

Amazing Insights

A Collection of Spiritual Short Stories &
More

By

Anmol Mehta

Discover Universal Truths about Love,
Life, Death, Passion, Time, Reality,
Money, Suffering and More.

Learn the Art of Manifesting Your Desires,
The Keys to Mastering Anything, How to
Turn Ideas Into Reality, How to Live a
Great Life and More.

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Dedicated to My Wise & Loving
Parents

Om & Shobha Mehta

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Author's Note

This book is a not just a collection of Spiritual Stories, it is the culmination of insights that the last twenty-five years of meditation has blessed me with. The stories are the carriers of these insights, with the sole purpose of helping this wisdom become yours as well.

All creativity rises from the depths of silence, where it resides as pure potential, until such time as it is summoned by intelligence to manifest and form. In this way these stories have flowed from the depths of my being, and I hope they help carry you to the depths of yours.

I have always found spiritual stories to be great messengers of Truth, allowing one to not just digest the insights which they are illuminating, but also allowing one to enjoy the process of assimilating these Universal Truths. I hope these stories are also savored by you, and that they nourish and feed not just your intellect, but also your heart and soul.

All Good Wishes,

Anmol

You can get more information on meditation, yoga and spiritual growth on my website <http://www.anmolmehta.com>. All information there is available for free. Chapters below that reference other articles can be found easily on the website as well. I also welcome your feedback and you can email me at anmol@anmolmehta.com.

Chapter 1

Stop The Madness of Self-Discipline

Everywhere you look nowadays the new holy grail of success seems to be self-discipline. From, diet plans, to sports, to the stock market, to the arts and also, most unfortunately, even in the practice of meditation, yoga and the related spiritual sciences. Raw material enters boot camp, is put through the patented regiment, and out comes a finished product. Discipline yourself to eat right, exercise right so you can get healthy, discipline yourself to sleep less so you have more productive time, discipline yourself to sit endlessly hour after hour watching your breath so you can gain enlightenment. Is this the way? Is self-discipline necessary? I don't think so. Let me tell you a story...

The War of The Rice Farmers

In a small village far from the hustle and bustle of the city, there lived a rice farmer, Barbary Rao. He was a simple man and had a small rice paddy, which he would tend to diligently and which rewarded him with ample harvest to support his family. Now Barbary loved to farm. He was born to farm. He loved to hoe the land, build irrigation canals, study the weather patterns, research fertilizers, and most of all he loved his rice.... yes eating it also. He knew all about farming rice. From end to end he was an expert farmer. Barbary had also developed new systems to improve the quality and quantity of his dear crop and other farmers would often visit him and his farm to learn from him new techniques in de-husking, storage, aging, packaging etc. etc. One such visitor was Coolun Das.

Coolun Das was from a neighboring village and he was a very strong man. His body was strong, his will was strong and most of all his ambition was strong. Coolun was eager for success and worked very hard to make his farm productive and profitable. He knew that Barbary was his main competition in the region and so worked very hard to learn his systems. One season, there was great excitement among the villages, that Barbary had developed a formula for new hybrid rice seeds that would double the yield of the harvest. Upon hearing this news, Coolun was very disturbed. What if Barbary refused to share the formula? What if he decided that this was too good to give away, as he had done with his other discoveries, and using it made himself the

richest and most powerful of the region? Coolun began to have nightmares. So one night he snuck into Barbary's farm and stole the formula and seedlings. Barbary was unable to reproduce the stolen formula and eventually moved on to other work.

Coolun utilized the formula and had a bumper crop that year and in the common market, where all the farmers would bring their crop and samples, he sought out Barbary to gloat. Much to his surprise and irritation Barbary was quite undisturbed by his success. Barbary congratulated him on having such a good year and began discussing with him new techniques in polishing that he was working on. Coolun wondered how come he was not as contented as Barbary. He decided it was probably due to the fame Barbary had in the region, so Coolun made up his mind to achieve greater fame than Barbary and thus greater gratification. Coolun knew Barbary worked very hard so he decided to discipline himself to work even harder. He started sleeping in the barn so that the dawn calls of the cocks would awaken him. He trained himself to eat only one time a day, so he would be even more time efficient. He learned to concentrate and work through pain, discomfort and fatigue becoming a non-stop farming machine. All that hard work brought him great success and in a few short years he became the richest and most famous farmer in the region. But alas, every year that he met Barbary in the market, he would be reminded that he was not the happier of the two.

Coolun tried everything, he had a huge estate built, purchased large farm lands, grew in political power, gave away rice to the hungry, all the time using great self-discipline to achieve these successes, but even when old and gray whenever he met Barbary, he knew there was something he had missed. Eventually, they both grew very old and as luck would have it they passed away on the same day. In the line outside the pearly gates, Coolun and Barbary met again. As usual, Barbary greeted him happily and began discussing the latest research on creating vitamin-enriched rice. Finally their turn arrived to meet the Big Boss.

Once inside the Big Boss turned to Barbary and said, "Well done my boy, here come take a seat you need the rest." He then turned to Coolun and asked, "Any questions?" "Yes," Coolun replied, "How come you have asked him to rest and not me? I have worked just as hard, if not harder than him, throughout my life. Also, how come Barbary was always happier than me, even though I achieved so much more success, so much more wealth, power and fame?" "Well the answer is

really very simple,” replied Big Boss. “You, Dearest Coolun, were meant to be a wrestler not a rice farmer. So your work is yet to be done. Off you go...” and with that Coolun was sent back down for another go.

Commentary & Analysis of Passion vs. Self-Discipline

One of the most important things in life is to figure out what you really love to do. This is not always easy. What makes it harder is that what you love to do is not necessary what you want to do. You may want to spend all your time sitting around watching TV, or playing World of Warcraft, or golf. This does not mean you have figured out what you love to do. I am not saying you don't do the things you want to do either, its just if you have not figured out what you love to do in life, you will do these things to escape from the tedium that your life will eventually become. So how can we figure out what we love to do in life? That is your first and foremost challenge and I have found the following questions to help with that process...

Questions to Help You Discover Your True Passion:

1. What is it that you like to do for its own sake, without any concern for reward or compliment? Do you like the joy of building things? Do you like to just create music? Do you like to teach? Do you like the challenge of watching your thoughts in action?
2. If you won the lottery, I mean the really, really big one how would you like to spend the rest of your life?
3. If you were informed that you were about to die shortly, what would you regret most as not having spent your time doing?
4. No matter where on Earth you are. In a rich, first world country, in the bush lands of Australia or high up in a Himalayan village what do you see yourself doing regardless of location?
5. What activity do you always find yourself coming back to throughout your life?
6. What activity can you just not see yourself doing without?

One important thing to remember is that nowhere am I saying that what you love to do is going to be easy. It may be very hard, very challenging, but what I can assure you is that you will do the hard work, with a smile on your face and not needing a shred of self-discipline.

The passion for the work will carve its own discipline. It is, like a river, carving its own banks, making its own path, no outside influence is required. Similarly when you are doing what you love to do, you don't need to impose any external discipline. You just do what you love to do. Pay attention to the demands that the work makes on you and you will find that simply trying to meet the challenges of these demands gives your life great order.

Self-discipline being imposed from outside is violence. It is not born out of intelligence and the natural demand of the work at hand. You can look at it this way, either you are devoted to yourself and, like Coolun, discipline yourself through will to attain what you believe you need to succeed in life, or like Barbary, you are devoted to your passion and you do what it requires from you. One leads to frustration and one to contentment. Time, to stop the ugliness of imposed self-discipline and embrace the path of wisdom and grace.

Chapter 2

True Meaning of Zen & Life In Just 3 Words

The students at Nowind Monastery were flabbergasted! They could hardly believe what they had just heard. Master Blumise, the greatest Zen Master since Dogen Zenji had just revealed what they never thought they would hear. In their traditional morning congregation Master Blumise had said, "My most beloved family, I really need your help. Yesterday evening a guest at our renowned monastery asked me a very good question. He asked me, 'What is the True Meaning of Zen?' and asked if I could summarize it for him in just three words. My loved ones please help me, as I don't know how to reply. I have asked the visitor to wait till the end of the week and then promised him my response. So please, by the end of the week, in three words give me the definition of Zen. The definition of Zen is also the definition of life. I look to you for help in this great crisis that has befallen me and the reputation of our great institution is at stake. Please save us from humiliation."

Master Blumise had just confessed that he had been stumped by a question! That he did not know the answer and that too, to such a fundamental question. Perhaps he was losing his mind, maybe senility was setting in, maybe this was a test, maybe he was no longer enlightened and had fallen back into Maya (illusion), the rumors were thick in the air. All the students had their take and all of them also saw this as a great opportunity to shine — to be the hero — to be the one who would save the day — all the students save one — our wise monk Tara. Midst all the excitement and gossip stood Tara, every so often just having a big laugh whenever the conversation was breached in her presence. She laughed and laughed all week in some secret delight, while the others mulled and mused the answer to this most interesting question.

Finally, the week ended and as requested by Master Blumise all the answers were written and submitted. They were to be read out after the morning breakfast in the Great Hall. The monks were anxious and excited... all but Tara, who continued to enjoy her private joke. Some monks, irritated by her mysterious behavior, finally approached her and inquired into the reason for her weird demeanor.

"The monastery is in trouble, Master Blumise has confessed he can't answer the question of the visitor, this is a very serious situation for us and we have all worked very hard to solve this puzzle, but all week we have not seen you make any effort. All you do is laugh and giggle constantly. What is so funny?"

Tara, though, did not reply and shrugging her shoulders made off toward the Great Hall for the answer reading ceremony.

All is One: Wrong

All is Nothing: Wrong

Just be Yourself: Wrong

Follow Your Heart: Wrong

All is illusion: Wrong

All is Love: Wrong

Be Here Now: Wrong

I am God: Wrong

Zen is Zen: Wrong

I am nobody: Wrong

Bliss, Being, Consciousness: Wrong

I am That: Wrong

All is Mind: Wrong

All is Emptiness: Wrong

All is Buddha: Wrong

All are Enlightened: Wrong

Tick Tack Toe: Wrong

Then Finally....

I Don't Know: RIGHT

Tara had realized that Master Blumise was right all along when he said that the answer to the Question, "What is the True Definition of Zen?" was "I Don't Know." She also knew that the great master was far from losing his mind. Master Blumise bowed to Tara with a blissful smile for her right answer and Tara bowed back utterly grateful to her teacher for sharing his wisdom and love.

The True Meaning of Zen is also the True Meaning of Life. If you can understand this answer completely you will understand all there is to understand. You will understand the heart of Zen, you will understand the heart of meditation, and you will understand what all the great teachers have been trying to teach mankind over the centuries.

I can explain this answer in great detail, but instead let me suggest another way for this insight to explode in you. Can you right now, absolutely, sincerely, actually come to the point where you can say, "I don't know" to the question "What is the purpose of life?" Which is just another way of asking, "What is the Meaning of Life or Zen?" If you can come to that point where you have no answer to offer, the mind will have nothing to pursue. As long as you think you know what the answer is, think you know what is important, think you know what is worthwhile, think you know what to do to get where you think you need to go, you will chase. As long as you chase, you will never find. Can you drop the apple and not take the next bite? Heaven is waiting...

Chapter 3

The True Purpose of Relationships

Your relationship is not there to make you happy. It is not there to satisfy your needs. It is not there to help you escape your loneliness. Its purpose is not for you to procreate, although you might. It is not there to provide you with a tax break, although you should take that. It is certainly not there for you to exploit, by exerting power and control over the other. It is not there to hold together the so-called moral fiber of society. It is not there because God mandates it. It is not there for divine male and divine female to merge through you and your partner. It is not there to play with Kundalini, although can be used for that. It is there as the mirror in which to see yourself clearly. That's it.

Story: The Princess Gets Whacked

Let me tell you a story. In a land far away a beautiful princess was about to get married to her dream man. She had been told he was the perfect man. Full of love, compassion, strength and intelligence – and of course handsome as hell. She was so happy. The wedding day came and went, the whole kingdom celebrated and all was well. The morning after an equally wonderful wedding night, the princess brought her new husband tea and biscuits in bed. He smiled, ate, drank, told her how deeply he loved her and then slapped her flush across the cheek. They had not lied, he was strong and the princess was knocked to the floor by the force of the blow. She was dazed, in pain but mostly just in shock. What was more surprising was the shock on the husband's face. He was even more bewildered.

The husband convinced the princess that he was just as taken aback by what happened and was genuinely sorry. His kind eyes and sincere tone clearly indicated to her that he was telling the truth so she forgave him and they moved on. Some years passed and soon both forgot the ugly event, until one day just as suddenly it happened again.... Whack! Then, soon after it reared its ugly head again.... Whack! Now it was too much for both to take and so they decided to seek counsel. Being royalty, all the best medics were summoned and consulted. Various theories were postulated and several cures were tried. Calming oils, exotic herbs, exorcisms, but every so often... Whack! It would happen again.

Desperate, they finally went to see a mysterious sage who lived high up in the mountains and was reputed as the wisest medic in the land, but one who would rarely accept an audience. After a long, hard journey they finally arrived at the sage's cave. He was sitting on a rock outside in deep meditation so they waited patiently. Several hours later the sage opened his eyes and noticed the couple and much to their relief agreed to speak to them. He led them inside and then heard about the problem. At the end of the narration he asked to see the husband's hands and closely inspected his palms. Once done with the husband he surprisingly asked to see the princess's hand and carefully began to check her pulse. Finally he looked up smiling and said, "I will tell you what is happening here, but in exchange you must not refuse me what I ask." Anxious to have this mystery finally solved they both agreed.

"Well, my dearies", the sage still smiling and looking at the husband said, "You sir are a great, healer. Your hands contain great power and you my dear princess have a terrible disease that keeps re-occurring every so often. By slapping you he has been curing you of this affliction time and again. If it had not been for those slaps, you would have long perished by now." What relief they both felt. Overwhelmed by what they heard they fell to the feet of the sage and tearfully thanked him.

As for the payment, well the husband wound up and laid one directly on the sage.... Whack!

What is the point of this story? Relationship produces pain for you so that you may awaken to what needs to be worked on within yourself. In the case of the princess she was lucky as the pain was benefiting her without her knowledge, but in most of our cases we need to utilize the suffering caused by the relationship to inspect closely the disease of our attachments. The pain, upset, discomfort caused in the relationship helps to reveal the attachments we have and the inner working of our minds. It could be as simple as feeling bad for not being complimented on a new dress or as complex as getting upset with your partner for giving away too much to charity. All the upsets, big and small, simple and complex have their roots in our attachments. The attachments could be to security, money, sex, power, prestige, name, fame, religion, children, family, country, comfort, food, etc. It does not matter, our relationships, specially the intimate ones, will poignantly reveal them to us.

As long as we have these attachments, and they are strong within us, we live in fear and misery. Afraid of not getting that which we want, afraid of losing it if we have it and fearful of those on whom we depend on for their fulfillment. Any relationship upon which you depend for your personal gratification and security will eventually lead you to the mess of anger, control, possessiveness, jealousy, fear and hatred. This is relatively easy to see if we watch relationships in action. So measuring the strength of one's relationship by the level of attachment is quite silly. In fact, life will not allow such relationships to endure and by producing a few storms she will eventually tear it down and force a new one to be built. On the other hand, when two self-sufficient people meet, adore each other and enjoy each other's company we have the makings of something special.

Seeing the trouble that attachment brings and realizing that love and fear cannot coexist, what can be done? Change your attitude towards relationship pain. See it for what it really is, an opportunity for insight. Insight into the working of pleasure and its child - desire, or pain and its child - fear. The way of insight is through delicate observation. When any upset occurs watch closely how you react to it. Watch closely how the storm of thoughts starts to take control. "I can't believe he did this again, he does it every time, I have told him so many times before, he knows how important this is for me, he is so selfish and inconsiderate, I bet he would not treat his mother like this, why doesn't he change, I am never going to speak to him again, ... I am so right!" On and on thought takes over and one is caught in the chaos. This is childish and won't help at all, and the worst part is that a golden opportunity is being wasted.

