

The Importance of Connection (to Self)

Let us focus on connection.

The Pandemic taught us a lot about connection... how much we need it, how important it is, how we grow from it. Throughout that time of physical disconnection, most of us continued to stay connected and busy, with life stuff in general, and also with life stuff that helped us get through the uncertainty and disruption of what "covid life" brought our way.

When our mind is occupied by worries stemming from activities that occur outside our control, besides bringing on stress, we actually become less connected to our own self.

For this reason, and especially in our current age of media, it is even more important than ever to take a few minutes a day to think about NOTHING. To intentionally sit (or stand, or lay down, or float – the point is intention, not doing it someone else's way) and release your mind from having any thoughts. Through this intentional practice, we naturally deepen our connection to self.

If you have a hard time meditating here are two questions you could think on when you take time to close your eyes: What does my breathing sound like? What does nothing look like?

The idea is to let go.

To let go of thoughts as they occur, and especially without judgment.

To let go of expectations and results.

To let go of the need to accomplish anything.

If you keep a steady practice of meditation, just 2-3 minutes a day even, you will see a change in your perspective on life. And calm comes, as well.

Please share your experience with meditation in the comments

below.

Tapas : Building and Maintaining Our Inner Heat

Yoga's third Niyama: Tapas

The word "tapas" in Sanskrit is often translated as "heat," though its implied meaning is having self-discipline. You might consider it as having a "burning enthusiasm," which helps us to achieve our goals, express our creativity, help others, and meaningfully contribute in the world. This happens because we make time for our passions and keep agreements we have made with ourselves.

Following your path/purpose (or dharma) is not always easy; often it takes tireless work. Tapas is the fuel to keep doing the work. Often, this means resilience amidst failure. When considering Tapas we might think back to Santosha (contentment). Some of the most rewarding things in life require hard work. Sometimes we use the fire within to push through to achieve what we most desire. But sometimes the inner fire becomes dim and it feels impossible to achieve anything. We must always remember the fire can never be extinguished, so keep your attention on it, and it will surely grow.

Personal reflection questions for Tapas:

> Do I make agreements with myself that I have difficulty keeping?

What holds me back from keeping the agreement?

> What are 2-3 habits I have that support my health?

> What are 2-3 habits I have that support my purpose/dharma?

> Do I observe silence? Do I speak unnecessarily?

> Do I make choices that are indulgent, or choices that build my strength and character?

Finding Inner Peace and Calm in a Time of Chaos

Have you started to spend less time on social media in an effort to avoid the seemingly never-ending negative messages?

Do you feel like you just want to put the news on mute for a while so you aren't constantly exposed to the negativity?

With all the chaos we're exposed to on a daily basis, it can seem overwhelming and stressful to be trapped in the house, full of uncertainty. However, it is important to realize that peace and tranquility come from within and can be found even in the most challenging times. Making an effort to find this inner peace is one of the most important things you can do in this chaotic time.

Here are some ideas for you to find inner peace.

Meditation

Meditation is a great way to calm the mind. There are so many ways to meditate, but you can make it really simple. Just focus on the air moving in and out of your body as you breathe for 10-20 breaths. This will help you stay present in the moment. A meditation practice allows you to feel balanced from within and allows you to reflect on outside surroundings rather than consuming them. You can also listen to a guided meditation to keep your attention more focused on "nothing." Download one from my store, or find a free one on YouTube. You will learn different breathing techniques that can help you calm down when you find yourself stressing out. If you keep up a short, steady practice of meditation, you will begin to notice that you are not as anxious and overwhelmed.

Routine

Developing a routine, even when stuck at home, is a crucial way to find structure in your life when there are challenges put in front of you. Waking up at the same time, making time to meditate or journal each morning, and reading before bed are a few examples of tasks you can incorporate into your daily routine to keep you feeling calm. I've noticed that most everyone chooses to take two minutes daily to brush his or her teeth. Imagine creating a daily routine of just 10 minutes that incorporates a couple other self-help practices. Start small to see a big impact on your life. When you keep up positive habits, it gives you confidence to continue and motivation to put even more time into your personal development.

