, are seated, and half the people are still boarding this "very full flight." A woman comes

and starts to make a ruckus and the ruckus gets bigger. Her bag is too big for the overhead bin, people behind her are demonstrating impatience, she refuses to move until the flight attendant comes, the flight attendant is caught a dozen rows back, you get the picture. Are you watching this woman? Thinking she is rude or stupid or selfish? Those are judgments. Are you whispering to the person in the seat next to you about how awful the airline is? That's a judgment. Are you watching the agitated person behind her who is huffing and puffing, and saying to yourself what an impatient bully she is? That's right, more judgment. (Not that I have any personal experience with any of this type of behavior.)

Now imagine yourself in the exact same situation without a single thought of judgment. Everything just is. You'll see, then, that you are left, oddly enough, with you. Your bad self surrounded by all manner of material that just is.

No More Gossip

Ouch. When I first began to really wrap my head around living a judgment-free life, I went through quite an extended period of wondering where my fun would come from. Somehow, when I'd stopped to notice, I realized that virtually all of my fun had been coming from judgments I was flinging around willy nilly – usually with my friends – about other people. I was ready to stop judging, to stop entertaining myself by talking about people who weren't in the room, but where would my fun come from? Well all I can say, Virginia, is, yes, there are other ways to be entertained. Who knew?

Bye-Bye Forgiveness

Another fantastic and, I think, largely undervalued benefit of practicing non-judgment is the resulting absence of the need to forgive. Think about it.

When You Judge, You Are Only Talking About Yourself

I simply cannot wait for the day when people wake up to the realization that what they don't like or can't bear or detest in others are only and ever things they don't like or can't bear or detest in themselves. That's because we simply can't see anything "out there" that doesn't exist "in here."

So ok, another example from the personal files. Suffice it to say that I am a fairly goody-two-shoes, law abiding kind of person who has had a disproportionate (my judgment) amount of, shall we say, experiences with the law. Specifically, police officers. One such experience – which happened to have involved, among other things, handcuffs, bruises, the back seats of two different squad cars, the insides of two different jail cells, and an indignant me mouthing off – occurred when I was learning this particular concept. Not wanting to add any more such experiences to my resumé, I decided to investigate. If my disdain for the police was so gargantuan that it repeatedly landed me in varying degrees of trouble, I was going to figure it out.

So I started by listing a few ways in which I described cops in general and came up with arrogant, inflexible, and superior. Well this was going to be a breeze because there was no way that I was any of those things, certainly not. But the breeze was really a dead end until, of course, I chose to get a little more real and look a little more closely. Ultimately, I admitted to myself that, yes, ok, I suppose, in certain circumstances, but nothing like what cops are like, I could be a bit arrogant. There, I said it. OK? And then I just stopped resisting it, stopped arguing with it, and simply took it on faith that if it bugged me that much in another, it was in me as well.

"Owning" that aspect of myself, seeing over the course of days and

weeks the ways in which it showed up in my personality, was ultimately what facilitated my not being bugged when I saw it in others. And that's the way it is. When we acknowledge it in ourselves, it ceases to bother us in others. My progress was affirmed when, years later, I was pulled over and had zero reaction to the sweet, kind peace officer who was doing his job to keep arrogant punks like me in line.

Judging Self

I have observed a trajectory that many of us follow when working with this concept. First, we get really good at hearing when other people are making judgments about other people. Then we notice when we are making judgments about other people. Then we get better and better at suspending or not even making the judgments and now we are cooking with gas. Then we go home and eat a cookie or have a glass of wine or lose our keys and call ourselves fat pigs and stupid. Really? Self-judgment is still judgment and, oh yes, it separates you from – you guessed it – you. And by that I mean the truth of who you really are and by that I mean who you are as a spiritual being.

In a Workout

So back to the guy in class who had shared his medical diagnosis. The second immediate way I had for applying the concepts that day was, as I said, for the class. I asked everyone to go back a few minutes to when he had first said what he'd said about his medical condition and life-and-death warning. I asked them to think of what they thought right when they took in what he'd said. "Oh how awful," was one response. "That's tragic" was another (he was in the room, of course). "It's frightening." Judgment, judgment, judgment. And, by the way, each one of those was separating us from him because, in actuality, we had no idea – at that moment, anyway –

what this diagnosis was meaning to him, no idea of what he was experiencing, but we made our judgments and thus activated our relationships to awful and tragic and frightening.

Imagine that this gentleman had been someone who was, bear with me, actually excited about what was happening. Maybe he was thrilled to finally be able to blow off the career he hated to focus on things that were really important to him. What if it was what inspired him to finally develop an exercise regimen and eat in a much more healthful manner? What if it brought him and his wife closer together? What if it prompted his estranged daughter to reconnect with him? Of what use would we have been to him with all of our judgments and assumptions? How much compassion might he have felt from us, even if we were sure about intending to give it to him? And what the heck is with all of our awful and tragic and frightened anyway? It's just our stuff. (I was going to say it was our silly stuff but that, of course, would be making a judgment.) The point is, it's our own and we cannot be compassionate when we are in our stuff – it defies the concept.

On Your Own

One really easy way to practice non-judgment is by not talking about people who are not in the room. That one should keep you going for a while. Part and parcel of that is, of course, gossip. If you're gossiping, you're judging.

Practice thinking and saying what we hit on earlier: "everything just is."

And watch the self-judgment. "I'm an idiot." "I'm a mess." "I am so lame." These and similar statements simply do not reflect the truth of who you are so knock it off.

Chapter 6

BE COMPASSIONATE

Feeling Sorry

To be compassionate is to feel sorry with someone, not for someone. It's to suspend all judgment and join them where they are. It's the process of truly knowing what is happening with another without any regard for what that knowing conjures in us. And that is the trick – precisely like what we were just talking about with our friend with the medical diagnosis. Being compassionate is all about listening, not reacting.