An opportunity to observe the self in action and perceive the root cause of the attachment. Have you ever tried to observe the actual feeling, the physical reality of what is taking place without interfering and without getting carried away into all the mental threads? By doing so, you will allow the fact of what is happening, anger, jealousy, fear, etc. to reveal itself to you in its complete detail. This is to understand by direct perception and allow insight to blossom. This is the only approach that will root out and weaken attachment. Any other reaction on your part to suppress the feeling, or run away from it, or replace it with good feelings, or psychoanalyze it, etc, will simply leave the underlying causes intact only to have the outburst happen again when the time is ripe.

The princess had cancer, which was cured by life through her husband; life tries in the same way to cure the disease of attachment that we are afflicted with using our relationships. Observing carefully our internal reality, which is reflected in our relationships, is the beginning of meditation. And meditation alone brings freedom and self-sufficiency. Relationship provides the most useful opportunities for applying ourselves in this way, so be ready, prepared and poised the next time you get Whacked!

Chapter 4

The True Meaning of Laziness

Do you think you are a lazy person? Do you think you are not a lazy person? I think a better question is, do you know what the true meaning of laziness is? I mean, until we know what the true meaning of laziness is, we can't really decide if we are or are not lazy people. So to reveal the true meaning of laziness let me tell you a story.

Zen Master Blumise was growing very old. He had been the head abbot of Nowind Monastery for a very long time and was ready to anoint a successor. Master Blumise decreed that the monk who he felt was least lazy, would take over as head abbot of Nowind Monastery. Everyone knew that the real competition was only between Chin and Tara. They both had immense character, were flush with noble qualities and were favorite students of Master Blumise. The competition was on.

Chin pondered hard as to how he would demonstrate his non-lazy character to Master Blumise and finally came up with a huge list of items that needed to be done around the monastery grounds. This he thought would be appropriate. There was much work to be done and, in accordance with the Zen teachings of physical labor, he would show Master Blumise just how devoted to work he could be. Moreover, Chin knew that some of this work was very physical in nature and that Tara, being a lady of slight stature and build, would not be able to do it even if she decided to. Feeling confident in his plan, he set out to execute it.

Chin began rebuilding the temple roof, which had begun to sag. Also, high up on the roof he knew he would be very visible to everyone in the grounds, especially Master Blumise. As he toiled in the hot sun, he noticed Tara far away sitting by the river under a shaded tree. He smiled and mentally awarded himself a point. Early the next morning, Chin sprang out of bed and headed to the monastery kitchen, which he had decided to repaint. Along the way he noticed Tara, awake, but still in bed. "That's two points for me," he thought, as his smile grew wider.

And so it went. Chin pounding away making the monastery the 8th wonder of the world and Tara strolling along the river, hanging out in

bed, drinking tea with her friends and watching the clouds roll by. A week passed and then there was great excitement around the monastery. Master Blumise had made his decision and all had been asked to convene in the newly built Great Meditation Hall.

"My most beloved students," Master Blumise began, "First, I would like to say that we are renaming the Great Meditation Hall to Chin Meditation Hall, to show our collective appreciation to young Master Chin for rebuilding it so finely and also, for all the terrific work he has done around the monastery grounds." After the sound of one hand clapping settled down, Master Blumise continued, "Master Tara will take over as the head abbot as I am retiring and heading to Disney Land." All were pleased and applauded once more, except of course a confused Chin.

Later that day, Chin visited Master Blumise and inquired about why he had selected Tara as the least lazy student. "Dearest Chin," said Master Blumise with a soft, compassionate smile, "It was a no-brainer. In the past week she has not let a single thought, emotion or action of hers go unnoticed. She is equal to Shakyamuni Buddha himself in her awareness. I bow to her greatness." Chin understood clearly and bowed as well in admiration and respect.

So there you have it. A lazy person is one who is not aware of their thoughts, emotions and actions - that's it. One who is aware of their thoughts as they occur, the feelings that pass through them and the actions they take, are the ones who are not lazy. So, one can be very active and still be very lazy, or one can be not active at all, but be very diligent. It is simply about being mindful and finely tuned in to the present moment.

Now I think you are better prepared to answer the question. I also like very much to bow to the greatness of others and I hope you will extend me this opportunity in the near future.

Chapter 5

The Saint of Suffering | The Law of Karma

Part 1 - Injin the Joyous

In a small village on the banks of the great river Ganga, there lived an immensely happy boy named Injin. He was full of the energy of life and seemed to be tapped right into the hidden stream of spontaneous joy that runs through the heart of every human being.

His contagious smile made the whole village a happy place and all the villagers loved spending time with this uplifting spirit. All except one... the Seer.

The eldest member of the village was the wise, old Seer. She had the great ability to see a person's future and every time she met the delightful Injin, a great sadness would overwhelm her being. She knew that terrible suffering was in store for Injin and it hurt her to the core to know that someone so joyous was to have to endure such pain.

Injin's parents knew well of the Seer's prognosis and they too feared for the fate that awaited their dear son.

Part 2 - The Saint of Suffering

Many years passed and Injin grew up to be a wonderful, deeply spiritual young man. Finally the time, as per the Seer, grew closer for the onset of the suffering and Injin's mother prayed hard for mercy and salvation for her son. Her prayers seemed to be answered by the arrival of a holy man who was called The Saint of Suffering.

There had been a lot of talk of a great Saint who possessed the power to relieve people of their suffering and news was, that this great Saint was going to pass through Injin's village. Injin's mother could hardly contain her excitement when she heard this news and she immediately asked her son to go visit the Saint when he arrived.

Part 3 - The Laws of Karma

Injin bowed deeply to the Saint, who stood smiling in front of him. A mesmerizing light seemed to emanate from this great being and all around him was a palpable silence; a silence far beyond the reach of words and thoughts.

The Saint looked upon Injin with infinitely compassionate eyes, and sighed deeply as he saw the great suffering that the young man was to endure. The great Saint knew the workings of Rienbandha (The Law of Karmic Debt), and also knew the secret techniques of how to absorb the debt of others and thus suffer on their behalf. Using these great Yogic secrets, he has taken on the suffering of many and, of course, was willing to continue to do so for others as well.

"Dear Son, what can I do for you?" asked the Saint.

"Lord, I have heard you are able to relieve people of their suffering?" asked Injin quietly.

"Yes," the Saint replied.

"The suffering is a result of Karmic debt and this means you take on the suffering of others and thus clear their debt?" continued Injin.

"Yes," came the reply.

"So this means you know the secret techniques for the transfer of Karma?"

"Yes, I do," affirmed the Saint.

Then Injin made a request, which the Saint had not heard to this day. He said, "Great Saint, please teach me this technique of Karmic transfer, so that I can take on your suffering and that of others, and relieve you all of your burden."

The great Saint smiled sweetly and bowed deeply to Injin. It was always nice to meet another Saint.

Analysis of The Saint of Suffering:

Real suffering is not at all easy to bear. I say here real suffering, as I am not indicating here the endless trivial dissatisfactions of the ego, such as "Why don't I have 1 million blog readers?" or "Why can't I find

my soul mate?", or "Why can't I lose my belly fat?", etc. I am speaking of the kind of suffering which makes one feel grateful that this physical manifestation is not eternal and makes one give suicide at least a serious thought or two.

This is the kind of suffering which one cannot escape from with a few distracting thoughts or pleasurable activities. It is suffering, usually so intense, that it keeps you bound to the "now" and often; this kind of suffering provides the necessary pressure for enlightenment as well.

So for those who know such suffering, what would you do when confronted with a Saint willing to carry your load for you? Would you say, "Whew! Here you go thank you very much?" Or would you say with a smile, "No, that's ok I can handle it?" It's not an easy answer when you are really suffering.

I am not advocating trying to be a Saint like Injin, and equalizing the debt of others. That type of sacrifice is not for most of us, and dabbling in such technology is downright dangerous. I am suggesting though, see if you can manage to carry your load. I know it can be very difficult, but life is not for the weak of heart.

In agreeing to carry your load, you will be able to end the endless, futile cycle of escaping. You will embrace the moment regardless of the pain it may bring. In being willing in this way, you won't be so afraid of what the future might bring, as you will be open to the flow of life. Perhaps, suffering is really only there when we are trying desperately to resist it?

I do want to point out here, that I am not suggesting we don't do what is necessary to heal ourselves or work towards relieving painful conditions, what I am indicating is that we don't let suffering disturb our inner composure and peace. In other words, suffering comes, that's ok, suffering goes, that's ok.

As the great Zen teacher Joko Beck suggests that enlightenment has to do with this ability to say, "That's Ok," no matter what the situation, and that is truly the Art of Suffering. To stare it in the face, smile and say "That's Ok, no problem."

Chapter 6

Intelligent Meditation for Enlightenment

The Best Path to Enlightenment

Senior monk Tara shook her head in disbelief as she looked around the meditation hall at Nowind Monastery. She could hardly believe what she was seeing. The meditation hall, her favorite place on Earth, which was normally full of devoted, sincere monks working hard to break out of the delusion of duality, today looked like a circus gone wrong.

First, the hall was half empty and this too during the most important early morning meditation session. Then, instead of orderly rows of monks sitting intently in Zazen, there were monks sprawled out all over the floor in all sorts of wacky postures and positions. Some were lying on their back, others were standing, some were balancing on their head, one was even hopping around on one leg, although all appeared to be meditating, or least trying to.

As she scanned the room, the sights just grew more and more bizarre. She finally just shook her head in absolute bewilderment as she noticed some monks who appeared to be drunk and still others naked! Master Blumise had sure created a fine mess this time, she pondered as she reflected on the events of the last few weeks.

Each day over the past month, the mysterious Zen Master had revealed a different best way to reach enlightenment. Starting from, meditate with your eyes open, then the next day he had said, best to have your eyes closed. Following that he had said, lying down was the best posture, and then he had said, meditate while hopping. He had carried on in this way for weeks. Having gone on to say, nude meditation is best and also, it's a good idea to drink to dissolve the ordinary mind. The great master had even proclaimed that meditation was useless and it would only drive you mad, and that it was best to just do nothing. The result of all this enlightenment advice... total chaos!

Finally, a monk noticed Tara and seeing an opportunity to get some more information about how to reach enlightenment, approached her

and asked, "Oh great monk, please tell me what you think of all these new teachings that Mastery Blumise has imparted to us over the last few weeks? He has sure confused me."

Tara looked over to her fellow monk and almost gave him a heart attack by replying, "Master Blumise is dead!"

Analysis on The Best Path to Enlightenment

You cannot rely on another for enlightenment. No one is going to save you or give you the answer. Saint A says follow this, Guru B says follow that, Savior C says, forget them follow me, all appear sincere and trustworthy, and what are you to do? Realize you are confused and then reject them all.

You have to figure this thing out for yourself and the question then becomes who or what can you rely on? You cannot rely on another that much we have seen. You also cannot rely on yourself. Why do I say that? Because you are like a crowd inside. One part of you decides one thing and another part decides against it. You decide to be vegetarian, till the part that loves hamburgers decides to eat one last Big Mac. You are full of contradictions and warring factions.

The thing to realize is that there is really only one thing you can rely on, which will never let you down - Intelligence. This, intelligence, that I mention here is not a personal attribute, it is impersonal. It is simply pure intelligence, not yours or mine. This intelligence is your flashlight in finding your way home, it is the only tool you need. Let's explore this tremendous power in some more detail.

What is Intelligence?

By intelligence here, I do not mean simply logic, reasoning, deduction, etc. The intelligent will be logical, but the logical may not be intelligent. By intelligence here I mean the power of observing things as they are and therefore understanding the current state via this direct perception. This capability is there in a human being, but it is not developed by most. Meditation can be defined as the development and application of intelligence.

Towards this end, the first step is to put aside all you know. "Bhikshu, empty the boat!" Which means that you clear your mind of all you have borrowed and ingested, thus making it possible to see and

question for yourself, perhaps for the very first time. You may be surprised to find, as you inspect and empty the boat, just how much junk you have cluttered your mind with, how little you have really truly questioned and what an amazing feeling it is to ask and inquire for yourself.

Once you throw out all the accumulated second hand garbage, you will feel the great power of aloneness, and will be able to observe without angle or prejudice. Now intelligence has a chance to function. To make this happen, turn the clear power of observation inward onto your mind and just start to watch keenly all that is taking place within. Let the understanding come from seeing what is actually happening, don't analyze.

Try this right now. Why delay? Close your eyes, drop all the answers and solutions that you have been told or read about, and simply shine the light of awareness onto your thoughts. Observe them keenly, with the intention to comprehend via direct perception. Give it a few minutes, don't be impatient. If you do this you will start to discover some truly remarkable things.

When you look in this way, the necessary action will spontaneously follow. Intelligence will then act. It has nothing to do with you, it has to do with intelligence. This is the art of meditation.

Master Blumise was trying to convey to the students that it was necessary for them to drop him and all the teachings that had come from outside. There is a famous saying, "If you see the Buddha, kill the Buddha," which means that finally, the Buddha also has to be dropped so you can see for yourself. Tara understood this, when she said that for her, Master Blumise was dead.

So do the same for yourself. Reject all that which has come from another and just let intelligence show you the Way. This is the true meaning of, "Be a light onto yourself."

Chapter 7

The Zen of Time Management – Part I

There have been volumes written on time management in the personal development and self-help space, but, I would like to tackle this issue from a different angle all together. I would like to explore this art of time management from a spiritual perspective, which I think you will find to be surprisingly useful and beneficial.

This is going to be a two part series and although the focus is on time management to promote spiritual evolution, I think what you will discover this approach to be very helpful to you in all areas of your life.

Let's pay a visit to our lazy yogi friend, Yogi Ponchie and see what he is up to. I think the following little escapade from his life; will illustrate well the first point I want to make regarding spiritual time management.

Lazy Yogi Ponchie & The End of the World

Our little story begins on a beautiful moonlight night, where we find our lazy friend in his favorite spot... in bed. Yogi Ponchie had completed his nighttime routine, which is a big ask for this laziest of yogis, and had finally curled into bed, under layers of cozy blankets, to get some delicious shuteye. Unfortunately, just as the sweetness of sleep was about to descend, Yogi Ponchie's inner voice sent him a disturbing reminder,

"You had to turn on the front porch light, so Dad would not have a hard time unlocking the front door!"

"Oh damn!" thought Ponchie. "When I finally got comfortable and was about to fall asleep". Ponchie struggled with his conscious, then finally decided to make his way down. When he opened his eyes though, he saw the moonlight streaming into his room and smiled.

"Oh dad won't need the light tonight, it's a full moon and it's like daytime out there," and so he convinced himself to get back to the most important project of the day, sleeping.

By the time dad arrived though, dark clouds had covered the sky and the great beauty and light of the moon was nowhere to be seen. An angry father then went about rummaging through his bag, and then sifting through his keys, kicking the door in frustration, as he struggled to endlessly put the wrong key in the hard to find little keyhole.

Just then a good neighbor looking through his window saw the shadowy figure pounding the door and fiddling with the lock.

"Thief!" he thought, and as any good neighbor would, he promptly dialed 911.

Sergeant Jack was on duty and upon getting the call, he, like any good cop would, hit his sirens and sped towards Ponchie's house. The siren, which he cranked up at the traffic light, unfortunately woke Dr. Crawford, who could then not fall asleep again.

Ultimately, the whole misunderstanding was cleared up at Ponchie's house and a very grounded Yogi Ponchie returned sheepishly to bed, but, being an expert at sleep, was snoring away in no time... very unlike an irritated and wide awake Dr. Crawford.

Now the story gets really interesting...

The next day, an assassination attempt took place on the President of the country, who was rushed to the hospital, where the elite surgeon, Dr. Crawford was asked to save the President's life. A sleepy and tiered Dr. Crawford failed! The hostile neighboring country, which had launched the assassination attempt then promptly declared war. Unable to organize itself fast enough without it's commander in chief, Yogi Ponchie's nation launched nuclear missiles, and received the same is retaliation. The world came to an end.

Analysis of Yogi Ponchie & The End of the World

What is the moral of the story? Do what needs to be done right away without making excuses. This is a great lesson to learn when it comes to living spiritually. Your job is to do the very task that is right under your nose right away. That's it.

Life places in front of you what needs to be done. Do it! Don't delay, don't debate, don't make excuses, don't over think, act. If you don't

act, you may not cause the end of the world, but you will create blockages in your life.

Your inner voice constantly reminds you of what needs to be completed. Not taking heed, and ignoring or getting out of these responsibilities, causes the following three problems.