Nature

"Nature is the best medicine." Not everyone has a back yard filled with trees and a meditation garden. If you DO have access to that, try to get out for a few minutes every day. Enjoy fresh air and the peace that nature holds. If you *don't*

have nature in your backyard, make it a priority to take a walk in nature at least once a week. Find a river or stream to wander next to, a path in a park, or a trail in the woods. Being in nature takes away the feeling of being trapped in the house. It is also a great stress reliever that will help you feel gratitude and inner peace during tough times. If you are committed to bringing inner peace to your life, schedule a 30 minute walk every day. It is a great way to stay active and get a breath of fresh air to reduce your stress and anxiety levels. When you are constantly surrounded by technology, filled with news that may seem concerning, your stress is likely to rise. When you intentionally step away and let go of this attachment, you will instantly feel calmer.

Watch Your News Intake

When chaos is going on around the world and there is stress in the air, the news is the main source that people base their opinions off of and process information from. However, it is no surprise that news sensationalizes negative situations. The more disturbing the information, the more viewers, right? The ever-increasing bad news can make the brain feel overwhelmed, anxious, and stressed. While it is important to stay up to date with current events, it is also important to not let it consume you. Many of these things are out of your control and after you take the precautionary measures that you can, it is important to step away from the news in order to relax the mind.

Read

Reading a book is a great way to clear your mind and distract yourself from your surroundings when they seem overwhelming or negative. It is a great way to restore your emotions and reduce stress without staring at a screen or scrolling through social media. When you read a book, you are improving your

brain function, and this has proven to improve mental wellbeing. Whether it is an educational book, self-help book, or fiction, you will find that you are able to learn a lot and grow both professionally and personally in an enjoyable way.

While each of these activities is “easy” on its own, it takes YOU to make the first step. Making yourself a priority, especially in chaotic times, is the only certain way to come to your own inner peace and find calm.

Start by doing just a few minutes a day of healthy habits. See how it affects your life in a positive way. Then add a few more minutes. Once you are up to 30 minutes a day of putting your well being first through practicing calming habits, you will easily recognize the peace developing within you.

What new positive habit will you take on first?

Writing In a Journal Helps With Stress

It might be surprising in today’s digitally dominated world, but Journaling has become incredibly popular these days. In fact it’s actually being recommended by health professionals as a scientifically proven way to help cope with the stresses of modern day life.

It can be incredibly impactful especially in the unprecedented times we are facing now.

If you’re not familiar with the concept of journaling, think back to when you were younger. You may have started a secret

diary back in elementary school or middle school, and wrote about whoever was your secret crush that week, or how you managed to sneak out to hang with friends when your parents thought you were in your room diligently doing your homework?

Journaling is still writing your thoughts down, but is generally a place for you to express your deeper thoughts, feelings, and emotions rather than just catalogue daily events.

So how can journaling help you cope with stress?

It releases pent up feelings

Think about it. Do you say out loud everything you ever think? Probably not. Most people don't. We all have thoughts that are never verbally expressed, especially negative ones. So instead of letting those thoughts become pent up emotions that eat you up inside, a journal gives you a place write them down instead. It can be a great stress reliever to tear up the paper once you're done – symbolically getting rid of the negative feelings and dumping them in the trash where they belong.

Nobody is judging you

Allowing pent up emotions to build up inside will eventually have a negative effect on your well-being. Journaling is an excellent way to getting things off your chest and releasing your emotions in a non-judgmental environment. You can clear your mind and mentally purge the stresses of your day without worrying what somebody else might think. Thoughts and emotions you might otherwise have kept hidden and never talked about can be released.

You gain greater self-awareness

Writing down both positive and negative feelings helps you become more self-aware. You can reflect on how you felt about something that happened in your day. How did you react? How do you wish you had reacted? What thoughts did you have but

didn't vocalize? What would you do if the same thing happened again?

Reading back what you wrote every few days allows you to re-assess the issues that arose and then learn from them. Knowing your emotional strengths and limitations is one of the best ways to understand yourself so you can cope better with stress as it arises, as well as grow and thrive both mentally and physically.