Allowing

I have come to believe that to allow people to be who they are and to have their experiences is to practice a very high level of compassion. How easy is it for you to know for yourself who you are and what purpose(s) you are here to fulfill? And how do you think it is possible to ever truly know those things about another person? Living this way, of course, is living in compassion. We acknowledge that each of us is here on purpose for a purpose, in any given

moment in the exact perfect place from its soul's perspective, and when it comes right down to it none of anyone else's journey is any of our business anyway. We may think we know, we may think we have better ideas, we may think we can change the course of their about-to-wreck train but, truthfully, compassionately, it's not our job no matter how much we love them.

"But if you could see my son and the world of hurt he is creating..." is typical of the kind of resistance I hear in my classes all the time. So is "But if I don't do anything he could die..." and so is "But I know much better than my wife does why what she's doing is a bad idea." At best, depending on the relationship, we can hope to inspire and maybe even cajole a little bit. But we just don't get to create in another person's reality and you'll know just how futile an adventure that can be if you remember a time when you have tried it in the past or when someone has attempted to tell you – without your asking – what they thought you should do or be or have. It just doesn't work.

When we think we have better ideas for those we love and care for than they have for themselves, our "good intentions" cover up an arrogance that isn't very pretty. For when we offer up our unsolicited heavy-handed ideas, suggestions, and admonitions, we are overriding the simple fact that our loved ones, like we, are spiritual beings having human experiences, that everything they are experiencing is their responsibility, and to interfere with their path is to forget that they are in a process with their (our) Creator, a process that has nothing to do with us. It's true when they're sick, it's true when they set out on empty-walleted backpacking adventures around the world, it's true when they enter into a relationship with someone you cannot abide, and it's true when they are dying.

Flip a Coin

Remember, you can be in compassion or you can be in judgment, but you cannot be in both at the same time.

In a Workout

In session with a couple, we did what probably looked like a basic exercise about communication, but I am wired to think of it as exercising compassion. As I said earlier, it's all about listening. So he would say something and she would tell him what she thought she heard. He, then, would be the one to say, yes, you got it or no, you missed it. If it was missed, they would keep going until the one who'd offered the original communication felt heard, and that's the key – that the person doing the talking feels as though he or she has been heard. And only he or she gets to decide that.

We then went back and forth for a few rounds so that they could each have the experience of feeling heard. Then we focused our conversation on how it felt to offer compassion – by taking ourselves out of the equation and really listening to another person's experience – and also how it felt to receive compassion and to be heard. In a matter of not that many minutes, right then and there, the acrimony that had been present when the session began went from about a ten out of ten to nothing, nothing at all. Simply because each chose to offer compassion.

On Your Own

There but for the grace of God go I. We've all heard, thought, and/or said that one before. Yet if you are intending to be more and more compassionate, try saying this instead: there go I. Compassion is also about seeing ourselves in others and trusting we are in there, even if it doesn't look that way here and now. As spiritual beings having human experiences, we have had experiences of all of

it – we have been the pauper and the king, the slave and the master, the victim and the abuser. “There go I” is an acknowledgment and a reminder of this very idea.

Chapter 7

CHOICES ABOUND

“I had no choice” and “I have no choice.” If you are serious about living a spiritually responsible life, you will have to own up to the reality that you always have a choice. When you wake up in the morning and get out of bed, getting out of bed is a choice. When you brush your teeth, brushing your teeth is a choice. When you go to work, going to work is a choice.

What's really great about becoming conscious of our choices is that we learn things about ourselves and what we value. I had to go to work is a way of saying that going to work was more important than staying in bed. Oh really, why? Well, because I have to make money. Oh really, why? Well, because I have bills to pay. Oh really, why? Because I like to have nice things. Oh great, well now we're getting somewhere. Tell me more about having nice things. What is something you have and are appreciating right now? What does it do for you to have it or why do you like having it? And on and on. A simple example, but I hope you get the idea.

Even Our Thoughts

When we start to really get that we create our experiences and that what we believe really matters, we see that we even choose our thoughts. Getting used to choosing our thoughts goes a long way toward feeling good. The old half full/half empty glass scenario is a perfect example of choosing a thought. Choosing to look at it as half full will create an environment for a particular kind of experience that will be very different from the one created by the thought that the glass is half empty. No right or wrong, no good or bad. Just a choice.

In A Workout

Many years ago, in a clinical setting as a psychotherapist, a client came in for six court-mandated sessions. He was not happy about this. His intent was to come in, sit for an hour, say nothing, and leave, but he had the wrong therapist for that, even if it was during my early days.

Soon and sure enough came the magic words: he was there because he had no choice. I told him I thought that was bull and he looked at me like I'd just grown another head. I said I was quite sure that he had a choice and he seemed dumbfounded. I asked him where the gun was and who was holding it to his head? Of course, there wasn't anyone with a gun (but if there had been, his doing what that person wanted would have been a choice of life over death, but I digress). "So what would happen if you didn't show up here?" I asked. "Then I wouldn't get signed off." "And what happens when you get signed off?" He replied, "Then I'm off probation." "And what happens when you are off probation?" I continued. He hemmed and hawed and I persisted and before long he was talking about many exciting things that awaited him after he'd put this arrest-proba-

tion thing behind him: a decent job, time with his kid, being with friends, getting his life together. "What's so great about being with your kid?" I asked. He went on to articulate a great deal about the joy he felt when he thought about teaching his son the things he thought were important in life. And our conversation showed him how much he valued, among other things, family and fatherhood. So "I had no choice but to be here" became something akin to "my choice to be here reminds me of what I value and, as such, tells me something about myself."