Problems Caused by Not Acting Right Away:

1. Opportunities Lost:

Opportunities that may have been lined up for you are lost. Often by completing some tasks, we open the door to certain opportunities. These can be lost by not acting in time. Return that phone call, go to the gym, email your friend, do what life has indicated you need to do, so that the doors that are meant to be opened, open.

2. Consequences:

We saw what happened to Ponchie's world. A chain of events can be triggered by your actions, or inactions. So heed your inner voice and do what you know you need to get done, right away. It is very possible that not you, but others have to suffer because you did not carry your load in time. I know you don't want to be responsible for World War III :-).

Along the same lines, I often notice that tasks not done in time, can often create much bigger problems, if left to fester. Like that glass left on the dinning table, that then gets knocked over by the kids and creates a big mess. I see such consequences all the time.

3. Back-log Forms:

As the list of tasks accumulate, you start to get dragged down by the weight of these pending duties. You don't feel very light or energetic and it eats away at you subtly from inside. When you clear your slate, you not only feel energized, but you make room for your life to move forward and for new pathways to open up. Otherwise, you start to stagnate.

Summary:

One of the biggest challenges you will face when trying to go about doing what needs to be right away, is your mind. The mind is very manipulative and a master at making excuses. You will have to be very aware; to catch when you are just making excuses, and you will have to be strong to not give in to them.

The one very good thing about this technique is that it creates it's own momentum. In other words, the more you are on the ball, getting things done, the more energy you will find yourself having and the more confident and ready you will feel when the next task arrives. So just get started. In any moment when a task pops up for you to do, remember the Nike commercial and Just Do It.

In part 2 of this series, on spiritual time management, we will pay a visit to Nowind Monastery, where I hear Zen Master Blumise has gone crazy and is running around slapping everybody. Now I wonder what that is all about?

Chapter 8

The Zen of Time Management – Part II

In The Zen of Time Management – Part one; we introduced the key concept of doing things right away. So, whenever life popped up with a task to do, the idea was to try to reject all excuses and make every effort to try and respond to that challenge and get the work done.

This approach would then allow new opportunities to emerge and prevent the mind from being weighed down with clutter and incomplete tasks. In this second part of the series, we will continue to understand time, and time management from the perspective of a spiritual heart.

To understand this next important concept in time management, let us pay a visit to our favorite monastery and see what Zen Master Blumise is up to there.

Zen Master Blumise on a Whacking Spree

There was chaos at Nowind Monastery. The monks were running scared and the cause of their fear was none other than the head abbot, Zen Master Blumise. They all knew that the only monk who could help them in such desperate times was senior monk Tara, and the monks were running around frantically trying to find her.

Finally, a group located her sitting by the river enjoying the late afternoon sun.

"What's all this ruckus about?" she asked, rather alarmed at seeing a gang of anxious monks approaching her. "And why is one side of each of your faces red?" she continued, noticing the glowing redness on the left cheek of every monk.

"Master Blumise has lost his marbles," replied Chin. "He is running around the monastery asking everyone what time is it? And as soon as you tell him the time, he gives you one tight slap and moves on to the next victim. In fact, he has slapped monk Gzan twice today already, see both his cheeks are red!" Chin exclaimed, while pointing out Gzan's very red face.

"The old bugger is still pretty strong," muttered Gzan.

Just then a very irritated Master Blumise burst onto the scene.

"Tara!" he yelled, "What time is it?"

Tara looked up calmly, smiled and said, "The time is now, Master," and that was the end of that. Master Blumise bowed deeply to his beloved student and left the now awakened congregation of monks to reflect on this right answer.

Analysis of Zen Master Blumise on a Whacking Spree

This is of course the ultimate concept of time when it comes to the spiritual dimension. This approach cuts across all the great schools of spirituality, whether that be Zen Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta, Gyan Yoga, Sufism, etc. Without fail, each enlightened master has stressed the need to be mindful of the moment, aware of the now, a witness to the ego in action and those who heed this advice uncover the True Nature of Reality.

Live One Moment at a Time:

To a master, the time is always *now*. This means that the linear view of time, especially with regard to personal gain or loss, is simply rejected. Thus, all that matters is, now. In part one we discussed the importance of doing things right away, and here we take it a step further, in indicating that live as much as you can in this very moment.

This, of course, has nothing to do with maximizing pleasure, what is being said here is that *attend* to and embrace the moment, and don't stray constantly to the past and future. All you have is the now, so don't miss that, everything else is only a concept. With regard to time management, this means that the time that is most critical to manage is the very moment that you are in. If you take care of each moment in your life, you will end up taking care of your life.

Live One Day at a Time:

I would like to mention here that, although the emphasis is on living one moment at a time, it is also a very good approach to extend this to living one day at a time. Just make each day go right. In each day,

try to include the key components of a spiritual life. Just do these tasks and let the results flow on their own.

The Importance of Leisure:

There is one more important view of time, from the spiritual perspective, that I did not include in this series because I will cover it in more detail in the story Money Money Money and the Path to Enlightenment (Chapter 16). That story, indicates the right use of money, which is to buy us leisure. Leisure is critical to your spiritual growth.

So in addition to doing things right away and being mindful of the now, it is important to organize your life so that you maximize leisure. This leisure though, should not then be squandered on endless entertainment. This leisure can provide the right atmosphere for self-inquiry to take place and insight to explode. So don't make commitments that force you to be so busy that all leisure is lost. Make your commitments wisely.

So from a spiritual perspective, time management is all about managing time so you can then discover the timeless.

Chapter 9

Kundalini Yoga Battles Zen Meditation

Kundalini Tantra Yoga vs. Zazen Zen Meditation! Now that's a heavy weight bout if I ever saw one. Those of us familiar with the rich spiritual landscape sometimes come across really tasty debates (much more so since Al Gore invented the internet of course ;-)) and of the many such wonderful discussions out there, this one certainly ranks high up on the list. Forget Ali vs. Frazer's Thrilla In Manila - - this war is far more enticing - Kundalini Yoga vs. Zen Meditation - Prana vs. Jyana. Yes sir let the battle begin.

The story below I think will help reveal the Truth on which one stands supreme, Kundalini Tantra Yoga or Zazen Zen Meditation.

Kundalini Yoga vs. Zen Meditation - Prana vs. Jyana

It was a great time in the history of man. The pursuit of the Truth was considered the greatest undertaking and society built itself to support the passions of such men and women. During this era of wisdom and love, one family stood apart from the rest, on grounds of having produced some of the greatest Yogis and Monks of that time. Lady Shanti, much to the envy of her friends, was married into this esteemed family.

In due course she got pregnant and to everyone's delight, not only was it determined that she was carrying twins, it was also determined that they were due to arrive on Maha Shivratri. Maha Shivratri, is the day dedicated to Lord Shiva and is considered the most auspicious day of the year. Lord Shiva is considered the God of the Yogis and the Deity for those of you who follow the path of Jyana (Wisdom) Yoga. A massive yagna (prayer) was planned for that day and Shanti, after a trouble free labor, gave birth to two healthy sons. They were appropriately named Yoga-ji and Zen-ji.

As per their names and true to the legacy of their family each grew to be a spiritual giant. Yoga-ji, who had been sent to a Kundalini Yoga Ashram for his studies, became a Master of Kundalini Tantra Yoga and Zen-ji, who had been sent to a Buddhism Monastery, becomes a Zen Master. Both were immensely powerful personalities, highly respected with large following and, of course, each convinced that their particular

training was the supreme path to follow for enlightenment. In addition, each considered himself to be the greatest spiritual being their family had ever produced. Here is what transpired when both returned home to wish Shanti a Happy Mother's day.

Soon after pleasantries had been exchanged, the battle of the sciences began. Kundalini Tantra Yoga versus Zazen Zen Meditation.

"Kundalini Yoga is undoubtedly the path to take for moksha and nirvana. This science gives you complete knowledge of Kundalini Shakti (energy) and how to manipulate her by using prana (life-force component of the breath). I can rotate prana thousands of times a second through my chakras (energy vortexes), thus clearing my emotional past and merging with Super Consciousness," Yoga-ji asserted confidently.

"Kundalini Shakti rises in me automatically when I sit for Zazen, I don't even need to toy around with prana. Sniffing through one nostril, then the next, what rubbish. I simply turn my glance to my thoughts and the intensity of my witnessing demands she rise and function within me. She then dissolves the jam of emotion soaked thoughts and clears the way for the light of Truth to shine through," Zen-ji responded disdainfully.

"Hah! Kundalini therefore moves in you just by chance and only as she pleases. I direct her as I please. By the knowledge of Tantra Yoga techniques I am able to maneuver her to work for me, to cure any illnesses or bestow great powers," came the retort from Yoga-ji.

"Those who practice Zazen are able to find a state of non-dual awareness which is optimum for their health so they seldom get sick in the first place. Your Kundalini Yoga practice allows for these acquisitions which binds you to desire and makes you greedy," Zen-ji fired back.

"It's better than becoming schizophrenic. Big Non-dual Mind trying to extinguish the Little Ego Mind. Compartmentalizing your brain and self into two realities, you don't need to find God, you need to find a therapist." The debate started to turn a little ugly.

"Psychosis! That is the result of YOUR Kundalini Yoga practice. Messing around with Cosmic energies, forcing her to awaken and then

unable to deal with her power, having to check into a mental hospital," Zen-ji spat back.

"At least we show the courage and heart to confront danger in order to attain the highest goal via the fastest path. You Zen monks have to spend 30 years watching your breath go in and out, in and out and then at the end of it you catch a small glimpse of heaven. The brave are not deterred by a little danger," Yoga-ji shouted back.

"Even without a glimpse of heaven we march on. That is how strong Zazen makes us. We are able to handle any contingency in life. If heaven comes we smile and even if hell comes we smile. We free ourselves from duality and desire. You do nothing but chase," Zen-ji yelled back.

"We converge all our desires into one big wave. To merge with the Supreme, you just confuse yourselves about having no desire, without which, how can you act?" A now heavy breathing Yoga-ji hissed back.

That's when Dad, having had enough, intervened. "Stop it! Today is Mother's Day can't we have peace for just this one day for her sake. You are both a disgrace to your respective teachings. I suggest you go ask your mother who is the greatest spiritual one this family has produced, she never lies and her declaration can settle this argument." Yoga-ji and Zen-ji agreed and approached Shanti with their question.

Shanti looked affectionately at her two wonderful sons and in her infinite wisdom replied, "Yoga-ji you would be the greatest spiritual being if you learned the secrets of Zen Meditation," and then turning to Zen-ji said, "Zen-ji, without a doubt you would be the greatest spiritual being if you learned the secrets of Kundalini Tantra Yoga," and that was the end of that.

Commentary

Both paths will take you to enlightenment. Speaking broadly, Kundalini Yoga is a path of using the body, while; Zen Meditation is a path of using the mind. Why not use both great teachings to help you with your spiritual evolution? Body by Yoga, Mind by Zen, or, Yoga Body Zen Mind. My personal insight and knowledge of Kundalini Shakti came first from meditation. During meditation Kundalini would rise with great power through my spine, forcing it to elongate and

straighten, filling me with the necessary energy to penetrate the veil of thoughts. Later, I developed my expertise in Kundalini Yoga and understood Kundalini Shakti via the tantric techniques of this great science.

The discussion above between Yoga-ji and Zen-ji is also filled with wisdom which is worth digesting. I will highlight one point for each of these sciences below, which I feel, are worth repeating.

Kundalini Tantra Yoga Important Highlight

As Yoga-ji acknowledges there is a danger factor with practicing Kundalini Yoga. So please make sure you familiarize yourself with the correct guidelines for doing Kundalini Yoga, before starting your practice.

Zazen Zen Meditation Important Highlight

As Zen-ji points out, one of the keys to Zen Meditation is to practice without any emphasis on gaining ideas and to approach all things with a non-dual attitude. Whether it be heaven or hell, to not lose one's composure and remain undisturbed by the storms life throws at you.

Chapter 10

Four Word Sacred Mantra to Trigger Enlightenment

These four words are the greatest mantra in the Universe. If you can chant this mantra sincerely, Enlightenment is yours. In fact if you can chant this mantra sincerely, you have completed your evolution and nature will no longer include you in the cycles of life and death. Here is a story to demonstrate the incredible power of this mantra.

Raja Antkarma was a tremendously powerful emperor. He had performed the Ashwamedha Yagna (where a special horse roams all the kingdoms and if stopped by any king, war is declared and the defiant king must be defeated) successfully and was considered the ruler of the known world. Filled with this great sense of power he summoned his wise court adviser, Guptjeet, and asked him, "Tell me Guptjeet, is there any man on this planet known to you who is more powerful than me?"

Guptjeet, knowing his response was not what the King was looking to hear said, "O Lord, you have performed Ashwamedha Yagna, you have conquered all known kingdoms and are ruler of this world."

"GUPTJEET! You have not answered my question. Don't play games with me. Give me a straight answer," barked the King back.

"My Lord, if you insist. You are not the most powerful man I know. Zen Master Blumise is more powerful than even you," replied Guptjeet directly.

The King was bewildered. A Zen monk, more powerful than him!! This he had to see for himself, thus, the very next day Zen Master Blumise was summoned to the palace.

The next day...

A great hush fell over the entire court as Master Blumise made his way in. The very atmosphere seemed to get charged as he walked towards the throne. He moved so gracefully he almost seemed to float in the air. This mysterious, gentle, yet obviously self-assured old man mesmerized all the members of the court. Even the flowers seemed to turn and bow to him as he passed by them silently.

"My Lord," said Master Blumise bowing. "You have called for me. How can I be of service?"

"Greetings Zen Master," replied the King, also evidently shaken by the mere presence of the man now standing confidently in front of him. "I have summoned you here as I was informed that you are more powerful than me. As much as I hate to admit it, now that I have met you, I have to agree that this is true. You have no crown, no army, no weapons, no wealth, but you exude an incredible palpable power. I pray you tell me the secret of this unearthly strength you possess?"

Master Blumise smiled. Pretended to think for a moment and then said, "Great King. I will tell you my secret, but first you must give me what I ask."

"Ask away," replied the King, eager to be proxy to this great wisdom.

"So be it, I will tell you... if you give me your kingdom," Master Blumise requested casually.

A murmur spread through the court. The King was also taken aback. He tried to think fast. "Master Blumise, I cannot do that as I have promised the Kingdom already to my eldest son. Please ask for something else."

"Very well," replied Master Blumise and with a twinkle in his eye asked, "You have a most beautiful queen. I will tell you if you let me sleep with her."

The King turned red. All sorts of violent thoughts coursed through his mind, but gathering himself he replied with as much composure as he could, "Master Blumise, please you ask too much. Something else perhaps?"

"Ok," said Master Blumise obviously enjoying this dialogue immensely. "I will tell you in exchange for your eyes."

"No, Master Blu..." exclaimed the King back.

"Ok, just your left eye," interjected Blumise and before the King could reply he continued. "You see great King this is why I am more powerful than you. It is because the following 4 words are true for me and not true for you. These four words are *I Don't Want Anything*."

Not wanting anything makes me completely invincible and fearless. You want and thus are attached to your kingdom, your wife, your body etc. I am attached to nothing. I seek nothing. I want nothing. Thus, I am untouchable. This is the secret to not only great power, but, is also the secret to enlightenment."

Upon hearing these words, Guptjeet was immediately enlightened. This insight exploded within him and all chasing spontaneously ceased. All seeking ended. A great freedom descended on him and he laughed at the comedy of it all. Enlightenment was always so near and the only thing keeping it away was the ever wanting mind.

Of all the mantras this is the one to embrace. "I Don't Want Anything!" If it's true for you, you are free, if it's not true, you are still a prisoner.

Chapter 11

It's Wonderful But Dangerous to Your Meditation Practice

This story is about something that is a wonderful part of all our lives. We each enjoy this activity and participate in it regularly, but unfortunately this activity can be quite dangerous to the health of your meditation, yoga and other spiritual practices. Here is a little story to help shed some light on this curious puzzle.

Monk Tataga was a new member of Nowind Monastery and he was busy familiarizing himself with his new duties and responsibilities. He had been given two major tasks to start out with. The first was to be the driver for Zen Master Blumise and the second was to work the front desk and guest reservations at the new Monastery Spa. Both tasks were well within his abilities and he was confident of being able to handle them without much difficulty, except for just one item that was confusing to him. Wanting clarity, he approached senior Monk Tara for clarification regarding it.