Better mental clarity

Sometimes your thoughts and feelings can seem like a jumbled mess, especially when you are stressed and your mind is anxious. Writing your thoughts and feelings down can help you sort them out logically so you can understand them better. Having the words on paper in front of you can also help you see things more clearly and put situations into perspective.

Recognize the positives

Journaling isn't just for getting rid of negative emotions. Keeping a gratitude journal is an excellent way of focusing on the positives rather than dwelling on the negatives. When you write down the good things in your life and give thanks for them, that will often allow you to see the forest for the trees, as the saying goes, and realize that maybe things aren't quite as bad as they first seemed.

As you can see, there are many reasons why keeping a journal helps you cope with stress. All you need is a notebook and pen to get started. I've found the less precious the notebook, the freer my thoughts come out.

You will not only feel less stress by writing down your daily thoughts, but journaling is also proven to improve cognitive function, strengthen the immune system and improve your memory.

Why not get started today?!

Can Meditation Keep Your Brain Young?

As people age, their brains lose weight and volume. These changes may start to occur in people as young as their mid-20s. Astoundingly, research has shown that people who meditate to lose less brain mass over time than those who do not. In particular, research concluded people who meditated showed less of a decrease in their white brain matter.

White brain matter acts as a connector and insulator for gray brain matter. It carries nerve impulses between the functional parts of the brain. Gray brain matter houses the various neurological centers of the brain, which direct speech, motor skills, memory, and more.

It is estimated that meditation is practiced by more than 15 million Americans and many more people around the world. It has its roots in eastern culture, but has been whole-heartedly embraced in western societies.

Meditation has a wide variety of benefits, including:

- Improves sleep
- Inner peace and tranquility
- Reduces chronic pain
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Reduces depression
- Boosts attention
- Improves immunity
- Helps with weight loss

- Boosts memory
- Improves heart health and lowers blood pressure
- Improves wellbeing and allows for deeper relationships

Now researchers are finding that meditation may also help to keep our brains young!

Interesting Experiments

A team of researchers from UCLA wondered if meditation preserves the gray matter of people who meditate as well. The researchers found meditation to have a widespread effect on the entire brain not just specific regions of the brain associated with meditation. The study compared people having years of meditation experience with those who had none.

The meditators had an average of 20 years of experience with meditation practice. The age range of the of the study participants included people in their mid-20s to their late 70s. Nearly equal numbers of men and women participated in the study with 28 men and 22 women. They found the meditators still experienced a decline in gray matter with age but less than non-meditators. The researchers noted the positive outcome of the study but caution people reviewing the results: they were unable to establish a direct link to meditation and the preservation of gray matter.

Another UCLA study conducted in 2012 showed meditators to have more gyrification, folds in their brains, which may contribute to an ability process information faster than usual. Meditation appears to allow practitioners to maintain both white and gray matter and form increased connections in the brain; it seems to keep the brain young. Along with its positive effects on white and gray brain matter, meditation appears to have a positive effect on other body functions.

Anti-Aging Benefits Of Meditation

The youth-preserving and renewing benefits of meditation

include:

- Meditation increases DHEA, which facilitates the production of the hormones that maintain fat and mineral metabolism.
- An increase in Melatonin, which acts as antioxidant, supplies immune support and fights depression.
- A decrease in cortisol, the stress hormone that encourages the body to retain dangerous belly fat associated with heart disease and diabetes.

The Effects Of Meditation

Part of feeling and maintaining a youthful mental outlook centers around the quality of one's thinking patterns. Meditators learn to quiet mental chaos and build their ability to concentrate. They experience greater clarity of thought and tend to react less and respond more to circumstances. In short, they maintain their ability to be highly adaptive and think quickly with the additional benefit of choosing their response to situations rather than reacting to them.

How To Meditate

Meditators in the studies above, typically meditated twice a day for 20 minutes per sitting. Some schools of thought recommend meditation to start the day and to close it. However, a person may meditate whenever they have time in their schedule to accommodate it. And not everyone is ready to sit for a 20 minute stretch. Meditation is not an all or nothing proposition. It is also beneficial to meditate in shorter increments of time, sitting for 5 or 10 minutes. Consistency is the key here, not so much the length of time.