When you look at what you're choosing, you learn about what you value and when you learn about what you value, you learn about yourself (your Self).

On Your Own

This one is easy: stop saying "I had no choice" and "I have no choice." Notice what happens. Rinse and repeat.

Chapter 8

BE PRESENT

Acceptance

Being present is all about acceptance. And acceptance is about completely suspending judgment – not calling a thing anything at all – and simply allowing it to be. Many of us go through all kinds of gyrations to avoid acceptance. It's very much like treading water, where we feverishly slice it with our feet and frantically flutter our hands, all the while gasping for air, fearing we won't get any, with virtually no energy at all for anything else. To reclaim our energy, however, all we really need to do is to allow our toe to simply touch the bottom. That's it. It's right there. You can tilt your head back, breathe comfortably, and relax. Just being still. Being present. Accepting.

Better Decisions

From the place of acceptance, toe on the ground, head back, breathing easily, we have access to higher frequency choices than we do when we are flailing about. Oh look, a life boat. Didn't see that before!

Feelings

For many of us, it's feelings that we are avoiding. So, yes, it's true, an intention to be present often requires us to sit in feelings that we judge to be unpleasant. Virtually anyone I've ever seen who was in a grief and loss situation, believes that if they allow the pain, if they start crying, they will lose composure and never stop. It certainly feels that way, but it has never to my knowledge happened that somebody actually didn't stop crying. Feelings simply want to come through us and our blocking them does not make them go away. In fact, they build up and build up and build up. That is why we often sense that the unpleasantness feels disproportionate to whatever may be happening at the time. The slight we experience at the hands of our friend today taps into all the previously unresolved slights we've experienced over the course of years before we even knew our friend and so the built-up emotions all blend together with the most recent experience and it's hard to know what's what. So we ignore and put off and deny what is because it just feels too big and too unpleasant and we do it the next time and the next time, always treading water.

Depression

More than likely, if you are feeling depressed it is because you are thinking – and feeling – things from the past. When feeling depressed, take note of what you are thinking about and more often than not, your thoughts will be about something in the past, something that has already happened and which can have no other outcome. The depressed feelings come from non-present-moment thinking.

Anxiety

More than likely, if you are feeling anxious it is because you are

thinking – and feeling – things about the future. When feeling anxious, take note of what you are thinking about and more often than not, your thoughts will be about something in the future, something that has not yet happened and may never happen. The anxious feelings come from non-present-moment thinking.

Balancing Act

When we start playing with the idea of consciously creating our experiences, we immediately run up against this notion of being present because we are thinking about something we want to be, do, or have in the future, yet we are also supposed to be present. The way we balance these seemingly opposed ideas is to be that which we are wanting to experience in the future here and now, today. Be it now. Imagine you have it now. Feel what it feels like to have now. Act as if.

Creating Better Present Moments

When we begin to spend more time in the present, sometimes we become aware of how little we like the present moments we are creating! This, of course, is good news because it inspires us to create way better present moments.

In a Workout

A woman recently presented a class with an opportunity to see what happens when we conflate present moment thoughts with those that defy being present. She was dealing with the loss of her mother, which produced in her feelings of sadness and loss as she processed the absence of her mother's physicality from her daily life. She went on to say that her mother had actually passed away several years earlier and that what really haunted her was the overwhelming sadness and grief she continually felt because her young children would be deprived of the experience of having a wonderful

grandmother as they grew up. Time and again, year in and year out, she felt profound grief and sadness not so much because her mother had died, but because she continually entertained thoughts of it's not fair and it wasn't supposed to be this way and my kids are being cheated.

I understand that, on the surface, most people would agree and say, yes, it is unfair that your kids won't be able to know your mother. It is easy to find allies to offer us degrees of legitimacy for the thoughts and feelings we are having. Yet to give any credence at all to a thought like it's not fair, a thought that defies acceptance, is to run afoul of any intention to be present. When we resist what is in any way, we have stepped out of the present moment. In the Workout, we talked about the difference between thoughts that are true – she is not here anymore – and thoughts that defy acceptance – she should still be here to be a grandmother to my kids. There is no way for the second thought to produce anything but anguish because her not being here in the physical can never be otherwise. Teasing non-serving beliefs out from serving ones just takes a little practice.

This happens, of course, with more mundane circumstances, too. Every day. For example, I am currently spending some time in Los Angeles, which is a very different environment than the rural mountain community I call home. I wanted to go to a particular location and, when I got there, there was no place to put my car. One o'clock in the afternoon, I'm where I want to be, but I can't quite get there because there's just no place for my car and the lot was teeming with other drivers like me, also looking for places to park their cars. Admittedly, a small part of me was ready to rail against the machine and go off on a tirade about how ridiculous it was that I just couldn't quite get to where I wanted to go, how insane it is that

everybody in LA has to drive everywhere, usually by themselves, wasting vast amounts of energy, and trust me, I could've go on and on from there as I have, in the past, on countless occasions. But that was before I began practicing – day in, day out – being present. So while I circled 'round and 'round the parking lot, finally pulling into a perfect spot, I chose to offer myself this thought: it's the way things are here. Simple enough. A thought that was true and utterly steeped in acceptance of what was, inspired by my intention to be present. Need I tell you how freeing it was not to have gone to that other place, not to have carried around an entire litany of complaints in my mind and body, not to have fueled it by going on about it with a friend or two hours or days later, as if it had just happened? I think not.

On Your Own

Here's an exercise: just listen for the word "supposed" as in it's not supposed to be this way or he was supposed to be here or parents are not supposed to outlive their children. Play around with simply accepting what is happening, instead of what was supposed to have happened. Offer it no resistance and see what happens.