"Taraji, one item in my list of responsibilities has me very confused," he said. "You see, the other day I drove Master Blumise to the city and dropped him at Henry Brown's house to spend the weekend. This of course would be fine, except that when I work the front desk, it says there clearly that Mr. Henry Brown is not to be allowed into the spa under any circumstances? So I thought he must be a big troublemaker or unwanted person, because, he is the only person who is on the "Do Not Allow In" list. So now I am confused about this whole situation with Mr. Brown."

Tara had a big laugh and said, "Henry and Master Blumise are actually very good friends."

"Good friends? Now I am even more lost," replied a befuddled Tataga.

"Yes, you see Henry has been trying for years to establish a strong meditation practice. He is actually able to get it going, but Henry loves to go on vacations. Every time his practice is about to take hold, he has an urge for another vacation and when he returns, his daily sadhana (spiritual practice) is back to square one as he is unable to pick up where he left off. So Master Blumise has spoken to all the

places he likes to go vacationing and gotten him barred from everywhere."

"Well, Master Blumise certainly is an interesting friend to have," acknowledged Tataga now having understood.

Vacations: Wonderful... absolutely, but, it's the one event I have seen time and again be a disruptive force in the establishing of a spiritual practice, especially for beginners. Does this mean you should get yourself black listed from all your favorite vacation spots? Well... no, of course not. What this means is you need to be cognizant that vacations can derail a burgeoning meditation, yoga, health, fitness or other such practice. One of the hardest parts in these practices is establishing consistency and early in the life cycle, when inspiration is high, is a key time to make it an integral part of your daily routine. You may be about to get there, where a day without meditation or yoga feels incomplete and then comes the trip to Disney Land and when you return you are back where you started from.

If possible try to continue your practice while on vacation, but, often I find these good intentions to be a bit unrealistic. So, go on vacation, but on your way back home hone your intent to immediately get back to your beautiful practice. There may be a whole slew of excuses just waiting to challenge you when you return, so it could take a bit of willpower to put it back on track initially. But just do it. I guarantee that you will be glad you did.

Chapter 12

Most Critical Tool for Your Spiritual Growth

Little John rushed into Zen Master Blumise's arms, delighted to be in the company of his most favorite honorary Grandpa. Master Blumise was equally thrilled to have Little John visit. Soon after his birth, Little John's mother, Linda, had brought John to Master Blumise for his blessings and Master Blumise had immediately recognized, even at that tender age, the great spiritual aura that emanated brightly from the little boy. Since then Master Blumise had kept an eye on the boy and helped guide the parents such that John's spiritual growth would be nurtured and cultivated. The parents had responded well and now John, at the age of 9, was a being with vital energy, a confident presence, abundant awareness, a swift intellect and a deep love for the wonders and mysteries of life.

"Greetings Masterji," said Linda, bowing in respect to the great Zen Teacher. "You look troubled," answered Master Blumise, sensing her disturbed mind. "How can I help?" he asked.

"Masterji, Little John has been failing all his exams lately at school. He has been doing terribly and at this rate may not be allowed to progress to the next grade. It's very strange because it's not that he does not know the answer to the exam questions, it's that he just leaves the answer section mostly blank. I don't know what to do. Please help me figure out what is going on?"

Master Blumise thought for a moment, or at least pretended to. He then turned to Linda and asked, "What does he eat for breakfast on the exam days?"

"Oh my God, I never thought it could be the food. Maybe it is making him sick. He usually eats his cereal. Should I change that?"

Without addressing her question, Master Blumise continued, "What time does he go to sleep on the day before the exam?"

"Oh my God, perhaps he is overtired from studying. Should I put him to bed earlier?"

Again, ignoring her question the Master continued his interrogation, "Where does he sit in class?"

"Huh? Could he be distracted perchance?"

"What color shirt does he wear?"

"Red is his favorite color, he wears his Spider Man shirt quite often. Why?"

"How far do you live from school?"

"Why? He gets there on time."

"What's his youngest cousin's middle name?"

"What?"

"Where did you go on vacation last?"

"Excuse me?"

"How much did your shoes cost?" The interrogation went on and on, and finally it was just Master Blumise asking and a bemused Linda staring back at him and Little John giggling at the whole scene. "I GET IT, YOU CAN STOP NOW!" She finally exclaimed.

"You have a special child Linda dear. His only concern is fast becoming the highest purpose of life, which is to 'Discover the Truth' and solve the problem of suffering. He has understood, not only that questions are a key component in one's self study, but also that Irrelevant Questions Lead to Unimportant Answers. This is one of the most important lessons to learn in life. Most people just ask the wrong questions and therefore, even as they discover the right answers, the answers are not at all important. Asking the right questions is an invaluable tool for progress on the spiritual path. For John, who is not interested in training for a vocation, the questions in the examination are irrelevant so he just doesn't bother with them. I assure you, though, that if you ask him about suffering, self, desire, meditation and freedom he will be most keen to indulge in a discussion."

This lesson is invaluable and worth repeating. Asking the right questions is perhaps the most critical tool for spiritual evolution and

Irrelevant Questions Lead to Unimportant Answers. People come to me all the time to discuss matters related to spirituality and often I find their questions distant and unhelpful. They are interested in all kinds of superfluous aspects of religion that play little role in the discovery of Truth and spiritual growth. They ask religiously oriented questions regarding cultural issues, social issues, political issues, financial issues, literary issues, family issues, global spiritual gossip, etc, and answers to these questions are of little use in their journey back to the Absolute. Enlightenment has to do with bringing about a realization in yourself and that should be the primary area of your inquiry. So it is most important, if you are interested in enlightenment, to ask and wield the right questions and not waste your life chasing answers to useless ones.

Chapter 13

The Secrets of the Universe

Is reincarnation true? How about an after life? Karmic Laws? Now, that absolutely must exist? Massive debates and discussions swirl around these and other such fascinating questions, but what are the answers? Well let's head over to Nowind Monastery and see if Master Blumise can help us answer these intriguing questions.

The Secrets of the Universe

Part 1: Totonaka the Fanatic

Monk Totonaka had just joined Nowind Monastery a few months back, and he was absolutely delighted with all the spiritual growth he had experienced there in that short time. You see for many years, prior to joining Nowind, Totonaka had worked furiously to try to awaken himself. He had meditated night and day, and had been absolutely obsessed with enlightenment. In fact, he had pushed himself so hard, that finally he suffered a full mental and physical breakdown due to the stress and endless hours he had put his mind and body through. It was then that he had sought out Master Blumise, who had been instrumental in not only nursing him back to health, but also helping him rapidly make progress on the path to enlightenment. Here is how Mastery Blumise had accomplished so much so fast.

You see when Totonaka joined Nowind, Master Blumise explained to him the profound Law of Reincarnation. He told Totonaka that this was one of many lives that he would live and that the work he did in this life would carry over to the next, just as the work he had done in previous incarnations were responsible for his current spiritual state. He indicated to him that there was no need to overstress his body and mind with excessive meditation practice, and that he should relax and let things take their natural course.

This advice was exactly the serum that Totonaka needed to cure his maladies. It made him relax and let go. He stopped meditating like a man possessed, which gave his body a chance to heal and recover, and he let go of his attachment to enlightenment, which allowed him to stop focusing on the future and come into the here and now. This

led to Totonaka making rapid progress on the road to nirvana, and he eagerly shared this development with his best friend Junjo.

Junjo, like Totonaka was immensely interested in enlightenment as well, and when he heard how well things had worked out for Totonaka at Nowind, he too decided to join the monastery. Junjo's problems though, were opposite of Totonaka's. He was one lazy monk. He would meditate off and on, and indulge in all the sensory pleasures he could get his hands on. As a result, his body was bloated, his mind dull and his spiritual progress stalled.

Part 2: Junjo the Lazy

Here is how the conversation between Master Blumise and Junjo went.

"Junjo!" yelled Master Blumise.

"Yes Master," came the delayed response, irritating an already agitated Blumise further.

"I don't know where you learned this nonsense, but there is no such thing as reincarnation, soul, higher self, and the rest of that mambo jumbo rubbish! You get but one crack at this life and if you screw it up, that is it. There are no second chances. Either you get your act together and awaken, or you lie on your death bed and lament wasting this most precious of opportunities," blasted Master Blumise.

"But, master, you told Totonaka..." Junjo tried to argue.

"Shut up! It is all lies. There is no reincarnation and being lazy and wasting this life is the greatest sin you can commit," Blumise interrupted harshly. And that was the end of that. The transformation of Junjo was as remarkable as that of Totonaka. He too in a few short months, got his body and mind in shape by ending his indulgent ways, and made enormous spiritual progress by meditation regularly, intensely and seriously.

Analysis of Secrets of the Universe

There are important aspects about the hidden secrets of how the universe works that are important to realize.

1. Not many people really know the hidden secrets of the universe. It is not knowledge that is handed out casually and even those that are privy to some of these higher laws, only tend to have partial knowledge at best.

2. Such knowledge is not required for enlightenment. For enlightenment you need to realize that which is false – the separate sense of self and psychological time, but you don't need to know how the cycles of birth and death work.

The third and final point about the Secrets of the Universe is the most important, and that is really the moral of the story above.

3. These so called laws should be seen more as tools to help you with your spiritual growth. So don't get drawn into theoretical debates about their validity. That holds little value. Instead wield them as tools and apply them in any way that helps you make progress on the path to enlightenment.

This is what sets apart the wise teacher from the ordinary. The wise teacher, who is only ultimately interested in awakening you, will know how and when to bring up these laws to help you grow. Master Blumise needed Totonaka to relax, so he told him about the law of reincarnation, which led him to adopt a healthy practice, while on the other hand, Junjo needed a kick in the butt, so Master Blumise stressed upon him the value of his current life.

Such an approach is what I refer to as the first Law of Tantra, which says, whatever helps you with your spiritual growth, use it.

Chapter 14

The Meaning of Beauty

A special competition was underway at Nowind Monastery and all the monks were quite eager to do well. Master Blumise had pointed out a very special tree that lived in the woods surrounding the monastery grounds and the monks had been asked to write a story about this tree. The winner would be the one who wrote the best story.

This tree was indeed very special. You see winter had just left the lands, and spring was in the air and this great tree was in full bloom. The uniqueness of the blossoms was that they covered all the colors of the rainbow. There were red, yellow, pink, blue, silver, white, you name the color and you would find a blossom radiating it. It was simply breathtaking.

Over the next few days, the monks all arrived to delight in the company of this great tree. Each with his book and pencil, eager to transcribe into words the impact of the great beauty of the wonderful tree. Poems, lavish descriptions and inspired stories were abounding. One monk, though in particular took a peculiar approach to this challenge. It was of course, our wise, senior monk Tara.

Much to the astonishment of the others, Tara would come to keep company of the great tree in the very early morning hours of the day. In fact it was actually even before dawn, when the earth was still enveloped in the darkness of the receding night. Which of course meant that the great beauty of the iridescent, blossoms was not visible.

“What a fool,” they finally concluded. “Her story will not capture the great beauty of this tree, surly it will lack inspiration and be empty of feeling and passion.” So saying the monks felt comfortable, that at least the great monk Tara was going to be out of this competition.

Finally the day arrived when the winner was to be announced and all the monks, in heavy anticipation, gathered in the great hall. Master Blumise, in his endlessly unhurried style, floated into the great hall and sat on the speaker’s stand. He looked around the hall till he found his favorite disciple and bowed deeply to Tara. Then got up and started to leave.

The flabbergasted monks of course immediately realized that once again Tara had proven to be the wisest, but what had she written? One monk unable to bear the question shouted out,

“Master Blumise, please at least tell us what Monk Tara wrote, which led to her winning this competition,”

The great master smiled and said,

“Go ask the tree!”

Analysis:

Beautiful, glorious, wonderful, amazing, lovely, divine... we are ever ready and quick to describe that which we encounter, but do we ever just behold quietly? Do we ever take the time to be inwardly silent and listen to the story that the thing is trying to tell us, rather than impose our thoughts on it? This quiet looking, with all one's senses, is the art of meditation. This is what Tara did.

Tara did not write her story about the tree, instead she listened and wrote the story which the tree told her. Although it is actually true, that if you listen very carefully you will be able to hear the trees talking, the lesson of this story is to learn and practice the art of observation. To learn the art of looking and listening with all your senses. Of putting aside you thoughts, feelings and opinions, and being thus empty allow the separation between you and the object to fall away.

The real question is how many of you will actually experiment with this? Actually spend some time investigating this possibility? It is only those who have the spirit and passion to explore this dimension, the dimension of meditation, who will discover the reality of Oneness.

Chapter 15

The Magical Gate to the Best School for Enlightenment

The excitement on the astral planes was unbelievable. The great Demi-god (Deva) explorer, Nebb Yaw, who had been exploring the distant planes in the outer regions, had discovered the legendary Magical Gate to the Best School for Enlightenment. This magical gate had been the most sought after artifact on the astral planes for eons. Innumerable demi-god explorers had sought to find it, without any success. As they had continued to fail, its very existence had become more and more suspect, till it became more a part of angelic mythology and less a plausible reality. Nebb Yaw, though, came from a family of explorers and in his family the belief in the existence of this most treasured doorway still ran strong and deep. Nebb, drawn by his adventurous spirit and strong desire for enlightenment, had vowed never to return home till he succeeded in discovering this greatest of all treasures. After years of relentless searching, Nebb had found it! There were smiles everywhere and most of all there were dreams of enlightenment... dreams of re-merging with the Source... with Param Brahman (One True God).

The news reached Earth. The humans, of course, were not happy. The Demi-gods had found this gate, but where was the entrance to the Best School for Enlightenment located on Earth? Also, was there one? There must be one on Earth if there was one on the Astral Planes. That would only be fair. The humans were very disturbed. To obtain answers to their many questions and concerns they decided to hold a massive prayer and call upon Lord Shiva himself to provide the answers. A mega-sized yagna (prayer) was conducted at the base of Mount Kailash on whose summit sat in samadhi (Deep Meditation) Lord Shiva. Finally, on the ninth day of the yagna, Lord Shiva appeared before the gathering.

"The Demi-gods have discovered the Magical Gate to the Best School for Enlightenment, O Most Revered One," cried the humans, "We would like to know where on Earth we can find this doorway as well, as we are as keen on enlightenment as the Demi-gods are? Please show us the way."

Lord Shiva, not too thrilled about being disturbed from his meditation, said, "There are many doorways to the Best School for Enlightenment on Earth, but you are all too blind to recognize them." So saying Lord Shiva returned to his meditation. The humans were now even more disturbed. There was not one, but many doorways to the Best School for Enlightenment on Earth and till now they were not able to recognize them? They convened the greatest scientists, explorers, artists, philosophers to help solve this mystery, but much to their dismay they failed. The frustration was unbearable, the damn Demi-gods had one door in all the astral planes and they managed to find it, while the humans had many doors and were clueless about their existence.

The Demi-gods, of course, really rubbed it in. When they learned what had transpired on Earth they had a big laugh. They mocked and teased the humans and gloated about the impending Age of Enlightenment that would soon dawn upon the astral planes. The Demi-gods, rightly elected Nebb Yaw as the first of them to enter the gate and travel to the Best School for Enlightenment. The strategy was that he would be the first to go and based on his feedback a plan for the others would be made. A great celebration was held on the day when Nebb entered the magical, shining golden gate and the whole Universe watched and waited with abated breath for what would transpire next. Even the disheartened humans paid close attention, hoping for a clue to help them in their own quest. Nebb entered the gate and promptly disappeared.

Nine months later... he was born on Earth! That's correct. Right here on our planet. Earth and life here IS the Best School for Enlightenment. The Demi-gods had just found the doorway to be born into our beautiful school – our beautiful planet. This is without a doubt, the greatest place to study and make progress towards enlightenment and Self-Realization. There are as many doorways to the Best School for Enlightenment on Earth as there are wombs... and we have all already come through them. We have already chosen to attend this institution, although some of us have forgotten why we decided to enroll in the first place. We are all the lucky ones. Our applications were accepted and we found and took the necessary gates to arrive here, so lets get busy earning our degree. Life is full of wonderful lessons to be learned in order to help us evolve spiritually. She is trying desperately to educate and awaken us. We need to recognize that we are in class, seize these learning opportunities and make the most of them.