There are also several different methods of meditation, including:

- Primordial Sound Meditation
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
- Zen
- Transcendental Meditation

- Yoga Meditation (Kundalini)
- Focused Attention Meditation
- Open Monitoring Meditation
- Vipassana Meditation
- Loving Kindness Meditation (Metta Meditation)
- Mantra Meditation (OM Meditation)
- Qigong (Chi kung)

Getting Started

A person new to meditation needs to be patient; it takes time to train the mind to focus and settle into a meditation practice. The first step is to decide which from of meditation you wish to practice, and then learn how to do it. If you'd like a little guidance on how to start, please consider joining the [Know Yourself membership](#) where you will gain support and many resources to support your journey of self-discovery!

The benefits of a consistent meditation practice can develop in a few weeks with continued practice preserving your brain's youthful dynamics for years to come.

How Journaling Can Change Your Life

Whether you're going through a difficult period in your life, or perhaps dealing with anxiety and depression, journaling can serve as a free and entirely self-managed form of therapy that's actually quite effective. In fact, keeping a journal can also be beneficial when you've managed to reach and sustain a state of emotional balance and mental peace. Journaling gives us perspective into our daily life and also helps us see the "whole picture" in life that even talking to

a best friend cannot give us. Let's look at some ways in which journaling can be life changing.

Evoke A Sense of Mindfulness

Far too often, we move from day to day without ever stopping to smell the roses [[see my article on this](#)]. Not only are we failing to feel and express gratitude for the many wonderful things that are happening in our lives, but we're overlooking a number of incredible learning opportunities. Writing in a journal provides you a chance to stop and reflect on seemingly minor events that might otherwise go unnoticed.

This practice isn't just about noticing the positive things in life either. During the process of writing about your day and your interactions with others, you may notice negative patterns repeating themselves in your thoughts and deeds, problems within your personal relationships, personal needs that you haven't been paying attention to, and alternative ways of responding to both internal and external stress that you haven't been using.

Establish a Positive Mindset

When you keep a journal, you have the power to fill it with any type of material that you choose. Spending time to reflect on the small blessings in life, however, can automatically move you from a negative and self-defeating mindset into a more positive and proactive one. You might be swimming in debt, struggling in your inter-personal relationships, or barely hanging on at your job, but you may have the ability to walk, run, and jump, which is something that many people lack.

You have another day to affect change in your life, strong mental abilities, the power of self-forgiveness, and more. Taking the time to list out things that establish you as stronger, smarter, and more enduring than the problems that you're facing at the present moment will give you the strength, and the right attitude, to keep pushing forward.

Start Forming New Goals

Journals are also great tools for overall life planning. If you've ever wondered how some people seem to have their whole lives figured out, you should consider the fact that these individuals may be keeping journals. The best part about using a journal to establish and pursue life goals is the fact that this process can be an entirely informal one. This is merely a platform for bouncing ideas around and helping them take shape. Once you're ready to make an actual commitment to a new life effort, you can always take notes from your journal and use them to draft a more formal plan.

Enhance Your Creative Potential

The act of journaling can be an incredibly creative process as well. After all, you're not just writing about the things that have happened or are happening in your life; you're also writing about the way in which you want things to be. This flexes your imagination, enhances your creative skills, and promotes new and far more interesting ways of thinking. For some people, journaling has even given rise to some fairly impressive works of fiction and fan fiction. If you're a writer or aspire to be a writer, a journal gives you sufficient private space for writing without fear of judgment.

Build Better Communication Skills

In the very long list of benefits that regular journaling can provide, better communication is hardly the least. The practice of writing about your thoughts and feelings will make you more adept in issuing thoughtful responses. It will also improve your emotional intelligence, thereby making you better able to respond to the wants and needs of others in an empathetic way.