Chapter 9

EVERYTHING IS ENERGY

Science & Spirituality

Whenever you hear talk of the convergence of science and spirituality, it will usually be in terms of everything being energy. It will be discussed by physicists and biologists and scientists whose professions I don't know anything about. They basically call the energy in which we live "the field" or "a morphogenic field" or "the unified field" or any number of other names. And they say – and I can't emphasize enough that I am offering a most non-scientific, crude explanation here just so we can have this bit of conversation – that everything we do, say, think, and feel affects the field (which starts to explain the law of attraction and how beliefs create our experiences).

In spirituality circles, the energy that everything is, is generally thought to be God.

There, I said it. It's out there. (Although interestingly enough, the word God virtually never even comes up in Spiritual Workout classes.) For my money, it boils down to what so many of us have

come to believe: God is not so much an old, white man with a long, scraggly gray beard sitting on a throne making judgments about who we are being and what we are doing so much as “he” is an It – and It is everywhere. In fact, there is no place It is not. A few of the names I hear and use myself that also mean God are All That Is, Creator, Source, Source Energy, The Universe, Universal Mind, and The Light. And there are many others.

Frequency & Vibration

What I said in the introduction about people’s lives improving “permanently” as they practice these concepts more and more makes sense when you think about how everything is energy. Say hello to frequency and vibration, ways we have of measuring energy. Thoughts have their own frequencies and vibrations, feelings and emotions have their own frequencies and vibrations, and so do words and so do the concepts with which we work in the Spiritual Workout. In energy language, higher faster frequencies feel a whole lot better than slower faster frequencies. The concepts we practice in a Spiritual Workout are of a relatively high frequency, which is what accounts for most people nodding their heads in agreement when they hear me list them out and why people always report feeling better after a class than they did when the class started. Love feels better than shame because love vibrates at a higher, faster frequency than does shame. (Power vs. Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior by Dr. David Hawkins explains this idea very well as does The Law of Attraction: The Basics of the Teachings of Abraham.) So when we choose to practice these concepts, we are actually anchoring a higher vibration into our bodies, minds, and daily experiences. And when we do so consistently, we raise our own vibrations. And when we raise our own vibrations we tend to feel better and have more fun.

Physics 101

If you haven’t guessed by now, I do not possess a particularly scientific mind, but I do know that a very basic principle of physics and one that helps tremendously with understanding the nature of this concept is that energy does not get created or destroyed, it merely changes form. In fact, when we begin to look at our world through the lens of everything is energy, we can see that pretty much all that’s ever happening is that energy is changing form. A leaf grows on a branch of a tree into a vibrant green. Then, one day, it begins to change into a stunning yellow before browning and falling to the ground and morphing into nutrients for the soil and protection for the tree in winter. Energy changing form.

Why It’s Easy to Change Beliefs

I never get good parking morphs into I always get good parking. Energy changing form. So the reason it is not so difficult to change a belief is that beliefs are really just thoughts we think over and over again, thoughts are things, and every thing is energy. Energy doesn’t get created or destroyed, it merely changes form. So if a belief is just a mass of energy, it can easily be transmuted and transformed into something else. I can’t becomes I can. It is that simple, though my clients tell me repeatedly, it’s not necessarily easy – and then I tell them that’s just a belief. (And why it’s called a workout!)

Medicine

When we are sick or out of sorts in our physicality – whether or not we seek “alternative” treatments or get a prescription for allopathic medication or meditate it away – what happens is that energy is being influenced and transformed. Continually. Some forms feel better because they vibrate at higher, faster frequencies. This concept is how healings occur and how it is that prayer works.

In a Workout

A participant was really struggling one night with judgment. It was really hard for her to separate out all that was going on in her mind, particularly with regard to whether or not she should be helping someone in her family financially. She had helped this person before and the help hadn't really helped – at least not the way she'd intended. She was upset with this person but also had compassion for him. She wasn't feeling very good about herself either, acknowledging that whatever was going on now was not exactly new for her. There was also a great deal of conflicting input from other family members and even her boyfriend and she was pretty much done.

It seemed in that moment like the perfect opportunity to look at it all through the lens of everything being energy largely because this can eliminate the judgment about anything and leave just the frequency, the vibration. So we teased out a number of different scenarios e.g., the trajectory she imagined if she gave the money; the trajectory she imagined if she didn't give the money; the individual responses of the various people in her life; several other scenarios. She soon saw that each scenario did, indeed, have its own energy and its own vibration – and it was certainly interesting for everyone to experience breaking things down this way. Ultimately, there was a scenario that simply, energetically, felt the best. And that particular scenario was a surprise to her – at first. But as she sat with it, as she was able to just be with the vibration of that scenario absent all the mind chatter, she agreed that she had sensed it all along, but just didn't want to really "go there" (because it was the option of not giving the money).

On Your Own

If everything is energy, then there is nothing that doesn't, on some

level, have something to do with this concept. So I will encourage you to start looking at what the world looks like through the lens of everything is energy. If you are in a judging situation, what does it look like when you think of it all as energy? Does it help you to step away from right/wrong/good/bad? What do you notice about the frequencies and vibrations of different thoughts and beliefs? How does thinking in terms of energy help you to listen to inspiration?

Chapter 10

HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

I began to earnestly practice having an attitude of gratitude when one day it was suggested to me that I list 25 things for which I was grateful. The first five came quite easily and halfway through the second five I thought, oh shit, I don't think I'm going to be able to do this. Twenty five? You must be kidding.

Then there was the day, months after that experience, when I realized I could spend 24/7 expressing gratitude and it wouldn't be enough. That, I believe, is when things began to change. And I noticed sometime after that, with myself and others, that expressing gratitude did two things really well: first, it raised my vibration; second, it got me right into the present moment.