Oh yes and of course you can just imagine the plight of the poor Demi-gods when they found out Nebb Yaw had been born as a New Baby on Planet Earth to begin his schooling towards enlightenment... we humans are still laughing about that :-).

Chapter 16

Money Money Money & the Path to Enlightenment

I work all night, I work all day, to pay the bills I have to pay
Ain't it sad
And still there never seems to be a single penny left for me
That's too bad
In my dreams I have a plan
If I got me a wealthy man
I wouldn't have to work at all, I'd fool around and have a ball...

Money, money, money
Must be funny
In the rich mans world
Money, money, money
Always sunny
In the rich mans world...

Ah yes, ABBA's super hit song about the ageless and most dear human Mantra, Money Money Money. Of all the Mantras in existence, this is certainly the one that is most chanted. Everybody seems to chant this Mantra; the question here is should one seeking Enlightenment also chant Money Money Money? What does the dollar buy in the marketplace of spirituality? Does it have any value? The answer is... revealed by the story below.

King Shantanu, like was the tradition of his time, was in preparation for renouncing the throne and retiring to the forest for the rest of his days to spend in meditation and yoga. The prince was ready to be crowned King and King Shantanu was ready, as ready could be, to enter the spiritual phase of his life (sanyas). The same, though, could not be said of his Queen — Maharani Ria. She was not keen on the hardships of hermetic living and was desperate to know what kind of life was awaiting them at the forest dwelling. Unfortunately for her, the only person to have seen this ashram, was the timeless Sage Rudravakta. Now, no one messed with Sage Rudravakta. He was one fierce Rishi (Sage). He was not only known for having conquered time, but was also famous for being brutally blunt and extremely hot tempered. There was no way the Maharani was going to risk incurring his wrath with her questions so, as any capable wife, she convinced the Maharaja (King) to have a chat with Rishi Rudravakta.

"Swamiji," asked the King very politely, "Can you please tell me something about the ashram we are retiring to?"

"Why?" came the bullet like reply from the Swami (Sage).

"Um, we are trying to decide what to take with us," the King responded trying to think fast.

"You will take nothing. Everything you need will be provided for. I want to make sure you are clear on my instructions here. The instructions are that you are to take nothing! Period. Also, let the Maharani know that in the ashram there are no maids, no cooks, no gardeners and no one to wash the clothes either. End of conversation." And that was that. There was no more talk about the ashram and after a few days the King and a troubled Queen made their way to the forest.

Upon arriving at the ashram, the royal couple was completely bewildered. The Queen had imagined a humble abode, a simple set-up but what she found was mostly just unbelievable and... quite puzzling. The strangest devices surrounded her, things she and the King had never seen before.

After enjoying their confusion sufficiently, Rishi Rudravakta explained, "These devices are from the future. They don't say I have conquered time for no reason."

"But, Swamiji," inquired the King, "What are all these strange devices and why are they here in this place designated for Meditation and Enlightenment?"

The Rishi smiled. "One of the most important things you need in the Path of Realization is leisure. Remember this. Without leisure you will not be able to make progress. Those that are ever busy and have no leisure will have no time to devote to the study of the Self. These devices wash your clothes, cook for you, keep your food fresh, wash your dishes, and clean your house, among other things. This is so you can have leisure. What you do with this gift of time is up to you. I though will be checking in from time to time and I better find you making good use of this free time." So saying, the Rishi instructed the delighted Maharani on how to use the devices and left the couple to get down to living a life of depth and inquiry.

This is the answer to if money is important in the spiritual path. It is important to the extent that it buys you leisure. Buys you time. All you really need is food, clothing and shelter. If you don't have those in reasonable quantity for you and your family, it gets difficult to meditate. The poor and hungry don't think much about enlightenment; they are trying to arrange the next meal for their crying baby. If you have been blessed with the basics then you have a great responsibility. You should try to leverage your financial blessings to maximize leisure and spend that time wisely. Endless entertainment is a criminal waste of that most valuable commodity — leisure. Leisure is time available to you to inquire and learn the ways of the mind and ego. This then opens the doors to what lies beyond.

So use the devices that Rishi Rudravakta has provided to make more efficient use of your time, and remember he checks in from time to time to see what you have been doing with the leisure he has so carefully tried to create for you. Guard your leisure fiercely. Be careful of the commitments you make so that your whole life you don't just end up singing the Mantra Money Money Money to try and meet them. Instead, make a commitment to find out the True Nature of Reality. This then leads to the discovery of all the real treasures life has to offer.

Chapter 17

How to Escape Your Suffering

There is a famous Indian story about the great battle between the blind man and the cripple which I think you will all enjoy. I came across this story first in Osho's book on *Courage, The Joy of Living Dangerously*. Here is how it goes. In a remote village in the outskirts of Punjab there lived two sworn enemies. One chap was blind and the other was a cripple. They just could not get along. No matter what one did, it would upset the other and visa versa. For years this battle raged on and the animosity between them grew fierce and caustic.

As fate would have it though, during one very hot and dry summer a terrible fire broke out in the village and began consuming everything in its path. The villagers began to flee in fear, as there was no stopping the inferno. In the panic, the blind man and the cripple were forgotten about and left to fend for themselves. They now had a big problem. The blind man did not know which way to go in order to escape the fire, and the cripple, who could see the path to safety, could take no action regarding it. So both were stuck.

Luckily for them, the desire to live was greater than their hatred for each other, so they decided to work together in order to save their lives. The blind man put the cripple on his shoulders he then directed the blind man on which way to go in order to escape. Thus, working as a team, they were successful and even ended up becoming friends.

Who is the blind man and who is the cripple? The blind man is your mind and the cripple is your heart. What is the fire? The fire is your suffering. The mind is the instrument through which you can move, act — but it is blind, in that it does not know which way to go. It endlessly debates, weighing pros and cons, wobbling between what will be gained and what will be lost if certain action was to be taken. It cannot see how to escape the suffering. The heart, on the other hand, can see clearly the way out, but does not have any means to act. In order to act, it needs the mind. So they need each other. But, more importantly the heart needs to sit on top of the mind, as the cripple sat on the shoulders of the blind man. With the heart leading the way, the mind becomes intelligent. Give the heart its precedence and wisdom will then emerge and guide you safely out of your suffering.

Chapter 18

God & The Axe Murderer

Part 1: Dr. Alluu

Blood was on his mind. Actually it was on his jacket, on his pants, on his shoes, on his car seat, in the trunk, and, of course, on his axe, Sparky. The difference was that the blood on his mind was going to flow later that night while the blood everywhere else had flowed at various times in his past. You see Zep was an axe murderer and he and Sparky had been, not only very busy in the past few years, but very successful as well. Together they had enjoyed 21 exciting feasts, but this one, Zep was especially excited about, it was the first time he was going to feast on a woman.

As the Pontiac sped along the hilly, dirt roads of Mountain County, Zep's mind wandered back to his days spent with Dr. Alluu.

"Dr. Alluu, I wonder how he is making out in that Mental Asylum they locked him up in? What a freak, eh Sparks," he exclaimed out loud glancing at the heavy chopping axe sitting on the passenger seat besides him.

"O that's right sweetie, you never met him. I always forget. But you know love, he is the reason that we are together," Zep continued, while running his fingers tenderly over the twenty-one notches carved into her thick blood reddened oak handle.

"You see Sparks, Doc knew the shortcut to God and he told me the way. Pure blood Zeppie boy, he would say, just one cup, but its gotta be PUURRRE," Zep raised his voice and imitated Dr. Alluu. He widened his eyes, scrunched up his face and wheezed on, "Its like rocket fuel, rocket fuel for the soul. You can't reach the heavens unless your rocket has the right fuel. All you need is one cup of pure stuff and bam. Bam! I said Zeppie boy, bam you are off and the only... landing spot... is the lap of God. Straight... yesss... straight into the arms of the Big Boy, boy. Non-stop flight, do not pass go, do not collect 200 dollars... one stop shopping Zeppie boy and all it takes is...," shouting now, "What does it take Zep?" Zep's excitement was evidently growing, he clutched the steering wheel tighter and floored the Pontiac while yelling, "Just one cup, Dr. Alluu, just one cup of pure blood and

bam we are off!" Zep's eyes flickered with determined eagerness as he now hissed over to his companion, "Sparky darlin' you ready to do some huntin'?"

Part 2: Ma Nomaya

Zep had drunk twenty-one cups of blood and yet he had failed to meet the Big Boy. Each time he had felt that the blood would be pure and each time he figured he had been wrong. But this time he felt it would be different. He had butchered eight priests, five mullahs, three rabbis, two swamis, two monks and one new born baby, but none had been female and none were as well reputed as being a spiritual giant as Ma Nomaya.

Zep had involved himself with several religious groups in order to research potential feasts and the overall religious hoopla involving the visit of Ma Nomaya was the first of its kind that Zep had seen. She was apparently from the Himalayan region of India and unlike the two other Indian swamis that Zep had preyed upon; she did not represent a particular Eastern school of thought. Swami Megaannanda had been a proponent of Kundalini Yoga, while Swami Yamaannanda had been a firm believer in the path of Bhakti Yoga. Ma Nomaya, on the other hand, was a maverick of sorts who seemed to propose a philosophy, if it could even be called that, which was a peculiar mix of Tantra and Jyana Yoga. She was also nicknamed Ma Soochchor, meaning mind thief, because of her great psychic powers and abilities to read other people's thoughts.

Zep thought about the teachings of Ma Nomaya. "You fools," she would say, "You are all fools if you think you are going to get anywhere. I am serious... and therefore I am a fool now too. I am serious and have to be foolish to talk to you fools. Even though there is nothing to seriously say, if I don't say it seriously you will not take it seriously, and because you take it seriously you are fools and I am making a fool of myself. Go have some sex for God's sake; you are such a morbid, boring, foolish bunch. If you could just be foolish you will be fine... and since I said you are all foolish already obviously you are all fine... so happy humping!"

Zep laughed in delight.

Part 3: Blood

Zep pulled off the road and into a well-hidden clearing about a mile outside the Ashram grounds. Gathering up Sparky and the Love Mug, as he called the silver cup from which he drank the blood, he began to make his descent down the wooded hillside towards the valley below which housed the Ashram buildings. The thorny holly bushes scattered amongst the undergrowth were hard to spot in the pale moonlight and Zep cursed softly as the sharp thorns occasionally penetrated through his clothing and bit into his skin. He was glad that he had done his homework and had mapped out the shortest path to the cottage where he knew that Ma Nomaya was going to be residing.

Zep, now on his knees and elbows, Sparky in one hand and the Love Mug in the other, crept up to the window through which a flickering light of a soft candle was gently shining. Unfortunately for him that light was not enough to illuminate the prickly holly branch that opportunistically hung along the lower sill of the open window. He lay down the cup and reached up to grasp the sill only to find his palm squarely stabbed by a menacing thorn. He bit down on his lip to muffle the yelp that was forming deep in his stomach but was astonished when it seemed to escape him anyway.

Zep was startled. He was sure that he had not made a sound and yet he was sure that he heard a yelp at the exact time that he had been pricked by that wretched thorn. He glanced at his palm and noticed the blood trickling out of the tiny incision that had been left behind. He sat still for few anxious minutes listening intently for the sounds of life that may have been stirred by that mysterious yelp of his. He heard some rustling in the woods from where he had come. He waited tensely. The rustling stopped and then there was silence again. The blood continued to trickle free.

Satisfied that the rustling was nothing more than a woodland critter, Zep again made his attempt to peer into the window. What he saw smashed into his being like a ton of bricks.

Part 4: Encounters

Looking straight back at him was Ma Nomaya, but what shocked Zep was that she was sucking on *her* palm. Time seemed to come to a screeching halt and Zep was frozen in place looking back at those eternal eyes that seemed to penetrate deep into his soul. Ever so slowly she withdrew her bleeding palm from her mouth and a tender smile crept across her blood-reddened lips.

It came to him in a flash. He glanced down at his own palm and brought his wounded hand to his lips. The only blood that was pure for him was his own. He realized at that moment that anything he added to himself from the outside would only work to contaminate him further. Ironically, in his own impurity lay his perfection. He succumbed to the reality of his imperfections. He was already full of the necessary fuel; all that had been needed was turning on the ignition. Ma Nomaya had turned the key and Zep's consciousness took off like a rocket, straight to the lap of God.

Infinite grace showered down on Zep and tears streamed down his cheeks as he felt the actuality of divinity encompass his world. The unending compassion and love of divinity soaked into every pore of his being and Zep felt himself being forgiven and purified. He fell to his knees and cried and whimpered in awe and humility.

"I am pure!" he cried out.

Somewhere in the corner of his reality, Zep heard the recently released Dr. Alluu's voice, who had come to the Ashram looking for the same rocket fuel as well, "You are pure eh Zeppie boy, well I guess I can just drink your blood then!"

Chapter 19

How to Find Your True Guru

How to find your True Guru? How to meet him? Who is he or she? Perhaps the story below about our spiritual friend, Yogi Ponchie, will help answer some of these important questions.

Yogi Ponchie was eager to become a great, enlightened Yoga Master, but the only problem was that he was one laaaaaazy chap. He was so lazy that once he almost forgot to inhale and soon after, he almost didn't bother to exhale. Now, Ponchie tried everything to establish a good daily meditation and yoga practice... well at least mentally he did. He planned it out in his mind to perfection. His meticulous plan was indeed a masterpiece. It was designed to perfectly squeeze out every drop of time from the day and maximize his daily sadhana (spiritual work). Only problem, of course, was that he hardly did anything to implement it. So Ponchie was in a fix.

Finally, after many failed attempts to establish his sadhana, Yogi Ponchie decided he needed to find his True Guru to help him. As a matter of fact, Yogi Ponchie was so desperate that he actually took some real action in this quest of his. He fasted every so often, which he kind of enjoyed as he didn't have to cook, chew, swallow etc. He sometimes performed penance, in the form of living and sleeping naked in the cold, which he didn't mind so much as now he didn't need to chop wood or wash his clothes. He also went as far as to relinquish all worldly possessions, so yes, no job needed either. Ponchie though, did continue on this quest of his for months with single-minded determination.

His prayers were finally answered. Very early one morning, as he was blissfully asleep, his True Guru arrived. Ponchie heard a whisper, "Wakie Wakie, I have come, my boy. Time to get to work." Ponchie turned his back to the voice and continued to snore away. A little louder this time, "You asked for me to come so now I am here, its time to get up and begin your meditation." A slightly irritated Ponchie covered his head with his pillow and returned to his dream. The Guru was bemused. Here, after all this time he had finally decided to offer his guidance and Yogi Ponchie would have nothing of it. What to do?

The wise Guru though would not be thwarted. He knew just what to try. "My Dear Ponchie," he said, "I am the greatest, wisest and the most True of all Gurus. I also know one of the greatest secrets of life and if you open your eyes right now it will be known to you as well." This was very tempting, just open his eyes and he would know this great secret. This Yogi Ponchie knew he could manage. He opened his eyes - there was no one else in the room.

The only True Guru resides within you - he is your Divine Nature - your Buddha nature - your Christ Consciousness - your Atman. Are you listening carefully to him? He is there trying to guide you, so awaken. Fine-tune your listening so you can hear the guidance that is being whispered to you from deep within. His guidance is what your heart is telling you to do. So instead of using the borrowed mind of mankind to make decisions, why not use your heart instead. Your heart is truly; only yours and it won't lead you astray.

If you are keen on developing the necessary awareness to hear the guidance coming from your divine consciousness (True Guru) you may wish to work on developing your Ajna Chakra (Third Eye), as this is the center which helps give you access to your inner guide.

Chapter 20

4 Key Universal Laws for Manifesting Desires

There is a state a consciousness where there is absolutely no whisper of thought or movement of any kind in the mind. The state is a stillness and silence upon which then, the dance of existence eventually takes place. In this state the timeless, the eternal, the infinite, Truth is encountered. In this state burns the fire of intelligence. It does not allow desire to form. Desire simply cannot take birth, it is as if there is a no entry sign and desire is not allowed in. Desire, if it attempts to take birth, is immediately snuffed out. Highest intelligence and swift awareness stand guard.