PRACTICE:

Tell Your Life Story with a Journal

In the later years of your life, will you remember all of your adventures? Will you vividly recall the emotions that you felt during some of the best times as well as some of the worst times? Will your family be able to learn about who you truly were as a person after you are gone? Will they understand your side of the story or your driving motivations? Each life is filled with incredibly rich and poignant twists and turns. Even on average days of your life, your unique thoughts and daily activities can be rich with meaning and importance in subtle or grand ways. Journaling is an excellent way to tell your life story for your own benefit or to share with others at a much later date.

Get to Know Yourself

Through journaling, you get to take a close, introspective look at who you are and what you stand for. Many people simply assume that they know who they are a person because they live in their own skin, but as soon as you sit down to put pen to paper, you may realize that there are at least a few parts of yourself that are a mystery. With each new journal entry that you write, you may discover a little more about yourself that you previously did not know. Your life story that unfolds on each new page in your journal may fascinate you in different ways.

Examine Your Highs and Lows

Many people who journal on a regular basis will not have major dramatic events to examine more closely, but no life is without its highs and lows. Journaling gives you a chance to capture the events of each passing day as well as to analyze your own feelings about these events. IF you choose to share your journal with others, the details of each journal entry can give others a day-by-day account about your own experiences and feelings related to routine days as well as to major life events.

Let It All Out

Many people remember major life events, but they fail to remember important smaller details surrounding those events. They may also forget details about day-to-day life that may actually be relevant and interesting in various ways. Through journaling, you can share the details of your life based on your own observations, and you can also let out all of your feelings. When you read back through the journal at a later date, you can recall in clear detail what your life was like at a certain point. This also gives you an opportunity to see how much you've grown since that past experience.

Explore the Big Picture

Everyone wants to find some meaning in their life. That meaning may be something profoundly important to the community, or it may be a special significance to others who are near and dear to you. Through the retrospection associated with reading through the daily journal entries that you wrote, you may be able to see the big picture of your own life. You can understand the importance of your own life. Others who read your journal and hear about the story of your life in your own words may also gain a deeper understanding about the meaning of your life.

Journaling can be a richly rewarding experience. It is an excellent way to de-stress and to sort through difficult emotions. It also is a way to document the story of your life for yourself and for others. You do not need to be going through some major life event to journal. Each day has its beautiful moments as well as its stressful moments. These are precious moments, and journaling captures each day in vivid clarity and great detail.

Please share in the comments section what you find most valuable about journaling.

Impact of Emotions On Your Health, Drive, and More

Some people need proof that self-care is critical... Let's start by talking about how emotions affect everything.

Come again?! Your emotions control and influence everything from your health and your sense of wellbeing, to your motivation, focus, success, and even physical strength.

If this sounds like a whole lot of nonsense, then consider what emotions really are: they are neurotransmitters and hormones. What many people don't realize about neurotransmitters and hormones is that they have a huge range of different roles in the body that go far beyond simply affecting our mood. That is to say that when you change your mood, you also change many other things.

For example, did you know that norepinephrine (a neurotransmitter with much in common with the hormone adrenaline) can increase your physical strength? Hence, when you are "amped up" in the gym, you can lift more!

Likewise, if you have high cortisol (the stress hormone), then you will be more likely to store fat, you will have more anxious thoughts, you will struggle to sleep, and you will even degrade your muscle? Worse, cortisol can actually direct blood away from your immune system and digestive system, which is why chronic stress can lead to so many health issues over time. This same process is useful of course if you are in a life or death situation!

Hormones and neurotransmitters regulate our appetite, they control our sleep-wake cycle, and they impact on our ability

to store memories. They can even increase or decrease our perception of pain! Did you know for instance, that serotonin is a natural painkiller? Whereas cortisol makes it much higher?

There are no good and bad hormones or neurotransmitters. That is not the point here!

The point is that if you can take control of your emotions, then you can take control of your entire body and system. As a result, you can be calmer, happier, stronger, healthier, and more resilient against illness. And that is all pretty amazing really when you think about it.

And THIS is why self-care really matters. Because if you don't look after your well-being, it's more than just your mood that is going to suffer. Learn to control your mood and you can perform your best, you can combat feelings of pain and lethargy, and you can feel amazing doing it!

So let's consider ways to turn around a bad mood...