Raising Your Vibration

In a world where everything is energy, it's clear that thank you are

words that vibrate at a relatively high frequency. (Check out [The Hidden Messages in Water](#) by Masuro Emoto for a look at this concept in action.) But more than that, I believe I feel lighter in general by expressing gratitude because I am keenly aware of what I am expressing gratitude to: our Creator, the source of all that I see, hear, feel, know, touch, smell, and experience. So an attitude of gratitude, choosing to live life fully in the knowing that everything we experience is from Source (spiritual beings having human experiences), keeps us in constant dialogue with and, thus, consciously connected to All That Is – and what greater frequency-raiser could there be than that?

Getting Present

What have you got right here, right now, to be grateful for? The listing of things (not necessarily material) begins and before you know it, you are in the present. Fully. Expressing gratitude for all that you have in your life – here and now - transcends what if, future-oriented thinking as well as woe is me, past-oriented thinking. And being present is another contributing factor to living in a higher vibration.

Gratitude for What Is Paves the Way for What Will Be

I didn't want to share this story because I'm not particularly proud of it, but after years of feeling quite sure that I absolutely had an attitude of gratitude, I kinda skipped over something big – my house. Now don't get me wrong; when I bought it and moved into it I was grateful all over the place for the amazing, well-situated home I'd just manifested. The house didn't need anything to be done to it for me to live in it, but it kind of needed everything to be done to it for me to love it. Truthfully, I had really just bought the property and kept imagining a completely different house on it one day. So I

was grateful for my home but not necessarily my house. A few years later, long story, I was in jeopardy of losing that very house. Yikes! And somewhere I realized what I'd done – or not done – and came right around. Crazy as it sounds, I actually pretty much fell in love with my house, just the way it was. I expressed gratitude to it over and over again, as if I could somehow make up for lost time. I felt terrible that I'd disrespected it (everything is energy, every thing is alive) and, sure enough, crisis averted, I kept it my house and it kept me.

I was reminded that I needed to be grateful for the house I had before I could expect to have a different one.

In a Workout

Someone in class was in a rather agitated state one evening. He was extremely anxious about several things that were going on in his life from financial stress to his father's illness to his son preparing to go to college. After conveying to him that I/we certainly appreciated all that was on his plate, I asked him to tell me five things he was grateful for – right there and then. He came up with five, then I asked him for five more. Then another five, another five, and another five. Twenty-five things to be grateful for and guess what? Everything about him changed. His energy, his demeanor, his outlook, his face, all in a manner of minutes. His anxiety – living the future in the present – dissolved because expressing gratitude is, as previously noted, a fantastic way to get present. Of course, it wasn't the only concept we used with him, but it was the one that called out the most and working with it produced an in-the-moment change.

On Your Own

Kind of obvious, but take a shot at answering that question: What do you have, right here and now, today, that you are grateful for?

As you do this, you will see the ways in which the question deepens and how you can deepen it yourself. For example, you may start by saying I have a family for whom I'm most grateful. From there, you might get more specific e.g., I am grateful for my grandfather and, from there, you might get even more specific e.g., I am grateful for how special I feel when I'm with my grandfather and, from there, you may go to something like I am grateful for the experience of feeling emotion. And on and on and on – you will never run out of things for which you can be grateful.

Chapter 11

LISTEN TO INSPIRATION

To listen to inspiration is to know that the part of us that is outside of our bodies, in the ethers, is connected to the part of us that is inside our bodies, the being part of us, guiding us through our life experiences here on Earth. Inspiration: in spirit. Listening to inspiration is about learning how it is that Spirit communicates with us. We perceive it through our senses and so the dominant way that Spirit communicates with any of us varies tremendously, but it's always through our senses. For some people it is via pictures; some of us are more likely to receive communication through sound; still others receive impressions via thoughts and others via feelings and, yes, still others via smell, though we are all capable of all of it. Many also receive communication via dreams or goosebumps and however it happens is however it happens. The point is to discover how it happens for you.

Listening to inspiration is about knowing how energy influences us. In the past, we've left this woo-woo stuff to a handful of individuals

(e.g., psychics, energy workers) who told us they could communicate for us. There's no problem with any of that, but it is certainly true that we can do so on our own – for issues big and small. For example, we may ask for guidance with helping us to understand and connect to our purpose for being here on Earth, now, living this particular life. Having asked, now it's all about receiving the answer(s). Yet as spiritual beings having human experiences and then, as we do in the Spiritual Workout, deciding to live from that perspective, there is no reason not to be in constant communication for even the smaller things. Just yesterday I had to go somewhere during the evening rush hour. My favorite! Having made the trip I was about to make a zillion times or so before, I was prepared to go the way I usually did and for it to take the time it usually took. But something told me to go the way I usually shun and, only because I've been getting better and better at listening to inspiration, I simply went with its message and I was blown away. Traffic moved at full speed and when I got off the freeway, I had green lights all the way for several miles – during rush hour! It took half the time I expected it would and lightning didn't strike to get me to go that way nor did an angel appear before my eyes nor did I hear a voice in my ear urging me to go the way I did. For me, it was a thought accompanied by a calm feeling in my gut and that was that. I have a good friend who is shown physical signs all the times – numbers, words, etc. We're driving from point A to point B and she sees "222" on a house and it has great meaning for her, though I didn't even see it. Another walks on an uncrowded beach thinking about her father who has died and out of nowhere appears a man wearing a shirt with "FAITH" on it, a message she knew was for her from him. Now what caused either of these two to look up at those particular moments and receive messages from Spirit? A close relationship

with it, of course. Mastering how to listen to inspiration.