There is also the state, where the mind moves and desire takes shape, but if you are established in impersonal awareness, you are free of any compulsion of having to act upon the desire. By impersonal awareness, I mean you are residing in the awareness of the non-duality of Reality, as best you can. From this perch, you are the Master and can decide if in fact you will indulge in the desire or not. This is all fine and dandy but, what are you to do if you have many desires and are being driven by them? That is the focus of this article. What to do with your desires and how to manifest them if necessary. There are 4 key universal principles – rules, which govern the manifestation of desire and I will go into each of them below.

Rule #1: Get Rid of Frivolous Desires by Introspection, Contemplation and Reasoning.

The second vow that you take when you become a Zen monk or Buddhist practitioner (Bodhisattva Vows) is "Desires are inexhaustible, I vow to put an end to them." So we acknowledge that desires are certainly an endless part of human existence, but having less desires is much better than having more desires. The objective of this vow is to move towards having fewer desires and the first step to take in making this progress is to thoroughly scrutinize the desires that you do have. By this power of scrutinization see if frivolous, immature, borrowed desires can simply be discarded using the power of intelligent reasoning. If the desire does not run strong and deep and is superficial in nature, extinguish it quickly and save your energy and time. Contemplate the results which the desire will bestow, reflect on your own experiences and study others who already have

accomplished what you seek and be sure that what you have decided to chase is really worth it and is something you really, truly need. You don't want to be old and gray and then realize you spent your whole life desiring and hoarding nothing but junk.

Rule #2: Align the Desire With Making Progress In Your Spiritual Evolution.

If possible, see if your desire(s) can be aligned with what you feel you need in order to make progress on the spiritual path. These are perhaps the only desires worth having and indulging. Assess your life and see what, if anything, is missing that would be beneficial to your spiritual evolution. If there is something your heart tells you you need, allow that desire to take shape and ask the Universe for it. In this way, see if the desires you do feel strongly about can be adjusted to help you in your spiritual growth. Such desires are beneficial as they are helping you achieve the Highest Purpose of Human Life — discovering the True Nature of Reality. Such requests will certainly be heard by the Universe.

Rule #3: Align the Desire For the Greater Good of All.

If you are keen on the Universe Manifesting your desires, see if you can align your desires for the greater good of others. Such desires will be powered not only by your mind and heart but also, by the others who it is benefiting. The Universe is more apt to acknowledge such requests.

Rule #4: First Deserve Then Desire.

This is the most important rule of all if you want your desires to manifest. You have to ask yourself, "Do I really deserve what I am asking for?" Have you done your part? This rule will be validated repeatedly by your life. Pour yourself into something you are passionate about, devote yourself to it and give all you got, the results will follow on their own. You will hardly even have to desire the results, they will simply start to flow. You must find out the truth of this for yourself by application. Determine what you really want, chances are it will be achievable by doing what you really love to do. Then give yourself to that work, the desires will start to manifest themselves. Just sitting around desiring this and that is silly. One additional thing that you will start to notice is that the doing part is

almost as much fun, if not more, than the getting part. Once you get to that point, life flows naturally and becomes a great work of art.

Summary of 4 Laws to Manifest Desires:

So there you have it. The 4 Key Universal Rules for manifesting your desires. To summarize, desires that are strong, spiritually oriented, beneficial to others and which you have worked hard to realize are the one's that the Universe is most likely to help with.

If you must indulge desires, these are the ones that you should seek to manifest. I will mention here briefly one more point. The Universe is very generous and she will give you what it is that you are seeking in some form at least, its just that there is always a price to pay to settle the transaction. So if you are going to get into the business of desires, follow the rules above. This way you will be spending your life and energy wisely, instead of getting stuck closing those transactions which were not of great benefit to you anyway in the long run.

If possible, go after the state of desirelessness — it is an actual state, not imagined or hypothesized, else, see if you can maintain an impersonal view to the desires that spring up in consciousness, finally, if you choose to indulge a want see if it can meet the rules outlined above. I wish that you get all that your heart truly desires.

Chapter 21

Ten Keys for Turning Ideas Into Reality

The more I live the less impressed I am by just ideas. Regardless of how good the idea might be, I have come to realize that good ideas in and of themselves are pretty much worthless. I know many people who are full of good ideas. Ideas about what they should be doing in life and also, lots of ideas for others too. Really, it is pretty easy to come up with a good idea or two, the hard part is putting the idea to work, to actually implement the idea.

This, I feel, applies to all dimensions of life. I am sure you have had good ideas about how to manage your money better, manage your children better, your diet better, your fitness better, your relationships better, your spiritual growth better, etc, etc, but, really how many of those ideas did you follow through on till the end and therefore, reap the final benefits of? If you have followed through on your ideas, then that is certainly meaningful, but, if you just have some good ideas, that is really nothing very impressive.

I have found this to be especially true in the arena of spiritual growth. Many aspirants, initially inspired, formulate great plans for daily meditation and yoga practice, but check with them a month later, and the idea has not been carried out and the practice has fallen by the wayside. So how do you turn your good ideas into action, so you can enjoy the benefits? I think the following ten suggestions will go a long way in helping you accomplish just this.

1. Hone Your Intent:

My teacher Ravi Singh, used to tell us all the time, "Hone your intent." I think this is very valuable advise. If you have a good intention and are not able to implement it immediately, chisel it, sharpen it, hone it. It is valuable to chew on it and give it strength, so that it does not simple fade away, but, instead remains alive till such time as it has the necessary power to manifest into action.

2. Use the Golden Rule:

I wrote about the golden rule in the article, How to Stop Making Excuses and Start Meditation Now. This rule essentially says that

don't try to do things perfectly. Instead just go for 70% of best and start. Often perfectionism is the leading cause of procrastination, and a very effective method of overcoming such procrastination is by applying this rule. Of course, this rule can be extended to other areas of your life and not just meditation.

3. Act Now, Build Momentum:

Again this is a topic close to my heart and I have written about it in the article, *The Art of Spiritual Time Management*. Essentially the idea here is to immediately act on a good idea or problem that you have. You will find that the more you just get down to doing things, implementing things, the more a certain momentum starts to build, and inertia and laziness diminish. So if you have good ideas, try to act on them now.

4. Use Righteous Anger:

This is probably the one positive application of anger. If there are things you have been meaning to do and are angry with yourself for not getting them done, I say good. Get angry with yourself, it's ok. In this case the energy of anger will serve as a positive force in getting you off your butt and on the path of productivity. This type of anger I call Righteous Anger.

5. Make a Plan:

One of the best methods of getting things done is by writing down what it is you want to accomplish in a particular day. This list will nag at you and perhaps that is what you need in order to start implementing. Making a list is definitely very helpful if you have too many things to do and don't know where to start. The list will help prioritize those ideas which are most important and thus, help insure that you act on them at the very least.

6. Use Your Resources:

Often constraints of time and energy are the limiting factors which prevent you from putting your ideas into action. To overcome these obstacles, see if you can better utilize the resources around you to help free up the time and energy you need in order to act. It could be leaning on a relative to help out with some babysitting, or getting a laundry service to handle that chore. You will see that once you start

to look for solutions, life will start to make things possible. As they say, where there is a will, there is a way.

7. Organize Your Life:

This is along the lines of the suggestion above, but here what I am suggesting is that you set up your life to make it as easy as possible to act on your ideas. So, for example, if you want to start a blog, maybe get yourself a cheap laptop, or if you want to meditate, set up a meditation space, etc. You will find it much easier to start and sustain your program, if you set-up your life to help facilitate it. For those looking for more tips on setting up a consistent meditation practice, you can read the following 2 articles: Essential Meditation Tips and Tools, and Top 5 Mistakes in Establishing a Daily Meditation Practice.

8. Be Willing to Sacrifice:

If you are looking to turn your good ideas into reality, you must be willing to sacrifice. You may very well have to watch 1 hour less of TV, or wake up an hour earlier, surf the web less, or play less video games. If you are really interested in living a full life, and being true to your inner callings, a little sacrifice may most certainly be required.

9. Be Willing to Work Hard:

I know all that stuff about the Law of Attraction and Follow Your Bliss, etc, but, there is no substitute for hard work. If you really want to reach your potential, then you have to be willing to work for it. Most great accomplishments demanded hard work, and it is likely to be no different for you. So embrace hard work, don't shy away from it. In fact, you may ultimately realize that doing is as much fun as achieving.

10. Practice Visualization Meditation:

Quite simply visualization meditation works. Visualize your idea manifesting. Whether that be a Yoga Center you want to open, a shape you want your body to be in, or a book you want to write. Visualize it happening and allow life to help you manifest it. The following popular article goes into details for manifesting your desires: 4 Keys Laws for Manifesting Desires.

Summary:

An example from my own life, where I have used and continue to use all the above suggestion to turn my idea into reality, is this very blog. Writing, maintaining and growing Mastery of Meditation and Yoga is not easy I confess, but, I can honestly say that putting this idea to work and creating this website has been one of the most satisfying aspects of my life. So I hope you too find the suggestions above useful and that by using them, will begin to manifest and benefit from the good ideas that you are blessed with.

Chapter 22

4 Vital Keys for Developing Mastery in Anything

What are the keys to developing Mastery? It could be mastery of meditation, yoga, zen or it could be mastery of any other field of your choosing, it does not matter. There are certain common factors in becoming a master and I want to share the top 4 factors, I have found to be key in developing such excellence.

1. Give Your Life to Something:

This is another way of saying, don't be a "jack of all trades and king of none". If you really want to excel in life, find your true passion and pour yourself into it. There are several articles on Mastery of Meditation that will help you determine your true passion in life, such as Stop the Madness of Self-Discipline and The Secret on How to Become an Early Riser, and once you determine what it is you love to do, give your life to it.

There may be many things you enjoy doing, and you will probably still be able to participate in them in some capacity, but if you wish to master one thing, I assure you, you will have to sacrifice some of these activities. So focus on the thing you really love to do and find out exactly how well you can do it. You may surprise yourself :-).

This is also the only way to not have any regrets in life. You may win recognition, you may or may not obtain material success as a result of your dedication, but, when all is said and done, you will know deep in your heart that you gave life all you had. Nothing more can really be asked of you.

2. Break Mood Based Decisions:

Most of the necessary discipline for mastery will come naturally, born out of your passion for the thing you are doing. The best analogy of this self emerging discipline, is that it is like a river carving its own banks. The flow and power of the river, generates the necessary channel for it to then flow. In a similar way your passion will generate the necessary discipline within which to excel. That being said, moods will still certainly pose a challenge to you.

Breaking mood based decisions, means being able to turn off the TV at 9:52 pm right before the detectives of Law & Order SVU reveal who is responsible for the homicide. In fact, I like to measure my attachments sometimes by doing precisely that. Turn it off, if that is what your path to mastery requires you to do.

In the same vein, sit in meditation or write your next chapter even when you don't feel like it. I think this is why monasteries are so successful in helping aspirants in their spiritual evolution. You have to do what you have to do, regardless of how you happen to feel about it at that particular time. This is the key to consistency, which is a cornerstone of developing mastery of anything.

Once you develop this strength, to not make your decisions solely on the pleasure principle, your life will become available to you as a tapestry to paint your masterpiece on.

3. Don't Concentrate on Results:

Once you know what you truly love to do - that's it, the hard part is done. Now just concentrate on doing that particular thing as well as you can. Don't worry about the results, just worry about excelling in it to the best of your ability.

So, if you love to write, just write, don't worry about selling a million copies. If you like to dance, then dance. Broadway will come knocking when it's time.

Concentrating on the results, which are really not in your hands in the first place, can be a demoralizing and distracting factor. If they don't come fast enough, you may hang up the hat, and if you are driven by them, you may adjust your art to commercialization pressures. So, instead forget about results and focus on just doing, just marching on.

4. Don't Worry About Survival:

This, I know is easier said than done. What I want to clarify before I delve into this key factor, is that I am not encouraging you to drop out of school, quit your job, dump your family or run away to the Himalayas. There is usually never a need to make such drastic changes and these changes are usually just romantic ideas. Having said that, mastery may certainly require you to take some risks, make some changes and show some courage.

Hopefully, you are lucky enough to figure out your true passions early in life. If you do that, then let them guide you in choosing the commitments you make in life. Once you make commitments, it is difficult to get out of them, so make them carefully. For example, a million dollar home sounds like a nice idea, but often it becomes a financial liability that limits your decision making. On a side note, there is no problem with having a million dollar home, the problem is if you are attached to it.

So you will have to show some courage, some guts, some valor in order to master the art of your choosing. Trust that life will be there to take care of you and go for it.

Summary:

So there you have the 4 keys to mastering anything. Give your life to it, be free of the pleasure/pain principle, drop result oriented thinking and show some heart. It is said that Einstein was working on his equations, even as he lay on his death bed in the hospital. That is passion, and that's what it takes to be a master.

Chapter 23

The Secret to Compassion

Compassion is the nectar of life. If you are saturated with it, you will be sweet and this sweet fragrance will also be felt by all those around you. Unfortunately, the true value and depth of this treasure is not fully appreciated and today, many vessels, also sometimes called humans, are empty of this enriching energy.

So what makes compassion flow? The answer is not at all complex. I suggest you pose this question to yourself and see what reply comes from deep within you, before I go into my thoughts on this matter.

The answer to what makes for you to be filled with compassion, is simply the realization that this world belongs entirely you to.

This beautiful earth, blue skies, eternal mountains, lush forests, quiet streams, starry nights and wondrous animals are all yours. This is your world. Do you see that? Do you feel it? It is your world to create as you see fit. All the people are your people. When you awaken to this truth, you will feel compassion like never before. After all, if you see the whole world as yours, you will start to care deeply for every part of it. So why don't many of us realize and live this fact?

There are, I feel, two primary reasons for why we are unable to fully awaken to the fact that the entire universe and all within it belongs to us, are an inseparable part of us. These two causes follow each other like night follows day.

First, you have been conditioned to believe that you are a separate being. Separate from everything. This separation is enforced by every facet of society and the embraced life. All of what society values, further strengthens this sense of separate existence, and the end result is you no longer feel your connection to the world you live in. You feel totally disconnected.

Having now created in you an impenetrable sense of separate existence, society next forces in you a sense of lacking or incompleteness. So now, you are forever lost in the pursuit of filling this hole. The end product is a tiny little separate person, all alone in a big world, trying like mad to build their petty little empire.

Result... no sign of compassion anywhere in sight.

You are so lost in trying to get somewhere and so consumed by your ambition, that you no longer feel connected to the totality, let alone feel the great responsibility of taking care of this great big world of yours. Compassion flows when there is a shift in emphasis, away from yourself and towards the totality.

So how do we undo this conditioning? Where do we go from here? The place to start, is to question the sense of incompleteness that has been forced on you. Question the ambition you are burning with. Will that new BMW convertible be enough? Will the 5 bedroom house, with the walkout basement and sun room be enough? Will a million dollar portfolio be enough?

It won't. It never is.

No matter what you acquire you will get used to it and soon demand more. Otherwise, you will find many who have achieved much be finished with ambition, but it simply is not so. The hole cannot be filled by acquisitions. The hole, the sense of being less, must simply be rejected. You must simply draw the line and say, I have enough, I am enough, I know enough, I am good enough, I am spiritual enough, I am fine, everything is fine, I don't need anything more, let me see what I can do for my world.

In other words, let me give, instead of take. I am the Sheppard, I am the savior, I am saved and I will save my world.

Result... compassion will flow.

Chapter 24

Five Key Principles of Living a Good Life

I think it's time to update the famous Yamas (Dos) & Niyamas (Don'ts) spelled out by the great Yoga Sage Patanjali. These observances are the ethical and moral requirements generally accepted by Yogic teachings. Don't get me wrong, I am a big fan of Patanjali and the Yoga Sutras, but frankly, I was never very impressed with the Yama Niyamas that he laid out in the Sutras. Furthermore, recently I am seeing many attempts to broaden and reinterpret the meanings of these observances to make them "fit" better and be more comprehensive, and I think this wrangling is getting a bit out of hand. For example, "celibacy" is being translated as healthy sex with your partner if you are married and between the ages of 25 and 50 with no adultery. I mean come on, let's just be brave and come up with a new model. It could very well be that in Patanjali's time these Dos and Don'ts made sense, or it could be that they were meant for a different purpose than what is currently thought (I suspect Ashram rules to assist in the study of Yoga), but, in any case I think it's time to put forth a new set of principles for enlightened living and that is the focus of this article.