Being in a bad mood is often taken lightly and can be seen as something of a joke. You may have teased a friend or relative for 'getting out the wrong side of bed' or 'being a bit moody' and generally we don't consider this to be a big deal. Sometimes though, being in a bad mood can be a serious problem if it happens often or is consistent. Not only can being in a poor mood prevent you from enjoying yourself, it can also lead to severe depression (or be a symptom of depression or stress), cause you to make bad decisions, and even cause you to drive your friends and loved ones away.

When a bad mood is severe, or when it emerges a little too often, it becomes a serious problem and you need to do something about it.

Here are some ideas of how to improve a bad mood:

Let it Go

There are a lot of articles and books out there advising catharsis when you're in a bad mood. 'Vent your anger' they recommend, 'by punching a punch bag or screaming into a pillow.' Unfortunately, there is one small problem with this advice – it's unfounded. Studies have shown repeatedly that punching a punch bag or 'venting' anger in any other way will achieve nothing and in fact only make you angrier and for longer. The better way to deal with anger is to make a conscious decision to 'let it go' – because after all you're not going to help anyone (especially yourself) by continually focusing on the same issue. Likewise if you're very upset, make the conscious decision not to wallow.

Be Incongruent

In other words do something that is incompatible with being in a bad mood. Watch a funny film, sing a happy song, or otherwise act in a way that doesn't sit well with being angry or depressed. This can actually become a self-fulfilling prophecy: you act happy and suddenly you start to become happier. Even just smiling can help to improve your mood due to a process known as 'facial feedback.' It sounds awkward at first, but try it then next time you are down and see if it works!

Go Incremental

You need to actually convince yourself to listen to that happy music if it's going to have any effect. This can be tricky seeing as your bad mood will be clouding your judgement and will be affecting what you want to do. The solution is to be incremental – to listen to gradually more upbeat music, or to watch gradually more upbeat programs (try googling 'funny videos'). Doing this you will be able to 'ease' yourself into a better mood and it won't seem quite so off-putting.

In whatever way you can, try to leave the bad mood in the past, and focus on the good that already exists in your life. It can be a challenge, but it is so important to your health

to keep your own spirits lifted (and not rely on others to lift them for you).

Please share your recommended bad-mood buster method in the comments below.

How to Practice Gratitude

You've likely heard that practicing gratitude is good for your body, your mind, and your soul. It is also often mentioned that a practice of gratitude will help you manifest the life of your dreams.

But how do you actually put a practice of gratitude into practice? Keep reading!

Gratitude has strong links to life satisfaction and good mental health. People who are grateful experience more enthusiasm, love, and joy. They also have better protection from emotions that have a destructive impact like bitterness, greed, and envy. Simply because they are more focused on what is good in their life.

It is believed that gratitude can reduce your lifetime risk of developing a substance abuse disorder, anxiety, or even depression. It can also help those who suffer from these issues and other conditions to find healing and closure. Being thankful helps you to understand that there is goodness out there, even if you are suffering or feeling lost.

Gratitude isn't just an uplifting and warm feeling; it can also benefit your body. People who introduce gratitude practice into their lives cope more effectively with stress, enjoy better physical health, and recover more rapidly from illnesses.

Even better, gratitude extends beyond you. When you experience gratitude, it reaches past you into your wider social circle. Gratitude has the power of inspiring others to act more kindly, and it can strengthen your bond with others around you. People who are grateful are more likely to be viewed as trustworthy, optimistic, outgoing, and helpful. These are valuable characteristics that draw others to you and help you forge positive and strong relationships. And better yet? Gratitude is contagious! Wouldn't you love to spread more good feelings to your community, to the world?!

When you introduce gratitude practice into your everyday routine, you'll experience positive effects such as:

- A sense of abundance in your life
- A greater appreciation of how others contribute to your well-being
- Recognition of the small pleasures in life
- Developing a more positive outlook that allows for a happier life experience

If you start practicing gratitude regularly, you can begin to reap all those benefits for yourself.

Banishing Negativity, Focusing On Positivity

A key element of introducing gratitude practice into your life is banishing negativity and focusing on positivity in return.