Feelings

This concept is also very much about feelings (yet again). I was working with a guy who said he wasn't very good at feeling feelings, something I hear from men and women all the time. So I asked him to close his eyes and to think about war. I asked him to think about all the things he associates with war. I asked him to imagine dead bodies and people screaming and severed limbs and explosions and blood and crying. I asked him to visualize military coffins draped in the American flag and officers walking up to front doors to deliver sobering news to soldiers' families. I asked him to simply hold those thoughts for a few moments and we were silent. Then I asked him to picture peace. I asked him to imagine blue skies and puffy white clouds and a flock of doves flying overhead and rolling meadows underfoot. I asked him to visualize a chorus of people in brightly colored clothing singing a joyful song with small children running all about laughing their heads off. I asked him to visualize a large gathering of people shaking hands and looking into one another's eyes and smiling and hugging. I asked him to simply hold those thoughts for a few moments and we were silent. Then I asked him to describe what, if any, differences there were. You can't imagine the richness of the descriptions of how he felt when he was imagining war and how he felt when he was imagining peace. So he learned that he had a gut, that he could distinguish feelings. Everybody can. You probably just did.

What Else?

When doing Spiritual Workout work, as I've said, you'll learn to take your dreams, goals, desires, hopes, wishes, objectives, aspirations, etc. and simply convert them into intentions. It's just the way

we roll. One of the questions that often arises in class is something like, "What if I want something that I'm not supposed to have?" I have long believed that our urgencies, if you will, the things that we want for ourselves, are really just us actually listening to inspiration. If, for example, you have felt for a number of years – or even longer – that you should become a nurse and it's a thought that just won't go away, I'd call that inspiration. When we reach a point where we just know things, that's our inspiration. When you have said, I knew that was going to happen, that knowing is your inspiration. When a thought that you probably shouldn't marry the person you are engaged to repeats and repeats in your mind, that's inspiration. And when we keep trying to make something happen and it just won't, that, too, is inspiration.

When we practice listening to inspiration, we simply get better and better at trusting what it is and how it communicates with us such that we say with greater and greater confidence, before a thing happens, watch what's going to happen! That's kind of how it was for me when I took the different rush hour route.

When we feel good, when we are feeling joy and excitement and enthusiasm and time flies and we are in the flow, we are experiencing, if not listening to, inspiration. That feels right; I think that's true; that makes sense to me are things we will say when we are aware of listening to inspiration.

In a Workout

A client was very confused about whether or not to go and spend a weekend with a former lover whose reappearance on the scene had stirred old feelings. Her confusion, she said, was due to a number of conflicting thoughts she was having ranging from rage against her husband to rage against herself for having created such an unhappy

situation to fear for what was happening to her children to guilt about even entertaining the idea of doing something she felt sure would lead to the demise of her marriage, to name a few.

As I keep saying, there is rarely one way to go when working with these concepts, but in that moment my own inspiration told me to start with this one. Then I told her that I thought she did know what to do. She was not happy with me at all as I calmly listened to her before repeating that I thought she really and truly did know what to do.

Then, practically in the middle of her protest, she said, “I know what to do,” and she continued. “Of course I know what to do. I should not meet the guy, I should go and talk to my husband once and for all and tell him everything about how I’m feeling and how close I’m coming to trashing our marriage and figure it out with him before I do anything else.” I cracked up laughing, on the inside anyway. On the outside I was just smiling and she was hating me. Well not really, but I could so relate to the notion of knowing exactly what it is that’s “right” and “true” and “whole” and “real” and not wanting to deal with any of it. To drive home the point, I asked her to tell me how she felt when she did her little rant. Her responses were in the range of strong and certain and confident. Those are feelings that confirm we are receiving or are aligned with inspiration. When we are unsure, confused, anxious, etc., we are operating from another place.

On Your Own

When you hear yourself describing a particular circumstance to someone, see if you can come up with another way to view it by using one or more of the concepts. There’s no way to mess this up. And then maybe come up with another view using a different

concept. And notice how each view feels. This would be listening to your inspiration.

Also, there is probably a thought you have about yourself or your life that you have always had. What is that thought? What happens when you give it some attention? What is your inspiration telling you?

Chapter 12

MIND AND BODY ARE CONNECTED

As a spiritual being having a human experience, the body is a wonder to behold. It is the entire way that we can have our human experiences in the first place. It's how we get from being to human being, by slowing our vibrations way down and squeezing a part of who we are into this relatively dense marvel. The body is what makes us physical, of course, and what allows us to feel, among other things, emotions. It's how we roam the planet and procreate our species. The concept that mind and body are connected is another area where we see evidence of the merging of science and spirituality as many doctors now acknowledge, for one super easy example, that a patient's attitude – what she thinks – has a tremendous effect on her physical condition. But I'll stay away from the medical and scientific stuff.

Just as we said that gratitude is a way to help us be present so, too,

is focusing on the body because the body is, always and forever, in the present moment. Think about that: the body is, always and forever, in the present moment. It's only our minds that tend to go elsewhere. So any time we choose to focus on our body we bring our attention right into the present moment. The body is also something for which many of us choose to express gratitude, for all it does for us – far more, I'm quite sure, than most of us will ever begin to realize.

In a Workout

One night a woman in class talked about being distraught about circumstances with her 19-year-old daughter who, at the moment, was living at home again after a troubled history including drug and boyfriend and education issues. There was also a lot of guilt on the part of the mom, who didn't want to be responsible for possibly having her daughter wind up in rehab or jail or something else altogether. As she put it, she just didn't know what to do. I was about to ask her what her options were, but instead asked how many there were. Two, she said. So then I asked her to just hold one of the options in her mind, to just think about it. Play it out a little bit in your imagination as to what you think will happen. I barely said anything else and she said, "peace. It feels like peace." And she said she felt it right in her gut. It was pretty obvious where this was going, but we went for it anyway and as she played out the other option in her mind, she felt upset and anxious and agitated. Those feelings, she reported, were in her upper chest and throat. Different thoughts playing out in different parts of the body.