The 5 Universal Principles below for living an enlightened and good life is the result of decades of spiritual exploration, experimentation and self-study. These are the principles that I live by. They are my mantras, my vows and I have found them to be extremely helpful in navigating the waters of spiritual living and help forge a sweet life. First, I will just briefly list the original Yamas & Niyamas of Sage Patanjali, which can also be found in the article Introduction to the Universal Principles of Yoga, and then I will go into my 5 principles for living an enlightened and good life.

Original Yamas Nyamas from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali:

1. Yamas: Yamas are self-restraints. They are non-violence, truth, control of sexual energy, non-stealing and non-covetousness (non-greed).
2. Niyamas: Niyamas are self-observances. There are 5 niyamas. These are contentment, self-study, austerity, purity and devotion to the Lord.

Anmol's New & Improved 5 Key Principles of Living an Enlightened and Good Life:

1. Relax: This principle is not to be brushed over. It is the key to developing the right approach towards life and all the twists and turns that inevitably come your way. If you can stay relaxed you will have a chance to break the reactive pattern of automatic response to conditions, thus, meeting more of the moment with more of your being. It all begins with having this ease of being. To relax means to not be easily swayed by the pull of dualities. Neither buying excessively into the promises of gain nor fearing excessively the consequences of loss.

Here are some articles that explore the concept of relaxation in more detail: [Embrace Reality and Let the Universe Fulfill Your Desires](#), [Shunryu Suzuki Speaks on Enlightenment & Zazen Practice](#) and [Today I Finally Passed the Test & Officially Became a Man](#).

2. Witness: This is a big ask I know. No human being ever has or probably ever will be able to bear witness constantly to all that is taking place within their mind and body. That being said, the more you can do it the more awareness will illuminate the inner walls of your mind, thinking and emotions. At the end witnessing is really all that is needed for enlightenment, so devote yourself to this practice of mindfulness. As Osho and Gurdjieff describe it, look with double arrowed awareness. One arrow observing that which is being done, thought and felt, while one arrow observing the doer, thinker and feeler. This is the secret to self-knowledge and being a light onto yourself.

In addition, witnessing is the basis of all insight meditation and you will find more details, hints and tips on this practice in the following articles: [Brain Development & Enlightenment - Insight Meditation - Part 3](#), [Silent Mind Meditation Program - The Silent Mind Meditation Chapter 12](#) and [The True Meaning of Laziness](#).

3. Affection: Forgive, be kind, be thoughtful, be nice, be good, be sensitive, be loving, be compassionate. All in all, it's the practice of Loving-Kindness Meditation. Let me tell you the hard part here. It is easy to do all of the above when things are going your way, but, can you do all of the above when things are not? As they say a well fed dog is friendly, but the real nature will be revealed when he is hungry. So it is with us. We can put up our best when all is good, but, can you

do the same when you don't get what you want? When someone insults you? When your ego takes a hit? Will you be able to side with affection under duress or will the subconscious, hidden, egotistical nature take control? That is the real test of adhering to this principle of affection and be warned it is not easy, but if you wish to ascend this practice must be mastered.

4. Honesty: Absolute honesty I should say. In word, deed and behavior. You will have fun with this one. Just give it a try and you will be amazed by how much you learn about yourself. How hard the mind works to manipulate perception and procure security, without any consideration to what is true. I have gone into this concept in more detail in the following article so head on over to read the nitty gritty: [Silent Mind Meditation Program: Honesty - Chapter 6](#).

One additional helpful tip. In the article, [10 Things to do Everyday for A Happy, Meaningful & Good Life](#), which I hope you are all following religiously :-), item #7 speaks of doing your daily accounting at the end of the day. This is a great time to reflect on all the times during the day you were dishonest, insincere, hypocritical and pretentious. Please don't start judging yourself, simply maintain a healthy sense of humor and learn about the antics of your ego and mind.

5. Courage: By courage here, I also mean self-confidence and self-belief. Courage is important on 2 fronts. First, the path to enlightenment is ultimately walked alone. Without courage you will not get very far, as at the first sign of danger you will balk. Second, to live a good life means to live according to your passion and if you lack courage you are going to play it safe always and never take the necessary chances to follow your heart.

This is another topic on which you can find lots more information here on [Mastery of Meditation](#). I would suggest the following 4 articles to help explore this concept more: [Silent Mind Meditation Program: Confidence - Chapter 5](#), [Inspiring Osho Quote on How to Live Courageously](#), [New Kundalini Yoga Classes & the Courage to Live Dangerously](#) and [How to Escape Your Suffering - The Blind Man vs. The Cripple](#).

Conclusion:

So there are my 5 golden rules for living an enlightened and good life. I try to review them every morning and have them posted in handy

places as reminders as well.

Chapter 25

Zen Meditation Technique - Zazen

The first meditation we will explore in the famous Zen Meditation Technique, also called Zazen or Breath Meditation. At the end of the meditation script I will reveal the real secret behind this most profound meditation.

Background of Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

This was the meditation of Lord Buddha - I should have to say no more in order to motivate you to try it. It is one of the most widely used meditations in the world and is the heart of Zen Buddhist teachings. If one was to make a short list of the best meditation techniques, Zazen would most certainly make the top 10 list.

Tools required for Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

* Zafu (traditional Zen meditation cushion), Smile Cushion or other firm meditation cushion. I purchased mine from zafu.net. I also purchased a zabuton (meditation mat) from them, a zabuton though is optional.

- * Loose comfortable clothing.
- * An alarm clock, stop watch or other time device.

Benefits of Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

Primary Benefits:

- * Builds concentration and focus.
- * Self Knowledge - both, the workings of little self (ego) and awareness of the Big Self (True Divine Nature).
- * Calmness.
- * Compassion.

- * Spontaneous joy.

Secondary Benefits:

- * Improves health and wellbeing.
- * Increases willpower and builds character.
- * Bestows psychic powers.

Cautions for Practicing Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

There are very few cautions with regard to Zazen practice, but the one I would like to point out has to do with emotional storms.

There can be periods of time, either during a single sitting or spanning across several weeks, when emotions you may have suppressed rise up to the surface and force you to deal with them. During these turbulent times, don't exacerbate the issue by chewing on the emotion laden thoughts that come up. Traumatizing yourself in this way has no value. Instead, sit with the emotions and related thoughts without resistance, then let them go and return your awareness to your breath.

This emotional cleansing is due to the visibility of the subconscious mind, once the conscious mind is quieted by the meditation. In the short term, this can be a difficult time to go through, but in the long term it's a necessary and healthy cleansing that will promote greater peace, depth, joy and clarity in your life.

Guided Basic Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

* Find a quiet place and sit in a comfortable cross legged position. If using a zafu or similar meditation cushion, sit on the forward third of the cushion. The objective is for your hips to be raised above your knees and to form a three point base with your knees and buttocks touching the floor/cushion.

- * Set your alarm or other time device for 20 minutes.

* Now elongate your spine upwards and to align it with the back of your head, subtly bring your chin back and in, like a soldier at attention. There will be a slight inward arch in your lower back.

* Now rock gently from side to side in big arcs, making them smaller and smaller till you drift to a stop. You should find yourself perpendicular to the floor with no tension or pull from either side.

* Have your eyes half open with an unfocused gaze on the floor in front of you. You should be looking down at a 45 degree angle about 2 to 3 feet in front of you. You may also close your eyes if you prefer.

* Bring your hands to your lap and place them in the cosmic mudra. To do this, rest your right hand on your lap, then rest your left hand on top of it and have your fingers overlap. Now bring the thumb tips together, thus forming an oval frame.

* Close your mouth, swallow your saliva creating a slight vacuum and place your tongue against the roof of your mouth. After this point there should be absolutely no more movement of the body. No fidgeting, scratching, shifting - nothing - be like you are frozen in time.

* Take 5 deep, slow breaths though the nose. This will oxygenate your blood and relax you.

* Now bring your attention to your breath without trying to manipulate it in any way, just become aware of its flow. Spend a few minutes just observing it closely till it starts to become regular and relaxed.

* At this point begin counting your breath. Count an inhalation as 1, then the exhalation as 2 and continue to count your breaths until you reach 10. At which point return to 1 with the next inhalation. If at any point you get caught in a mental story line and loose your count, gently, without passing any judgment, return to 1 and start over. That's it, continue for the duration of the meditation.

Guided Intermediate Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

Follow all the steps for the Basic Zen Meditation Technique, except for the last step where now a complete inhalation and exhalation cycle should be counted as 1. So you will do 10 full cycles of inhalation and exhalation before returning to 1. You can also increase the time to 30 - 40 minutes.

Guided Advanced Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

Follow all the steps for the Basic Zen Meditation Technique, except for the last step. Now instead of counting the breaths, just "be the breath". Don't try to jump to this step too soon, first build your concentration and focus. You can also increase the time to 1 hour.

Hints and Tips for Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

- * Do some stretching or Yoga before sitting in zazen. It will help your body adjust better.

- * Be regular, the benefits of this meditation are vast, but they take time to manifest.

- * Some good internet resources and books on zen meditation and zen teachings are listed below...

 - o Charlotte Joko Beck's Ordinary Mind Zen School and her book Everyday Zen: Love & Work

 - o Zen Mountain Monastery - Mountain and Rivers Order of Zen Buddhism

 - o Shunryu Suzuki's San Francisco Zen Center and his book Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

Secret of Zen Meditation Technique (Zazen):

The secret of zazen does not lie in the awareness of the inhalation or the exhalation. It lies in the gap in between these breaths. It lies when the breath is spontaneously suspended. It is in this gap where the mysteries of the Universe are hidden. This gap and the gap between 2 thoughts are best friends, and in this silence between 2 thoughts the absolute is revealed. Don't try to force this pause, just continue with your zazen, it will come about naturally.

Chapter 26

So-Hum Mantra Meditation

Background of So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique:

The simple, yet profound, So Hum Meditation technique is probably one of the most popular Mantra Meditations. It emerges from the Yoga school of Hindu Philosophy and belongs in the category of Japa Meditations (meditations that require the chanting of mantras).

The So Hum (aka So Ham, Soham or Sohum) Mantra Meditation, done sincerely, is very effective in bringing about a complete transformation of individual consciousness. So Hum literally means "I am That" (So = "That" or "Thou" or "Divinity"; Hum = "I am") and the mantra's aim is to bring about this union (yoga) between your individual consciousness and Divine Consciousness. Another way to interpret this purpose, is that the meditation brings about the realization that all that you see is yourself — The Observer is the Observed.

Tools Required for So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique:

- * An alarm clock, stop watch or other time device
- * Or you can use a traditional bead necklace (mala) to count repetitions if you prefer.

Benefits of So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique:

Primary Benefits:

- * Realization of your Divine Nature.
- * Realization of the non-dual Nature of Reality.
- * Stress reduction, relaxation, peace and tranquility.
- * Spontaneous joy and happiness.

Secondary Benefits:

- * Promotes self-healing.

- * Builds mental focus and concentration.

So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique Cautions:

None.

Guided So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique:

Follow the step by step guided meditation below to practice this technique.

- * Sit in a comfortable cross legged position. You may also sit on a chair or lie on your.
- * Set your alarm or other time device for 10 to 20 minutes. If using a Mala do an appropriate count (for a traditional 108 bead mala its about 1 full cycle through the mala)
- * If sitting, elongate your spine upwards, lengthen your neck and subtly bring your chin back and in, like a soldier at attention. This will align the spine with the back of your head.
- * Place your hands in Gyan Mudra (Gesture of Knowledge). Which is thumb and index finger lightly meeting, wrists resting gently on the knees and palms facing upward. The other 3 fingers are extended.
- * Take 5 deep, slow breaths though the nose. This will oxygenate your blood and relax you.
- * Try to remain as still as possible.
- * Now inhale slowly while saying the sound "Sooooo" mentally and then slowly exhale while silently saying the sound "Hummmmm".
- * After spending about half the time in meditation as described above, start with every cycle to feel your awareness expanding and merging with the Universe Consciousness. So as you continue to chant silently the mantra in rhythm with your breath, feel its real meaning acting upon you.
- * Continue for the duration of the meditation.

* As the end of the meditation, try to remain with the all inclusive awareness and the sense that all is included in you.

So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique Tips:

* Another way to practice the So Hum Mantra Meditation is to visualize life, light and Divine energy flowing into you when you inhale and mentally say "Soooooo" and to feel your ego-centric limited consciousness flow out and evaporate into the atmosphere as you exhale and mentally say "Hummmmm". This variation is also consistent with the meaning of the Mantra.

* At you develop this practice increase the exhalation phase such that it grows to about two times the inhalation phase.

Secret of So Hum Mantra Meditation Technique:

Where did this Mantra come from? That is the secret of this Mantra. It is actually the sound of the breath during inhalation and exhalation. Inhalation sounds like "Soooooo", while exhalation sounds like "Hummmmm". So this is the music of life and by practicing this meditation, we can learn to dance in tune with it.

Chapter 27

AUM Mantra Third Eye Meditation

The next guided meditation technique we will explore is a widely used and accepted method for opening, activating and balancing the mysterious and powerful Ajna Chakra (Third Eye). It is the potent AUM Mantra meditation technique.

Background of Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

The Ajna Chakra is the sixth chakra of the Kundalini Seven Chakra System. A chakra is an energy vortex which resides in a particular location of the body and governs the organs and glands of that region. A Chakra is also associated with certain traits and characteristics of the personality and forms a bridge between mind, body and spirit.

The Ajna Chakra (or Third Eye) lies at the very top of spine in the medulla oblongata. It relates to the pituitary gland, the pineal gland, the nasociliary nerve plexus and frontal lobes of the brain.

Chakra Meditation means to activate and balance a particular chakra, thus improving the functioning of everything in that particular region, as well as refining the associated personality traits and characteristics. In some cases psychic powers associated with a particular chakra are also unleashed.

Ajna Chakra literally mean "To Command". This chakra is also called the "Third Eye", as it's activation gives one the power of intuitive knowledge. In addition, it is called the "Guru Chakra" as its activation connects one to the "Inner Guru". Similarly, it is also called "Eye of Shiva" or "The Divine Eye" for it's awakening implies the higher stages of meditation and wisdom.

Each chakra can be activated by several means. In this guided meditation we will use the physical trigger point of the chakra (kshetram) as a point of concentration to activate it. In addition, each chakra is associated with a particular seed sound (Beej Mantra) which can be utilized to awaken it. For the Ajan Chakra the Beej Mantra is the primordial sound "OM" (AUM) and this guided meditation will be using that as well.

Tools required for Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

- * An alarm clock, stop watch or other time device.

Benefits of Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

Primary Benefits:

- * Builds the power of intuition.
- * Bestows and increases psychic powers.
- * Increases and refines awareness.
- * Provides clarity of thought, insights and wisdom.
- * Allows one to connect to the "inner guru" or "higher self" for guidance and inspiration.
- * Builds the Yogic Mind or Neutral Mind, which is free from attachments of the ego.
- * Build the power to read others and detect their subtle and gross energetic conditions.
- * Promotes the flow of Kundalini Energy into the higher centers.

Secondary Benefits:

- * Promotes the ability to have lucid dreams.
- * Allows for non-verbal communication.
- * Builds focus and one-pointedness of the mind.
- * Improves your vision.
- * Promotes health and wellbeing.

Cautions for Practicing Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

Do not strain when holding shambhavi yoga mudra (detailed below).

Guided Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

Follow the step by step guided meditation below to practice this technique:

- * Sit in a comfortable cross legged position. You may also sit on a chair or lean against a wall for this meditation.
- * Set your alarm or other time device for 20 minutes.
- * Elongate your spine upwards, lengthen your neck and subtly bring your chin back and in, like a soldier at attention. This will align the spine with the back of your head.
- * Take 5 deep, slow breaths through the nose. This will oxygenate your blood and relax you.
- * Keeping the head straight look up at an imaginary point in the middle of your forehead, just above the eyebrows. This eye position is called shambhavi yoga mudra. Close your eyes while holding this mudra. Do not strain.
- * Rest your hands in any comfortable position, you can place them on your knees.
- * Try to remain as still as possible.
- * Now inhale deeply and begin to chant in a soft, slow, steady voice the mantra OM (pronounced AUM). One chant of OM (AUM) Mantra should last for the entire exhalation. It's a long "Oh", followed by a semi long "Mmmm" during each exhalation. Once all the air has been expelled, inhale fully again and begin to chant the mantra once more. Visualize the OM sound coming from a point in the middle of the forehead just above the eyebrows and emanating throughout your entire body.
- * Continue for the duration of the meditation. If your eyes tire from shambhavi yoga mudra release the mudra, but continue to chant the OM (AUM) mantra as above. Reapply the mudra again when ready.