Now don't get me wrong, her knowing what the "right" choice was – like the woman about to cheat on her husband – did not necessarily make it easy for her to go home and do what she knew she

needed to do. The fears that arise in all of us when we know what it is we are “supposed” to do but struggle with it are, of course, just beliefs we have about what’s happening. And we can work with beliefs!

On Your Own

There is a sure-fire way to see how your mind and body are connected and it will require that you have some sex and some orgasms. Ready?! OK go. Now as you engage, whether you happen to be with another or not, just bring awareness to what is likely already happening – an array of tons of different thoughts running through your mind – and then throw some ringers in there just for kicks. Is Junior ready for his test tomorrow? Love. Will I have time to go food shopping? Hate. If her mother will be there, I’m not going. I’m grateful. I’m not sure if I’m ready for the meeting tomorrow. Joy. I am right where I want to be. War. I love you. I hate you. Up down, back and forth, mix it up, words and phrases. And as your orgasm builds and, what’s the phrase, culminates? explodes? (told you, I’m no scientist) – you’ll see exactly how thoughts from your mind connect to and affect your body. Yes you will.

Chapter 13

WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

As Chief Seattle said, “Man does not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. What he does to the web he does to himself.” That is the essence of we are all connected. Everything affects everything.

What We Do Matters

For those of us involved with personal growth of any kind, it’s fun to realize that every single thing we do, every bit of growth we achieve, helps all of us. It’s not that we will necessarily perceive that it’s helping all of us – it’s a rather large world from our human perspective – but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen. We are all connected whether we are consciously aware of it or not.

When you struggle to conquer a fear, you make it that much easier for others to conquer theirs. When you find your way to releasing an old, non-serving belief, you make it that much easier for others to do the same. And as we are on the cusp of an entirely new age and new way of living as humans on Earth, there is practically no

such thing anymore as “personal” growth because those of us who are inclined toward it and willing to do the heavy lifting, as it were, are doing the heavy lifting for all of us. Earth is evolving, humans are evolving, and each of us that evolves consciously, evolves for all of us.

Reminds Us of Our Spirituality

Of course, when we think about what it is that connects us all to one another, we cycle right back to the everything is energy concept. That energy is what connects us to one another and so an awareness that we are all connected is, again, an awareness of Source Energy.

Prayer

If everything affects everything, then that is how and why intentional prayer works. Every thought we offer is, in effect, a prayer that it is responded to immediately, energetically, somewhere, even if, once again, we don’t perceive it.

In a Workout

One of my clients was struggling with a lot of anxiety about the state of the world and her particular concerns were about war. She fretted over our simultaneous adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan and she cried over the destruction of civilian families abroad and military families here at home. The problem was so big, she said, that she often felt overwhelmed with anxiety and fear and depression. And what made it all worse was that she didn’t think there was a single thing she could do about it.

I asked her if she’d be willing to talk to me about the relationships in her life. Was there anyone she was at war with? Anyone she hated? Anyone she needed to make amends with? Courageously,

she said yes. She went on to say that there were definitely significant relationships in her life that were very much out of sync, so there it was. We then talked about how when we create peace in our own world, we create peace in our outer world because we are all connected. So even if she wasn’t going to be an activist and stand in front of rolling tanks in Baghdad, she could contribute to creating peace by creating it in herself. Today. Now.

On Your Own

If you find yourself getting caught up in what other people are doing or, more to the point, what they are not doing – all the people who you perceive as not getting it or not having the capacity to comprehend what’s necessary to create a more peaceful, sane world, for example – remember that they don’t have to. A rising tide lifts all boats so rest assured that you are participating in making the tide rise and don’t worry about the boats that don’t know what’s happening. They, too, will rise because we are all connected.

Chapter 14

WE ARE HERE FOR A REASON

“I didn’t ask to be born!” was a familiar refrain of mine, living a childhood that felt oppressive and depressing and ridiculous. Well fast forward to learning a bit more about life and how it works and, turns out, I did ask to be born! Literally. And so did you, back when we were all spiritual beings in non-physical form contemplating new human experiences. In that sense, I know that I came here on purpose for a purpose and I am willing (now anyway) to say that I did ask to be born. And there is basically one overarching reason why any of us asks to be born and that is to go to planet Earth, to play around in a meat suit for a while, and to have experiences that will ultimately foster our growth and development and expand our awareness – on a soul level, as we’ve been saying.

You’ll recall that this comes up when we talk about compassion and allowing people to have their experiences. In those instances, when we see people we love heading for a wreck, we must remember not only to allow them to have their wreck, but to re-focus our

attention on ourselves, for it is our witnessing of their wreck that is what is part of our experience; an experience we are having, nay we created, for our expanded awareness.

Projects

Here’s what usually happens. We agree to accept that yes, ok, I get it, I am here for a reason. In this life, as me, and in any given present moment that I am in, all for a reason. Then the question is, what the heck is the reason? Experience tells me that there will always be something custom-made for us in whatever experience we are having that will foster our growth and development. And, virtually without fail, it will be something that has been with us for quite some time.

In my book, An Extra Year: Grief and Loss in the New Age, I discuss how one of the greatest challenges for me in the wake of my partner’s passing when he was 36, when I got right down to it, was trust. I felt as though I was being asked to trust that what was happening in my world – living without him – was absolutely what would serve my highest good. Then I realized that trust, as an “issue,” was not something new for me. In fact, I had pretty much determined some years earlier that trust – and I’m talking about trust in God and the process of Life – was something I had come here to master in this lifetime. And what a perfect opportunity there was for me to do just that. Developing my trust muscle became what I often call a project – it was a reason I was in the situation I was in and it gave me something positive to do instead of bemoaning that my partner was no longer here in the physical, no longer available to me and for a life together.