* Once you have completed the meditation, rub the palms of your hands together to make them warm and place them on your eyes as you open them slowly. This will relax and comfort your eye muscles.

Hints and Tips for Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

* There are many variations to OM (AUM) Mantra chanting for the activation of Ajna Chakra. I will provide a variation that only requires silently chanting OM Mantra and therefore can be practiced almost anywhere. Follow all steps from the guided meditation above except instead of chanting OM (AUM) Mantra out loud, as you inhale chant "Oh" silently, while visualizing the sound flowing into Ajna Chakra from your forehead and then silently chant "Mmmm" as you exhale, visualizing the sound leaving your forehead from Ajna Chakra. The rest is the same as the guided meditation above.

Secret of Ajna Chakra Meditation Technique (Third Eye):

Many women today are actually practicing Ajna Chakra Meditation without even knowing it. This is resulting from the tradition of wearing a bindi. A bindi is the colorful decorative dot placed in the middle of the forehead and was designed originally to provide continual stimulation to Ajna Chakra by way of its Kshetram (physical trigger point). So next time you wear a bindi, remember that not only does it look oh so fine, but it is also raising your level of awareness and consciousness - not bad for a dot.

Chapter 28

Beginner's Guide to Yoga Pranayama

The vast benefits of yoga pranayama, or yoga breathing exercises, are now starting to be discovered by mainstream society. It is inevitable, to those of us familiar with this profound science, that pranayama will gain equal, if not greater, popularity than the physical yoga exercises (Hatha Yoga Asanas) have done so far. This is because pranayama is absolutely something everyone can practice, regardless of age or physical prowess. If you can breathe, you can do pranayama.

The beauty with yoga breathing is that simple techniques can bestow terrific benefits and that learning and practicing these techniques is something well within reach of us all. Whether you are a beginner or advanced yogi, pranayama is something you will find to be a powerful tool to help you with your spiritual evolution. That being said, there are certain guidelines and recommendations that you should follow with regard to pranayama practice, and in this article I would like to provide those to you.

If you are an advanced yogi, from the point of view of Hatha yoga practice, and you have not done much pranayama, then you should approach this science with the same respect as a beginner would. This is because prana, or life-force, is the vast energy of atoms, and the body's capacity to handle such energy should be built up gently and systematically over time. Rushing pranayama practice can create imbalances in the systems and other problems, that could easily have been avoided if an intelligent approach had been embraced.

Beginner's Guide to Yoga Pranayama Practice

1. Clothing: Clothing should be loose, specially around the abdomen. This will ensure that the natural movement of the diaphragm is not impeded when doing the breathing exercises.

2. Diet: You should not have eaten any heavy meal at least 2-3 hours prior to practicing pranayama. The stomach should be empty. It is fine to sip some water though during the practice to stay hydrated, specially when doing heat generating vigorous exercises. If your diet can consist of light, fresh food that will help the cleansing process as well.

3. Time: Dawn is a terrific time to practice yoga and meditation, but this is more so for pranayama practice. This is because the early morning air is fresh and at this time the air contains the most amount of prana. Practicing at this time, will bestow benefits faster. Of course, if this is not feasible, no worries, practice when you can. The article, [How to Help You Become an Early Riser](#), can be helpful to you if you are looking to establish an early morning practice.

4. Posture: Always sit with your back as straight if possible. In addition, keep the chin slightly tucked in so that the back of the neck is aligned with the spine. This will help the flow of energy up and down the spine and up into the brain region. In addition, this will prevent you from getting dizzy during vigorous exercises.

5. Illness: Whether you are a beginner or an advanced practitioner, do not practice any advanced pranayamas when you are unwell. Do the beginner versions of the breathing exercises or choose easy pranayamas to do instead. It is also fine to stop entirely until you have recovered fully.

6. Effort: Again, regardless of if you are a beginner or advanced yogi you should never strain when practicing yoga. This is especially true when doing the breathing exercises. As indicated above, pranayama, which means the expansion and control of prana, deals with the nuclear energy of atoms and progress should be made gently and systematically.

This is even more applicable for any pranayama that requires you to hold your breath in or out for prolonged periods of time. If at all you feel uncomfortable while practicing a pranayama, stop, take a break and restart again when you feel ready.

7. Cautions: Don't practice any heat generating pranayamas while sitting directly under the hot sun. This can aggravate the heat in the system (pitta). Similarly, choose pranayamas according to conditions and state of your health. In other words, don't practice Sheetali Pranayama if you are suffering from a cold or chest congestion, etc. The [Overview of Ayurveda](#) article, can be a helpful guide to you on this topic as well.

8. Location: Try to practice in a well ventilated room with plenty of fresh air.

Summary

Yoga Pranayama is perhaps the best part of yoga. All the various types of yoga have contributed to this profound science and the following 2 free e-books on the website, should give you plenty of techniques to incorporate into your daily practice: Free Online Yoga Pranayamas E-Book and Free Online Yoga Brathing Exercises Videos.

If you are just beginning your yoga practice, definitely incorporate pranayama into it, if you are an adept yogi and have not indulged in pranayama, then it's overdue that you take advantage of this warehouse of profound wisdom.

Chapter 29

Four Part Deep Breathing Exercise

Background of 4 Part Deep Breathing Exercise:

This is the yoga breathing technique that my Kundalini Yoga teacher, Ravi Singh, almost always started our classes with. This is because despite being a simple breathing exercise, its ability to open up and get one's energy going is astonishing.

In addition to awakening one's energy, this particular yoga pranayama also has other significant benefits which I will detail below. Whether you are new to Yogic breathing techniques or an expert, this particular breath control exercise should be a permanent member in your goodie bag, so you can pull it out anytime you need to fire up and vitalize your pranic body (energetic body).

Benefits of Yogic 4 Part Deep Breathing Exercise:

Primary:

- * Rapidly oxygenates your blood, thus helping the body heal, detoxify and remove waste more effectively.
- * Increases the amount of Prana (life-force) you are bringing into your system.
- * Improves the elasticity of your lungs and increases respiratory capacity.
- * Activates the energy flows in your body.

Cautions for Practicing Yogic 4 Part Deep Breathing Exercise:

- * If you feel dizzy when practicing this breathing technique, you should stop and substitute normal breathing. If you suffer from vertigo, you should use caution in practicing this exercise.
- * You should be careful practicing this pranayama if you have high blood pressure, heart disease or suffer from stroke or epilepsy.

Step-by-step Instructions for Yogic 4 Part Deep Breathing Exercise:

- * To practice this breathing exercise sit up in a comfortable position.
- * Elongate your spine upwards, lengthen your neck and subtly bring your chin back and in like a soldier at attention. This will align the spine with the back of your head.
- * Close your eyes.
- * Bring the palms of your hands together at sternum level (like when you pray), but have them 2-4 inches away from your chest. Your elbows should be raised up such that your forearms are parallel to the ground.
- * Press the palms of your hands together applying equal pressure from both sides. The pressure should be firm but not excessive.
- * Relax your diaphragm and stomach muscles.
- * Now inhale in 4 sniffs and exhale in 4 sniffs. So you are breaking up 1 inhalation into 4 equal parts and breaking up 1 exhalation into 4 equal parts. By the fourth sniff, during the inhalation, you should have completely filled your lungs with air and by the fourth sniff, during the exhalation, you should have completely expelled all the air. Completely inhaling and exhaling by the last sniff is a key part of this breathing technique. That's it, continue for 1-5 minutes.

Secret of Yogic 4 Part Deep Breathing Exercise:

The real benefit of this yoga pranayama is hidden in benefit number three listed above (increases lung capacity). According to Yoga, your evolution can be triggered simply by the capacity of your respiratory system. When it reaches a critical threshold relative to your size, you evolve. By partitioning the breath, this particular breathing technique forces you to maximize the use of your lungs. Thus, helping them expand and absorb more prana (life-force) from the air.

Generally, in everyday life we don't use our full lung capacity and over time this capacity diminishes. So take a bold step towards your spiritual growth and include the Yogic 4 Part Deep Breathing Exercise

into your daily yoga practice. It is a great way to start and will go a long way in helping you finish.

Chapter 30

Kapalbhati Yoga Pranayama

What Is Kapalbhati Yoga Pranayama:

Of the many wonderful pranayamas that Yoga gives us, Kapalbhati (aka Kapal Bhati) is one of my favorite breathing exercises. It is not at all complicated to do and yet, even when done for a short time consistently, it's benefits are undeniable. If there was only one pranayama that you elected to do, Kapalbhati might well be the one to pick - it's that good!

Kapalbhati of course dates back to the Yoga Sutras of Sage Patanjali, but recently its popularity has been revived by the work of Ramdev Swamiji. Kapalbhati is part of Ramdev Swamiji's set of 6 pranayamas and the practice of this set has spread like wildfire across India as well as the rest of the world. Kapalbhati, in my view, is the corner stone of this set and many of the absolutely unbelievable benefits that practitioners have been getting from practicing Ramdev Swamiji's set, can be attributed to this powerful breathing exercise.

Below are the details of Kapalbhati Yoga Pranayama.

Benefits of Kapalbhati Yoga Pranayama:

Primary:

- * Works on the Heart Center (Anahat Chakra) and associated organs and systems of that region. Thus improving respiration, lung capacity and blood circulation. Kapalbhati helps cure associated diseases of this region (asthma, bronchitis, etc).

- * Works on the Naval Center (Manipura Chakra) and associated organs and systems of that regions. Thus improving digestion and elimination. Cures diseases and imbalances associated with this region such as indigestion, gas, diabetes, etc.

- * Practiced over time, Kapalbhati Pranayama also helps reduce abdominal fat, fight obesity, tone abdominal muscles and bestow core abdominal strength and power.

* From an emotional stand point Kapalbhata Pranayama purges the system of accumulated emotional debris such as anger, hurt, jealousy, hatred etc., thus dissolving the blockages and removing the imbalances such emotional history causes in the energetic pathways. The cleansing of the energetic pathways (nadis) increases the magnitude and flow of prana (life-force) and Kundalini Shakti (energy) throughout all regions of the body.

* From a mental stand point Kapalbhata Pranayama assists in throwing out all negative thoughts from the psyche, thus, helping to cleanse and illuminate the mind.

* From a body stand point, Kapalbhata Pranayama should be used to eject any illnesses, diseases, weaknesses from the body, thus allowing it grow in health, vitality and vigor.

Secondary:

* Generates heat in the system to help dissolve toxins and waste matter.

* Adds luster and beauty to your face.

Cautions for Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama:

* If you feel dizzy or nauseous you should slow down the force and pace of Kapalbhata pranayama or stop entirely and return to normal breathing.

* If you have acid or heat related gastric issues such as ulcers you should use caution with Kapalbhata Pranayama.

* Kapalbhata is not to be practiced by those suffering from high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke or epilepsy.

How To Do Beginner's Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama:

* To practice this breathing exercise sit up in a comfortable position, cross legged is best.

* Elongate your spine upwards, lengthen your neck and subtly bring your chin back and in like a soldier at attention. This will align the spine with the back of your head.

- * Close your eyes.

- * Have your hands in Gyan Mudra. In Gyan Mudra have your thumb tips and index finger meeting, with the wrists resting gently on the knees and the palms turned slightly upwards.

- * Relax your stomach muscles.

- * Now expel the air through the nose, as forcefully as you are comfortable doing. As you exhale, consciously contract your abdominal muscles and draw the abdomen inwards towards the spine (like when you suck in your stomach). Then allow the inhalation to occur completely passively without any additional effort. To repeat, the exhalation is done using conscious sharp force, while the inhalation is just a recoil action bringing the air back into the lungs. All the breathing takes place through the nose. Right after the passive inhalation, exhale again forcefully and continue at a steady rhythm.

- * Do a round of 10 repetitions.

- * Work your way up to doing 5 rounds (where 1 round is 10 repetitions), while taking a break between each round.

- * Practice Note: Unlike doing Bhastrika Yoga Pranayama where you use force during both the inhalation and the exhalation, in Kapalbhata force is only to be used during the exhalation.

How To Do Intermediate Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama:

Once you feel comfortable with the beginner's version of Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama, perform the breathing exercise with more force if possible and also slowly increase the number of repetition per round to 50. You may also prefer to do a single round, but, with many more repetitions instead (up to 5 minutes worth)

How To Do Advanced Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama:

Build up to doing this pranayama for 10 minutes straight or equivalent number of rounds with more repetitions per rounds.

Secret of Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama:

The secret of the success of Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama lies in where your mind is when doing this terrific breathing exercise. If you need to cure your body, then with every exhalation imagine that disease is being purged from your system. If you need to regain emotional balance, then again, with every exhalation visualize the negative emotions or weaknesses being thrown out of your system. If negative thoughts are the issue, let every exhalation expel them from your heart and mind.

The power of the mind has been well documented, you are read about some of its incredible capability in this article [Mind Power to Manifest Intentions & Desires Instantly](#), so use your mind to help you accomplish that which you have intended and unleash the full potential of Kapalbhata Yoga Pranayama.

Chapter 31

Breath of Fire Yoga Pranayama

What Is The Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

Breath of Fire Yoga breathing exercise lies at the heart of Kundalini Yoga practice. This breathing exercise is absolutely essential to the practice of Kundalini Yoga. The roots of this pranayama are impossible to trace, but I would like to thank my teacher Ravi Singh under whose expert guidance I learned this technique.

Tools Required for Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

Just your nose :-D.

Benefits of Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

Primary:

- * Quickly oxygenates your blood, thus helping the body detoxify itself and remove waste more effectively.
- * Builds lung capacity and helps purify the respiratory system.
- * Generates heat and increases your level of energy by activating energy flows in your body.
- * Synchronizes your entire system under one rhythm, thus promoting greater internal harmony and health.

Secondary:

- * Balances and strengthens the nervous system.
- * Magnifies the benefits of exercises done in conjunction with this breath.
- * When done forcefully, the pulsating of the diaphragm massages the internal organs, thus improving the digestive system.

Cautions for Practicing Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

* If you feel dizzy when practicing Breath of Fire, you should stop and substitute normal breathing. If you suffer from vertigo, you should use caution in practicing this breathing exercise.

* If you are menstruating you should not practice Breath of Fire, use Long Deep Breathing instead.

* You should be careful practicing Breath of Fire if you have high blood pressure, heart disease or suffer from stroke or epilepsy. Also, if you have acid or heat related gastric issues such as ulcers you should use caution.

How To Do Basic Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

* To practice this breathing exercise sit up in a comfortable position.

* Elongate your spine upwards, lengthen your neck and subtly bring your chin back and in like a soldier at attention. This will align the spine with the back of your head.

* Close your eyes.

* Rest your hands in any comfortable position.

* Relax your stomach muscles.

* Now begin to breathe rapidly through the nose with equal emphasis on the inhalation and exhalation. It will be like very fast sniffing. Keep the breath shallow, just at the tip of the nose. This is very important. Proceed at a comfortable pace and establish a steady rhythm. Pay no special attention to the chest or diaphragm other than staying relaxed. You will find the stomach pulses on its own in rhythm to the breath. That's it, continue for 1 minute.

How To Do Intermediate Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

* Perform the breathing at a faster pace.

- * Increase the duration of the exercise to 3 minutes.

How To Do Advanced Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

- * Build up the pace and power with which you do the breathing.
- * Build up the time for this pranayama to 11 minutes.

Secret of Breath of Fire Kundalini Yoga Pranayama:

So the trick question is, "How many breaths are you taking when doing the breath of fire yoga pranayama"? This will be of some special concern to those who believe in the idea that each of us is born with a preset number of breaths and once we finish our quota - the fat lady sings. So for those folks it would be rather alarming to practice this exercise regularly, as they would be drastically reducing their life span - but, thankfully they need not worry. The beauty of this breathing exercise, aside from its lengthy list of benefits, is that it registers to the brain as only 1 breath. So put your worries aside and enjoy the practice

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