There Are No Accidents

Another way to say we are here for a reason is to say there are no

accidents. And this belief, this way of thinking, cycles right back to the idea that we are responsible for all of it. And, of course, when we take responsibility, we can get right to discovering what our projects are.

Be Present

And it is not just that we are here, as the people we are, for a reason. It is also that we are here, in any single particular present moment, for a reason. Witnessing a crime; on a horrible date; in miserable weather; on a 15-hour plane ride next to a loud snorer; in a beautiful pollen-free meadow on a spring day – you name it. It's all for something but just remember that not every something carries the same weight.

In a Workout

Here is an example of different people having the same general experience, but for very different reasons. A client who had read my book came to me because his partner, too, had died. In the early stages of our working together, I endeavored to help him find at least one project for himself. He knew that one of my big projects had been trust. For him, however, the issue was loneliness. Not particularly surprising, but very telling. He'd been with his partner for as long as mine had been alive, but he was questioning whether or not he could tolerate the loneliness. As we talked more, it became apparent that loneliness was something he'd avoided like the plague for virtually his whole life. What had first made its way into his consciousness when he was a boy was re-surfacing again – decades later. His partner's death was giving him the opportunity to transcend his loneliness, to turn within for the strength and company he used to derive from another, and to re-imagine what lonely and being alone even meant. Part of him definitely did not want to

deal with this in any way, but when we looked at his circumstance through the lens of this particular concept, two things were abundantly clear: his inspiration told him that we had definitely landed on something and that something was, indeed, something that had pretty much been there for his whole life.

On Your Own

If you find yourself in a situation that is not so much to your liking, here's a question to ask that I picked up from Rev. Dr. Michael Beckwith (leader of the Agape International Spiritual Center) many years ago and use all the time: Given where you are, what muscle do you have to grow or develop in order to navigate to peace? Like me with trust or my client with loneliness, there will be something in that circumstance custom-made for you.

As you play with this, notice that the projects you come up with for yourself will almost always be extremely simple – conceptually. Oftentimes we create circumstances that challenge us to be more patient, more courageous, more compassionate. Your inspiration will tell you when you've hit on what it is for you.

Chapter 15

WE BELONG TO THE PLANET, NOT THE PLANET TO US

This is a gigantic concept and one that stretches in multiple directions, moreso than many of the others. But it essentially boils down to this: we humans are made of the same stuff as the planet itself (and all other forms of life upon it). What we do to it, we do to ourselves and what we do to ourselves we do to it. When we reflect its nature, the nature of Nature, if you will, we align ourselves with wellbeing, with the planet, and we arrive in the flow, as it were.

Ch Ch Ch Changes

One of the ways Nature manages itself is by being in a constant state of change. And we have all heard it said that the only constant we have is change, even if we don't want to accept that. In fact, humans in our culture have become very adept at resisting change at every turn. We even say it's human nature to resist change, we've done it so well for so long. But it is actually in our nature to allow

change, to offer it no resistance which, of course, is to be present. It's what the planet does every second of every day. Remember the vibrant green leaf on the tree? It changed color, then browned, then fell to the ground. No sadness, no death, no funeral. Just change.

Community

Interdependence is another way that Nature manages itself. Nothing in nature that is utterly dependent or utterly independent ever survives. This helps to explain our inclinations, as humans, toward relationship, family, and community. It is natural for us to depend upon one another, to be able to ask for assistance and to be able to receive it.

Purpose

Nothing in Nature is wasted. So that green leaf that turns to yellow, then brown, then falls to the ground, joins with the others to insulate the tree in winter and/or provide nutrients for the soil. This, of course, is true for us as well. There is purpose to our being here and when we find it, when we align with our purpose, we are in the flow. Time whizzes by. We're excited and enthusiastic. Fully engaged. Mirroring the nature of Nature.

In A Workout

Spiritual Workouts are the most fun when we are prompted by what we might call mundane circumstances because I'm convinced that that's how we learn best and it's the entire point of the class. One day, a single, working mom was talking about her history of growing up with two brothers and learning at an early age to be independent and strong and more "like a man." I can do it myself! and all that kind of stuff. So after a valiant attempt to move – by herself, on her own – a rather large and heavy armoire, she and it became stuck. It, because it was a tad taller than the doorway she was mov-

ing it through; she, because of her beliefs about what it meant to ask for help, which for her had to do with being weak and not independent, among other things. In class, we were able to help her see that the help she finally did ask for was something that actually aligned her with Nature!

The reliance on others for certain things and the willingness to provide certain things to others is all part of practicing interdependence which aligns us with the very nature of Nature, with well-being, with Spirit, and all things great and wonderful.

On Your Own

When you notice yourself resisting change, remember this concept and that it is actually in your nature to allow change. When you notice yourself, like the woman in the example just now, refusing to ask for help, remember that it is in your nature to ask for and allow help. When you notice that you are seeking balance, remind yourself that balance is the nature of Nature as well and that it is natural for you to seek it. When you are questioning whether or not you have a purpose, remember that everything has a purpose – especially you.

IN CLOSING

You will probably notice that many of these concepts are, themselves, beliefs.

And as we know, beliefs matter because they basically create the experiences we will have. As I said earlier, I'm not here to sell you on any of them. But hopefully you have garnered a hint as to what they look like in everyday life and how they may create for you some experiences that are more enjoyable than the ones you are having. That is always the opportunity. Namast'e.