Thinking positively comes with a host of benefits including:

- Happiness – banishing negativity in favor of a positive attitude can awaken happiness in your life. You may not be rich and you may not have reached the career goals you set yourself, but happiness is all about attitude. If you have a positive mindset, you automatically become happy. Recognize your happiness doesn't depend on an

external cause. Rather, it comes from within. All too often, we find reasons not to be happy. We delay adopting a positive mindset. I'll be happy when I lose weight. I'll be happy when I win the lottery... Banish negative thoughts like "I'm too fat to be happy," or "I'm too poor to be happy." You can make yourself happy right now without any of those things by simply thinking positively. It sounds hard at first, but with some practice it can become second nature!

- Motivation – when you banish negative thinking, you can actually become more motivated to accomplish the goals and dreams you set for yourself. Being motivated in itself is a positive characteristic, pushing you forward, encouraging you, and helping you to overcome obstacles. Being positive makes you more motivated to succeed and it also helps you believe that you can be successful. As a result, you will be able to achieve more than you ever imagined.
- Self-esteem – when you have a positive mental attitude you'll have higher self-esteem. You will look at yourself more kindly and begin to see your good traits rather than only the bad ones. Ignore negative people and forget about what they say and think. As soon as you adopt a positive mindset, others around you automatically raise their opinions of you and become more respectful.
- Better health – positive thinkers are usually healthier and more energetic than negative thinkers. The mind's effect on the body is a powerful one, and positive thinkers enjoy a healthier immune system with faster recovery times.
- Better relationships – when you think positively, you'll find that other people gravitate towards you. People prefer those around them to be positive since they bring happiness, energy and joy into their lives.

Gratitude – A Skill That Takes Work

Although we're all capable of being grateful for so many things in life, it's not something that we all do naturally. This makes it a somewhat alien skill. When you first decide to start practicing gratitude it can be very difficult at first.

You may find yourself struggling to think of things to feel thankful for, or you may try telling yourself to be grateful but not truly feeling it. All of this is normal, and it's something that needs to be worked through to come out the other side and to reap all the benefits that gratitude can bring.

Remember that gratitude is a skill like any other. How does an aspiring musician end up playing at Carnegie Hall? The answer is "practice." It's the same for gratitude. Practice makes perfect, so keep working on being grateful for the little things. It may be hard at first. In fact, it almost certainly will be. But, with a little effort and time, it will eventually become easier and, soon, being thankful will be second nature.

One great way to get started with a gratitude practice is to take a simple paper calendar (you can always make your own) and write three things you are grateful for each day. Ideally you will write your list in the morning, but any time of day you can spend two minutes reflecting on the good in your life is a great time!

As your calendar fills up with all these wonderful, beautiful, even simple things, you will start to see the bounty in which you already live!

If you forget a day, don't fret. Just fill in more things the next day. Can't think of three "new" ideas each day. That's ok! Repeating what you really love, what you are really grateful for is also a great way to start.

The point is to keep up the PRACTICE so that over time gratitude will become a natural process for you every day!

Don't Be the Victim, Be the Master!

Victim mode. We've all be there. You've been hurt by someone else. And I'm talking emotionally, no violence here. Your significant other lied for months, you overhear someone say something negative about you, you get yelled at by someone in your inner circle. It hurts. Can you remember feels like that?

It usually comes quite unexpectedly, this feeling of hurt, of being the victim, of being in complete defense mode, when something bad happens. Sometimes we respond to the situation as if something tragic happened only to us. The reality is we play a role in every relationship we are in. Unless we're dealing with a stranger (and more on this topic in another post), it is important to take responsibility for our part in the situation.

It might be hard to hear, but in most cases you are part of the reason the other lied, or said something nasty, or yelled. I'm not blaming you. I'm saying it purely to provide a topic for self-reflection. Of course the lying isn't ok, but in general, how is the trust in your relationship? If your friend called you a bitch, how had you been treating her? If your other friend yelled at you, had you really been listening?

Maybe these aren't great examples, but an analogy helps me explain the idea. Action is continuous. As we've learned: every action creates an equal and opposite reaction. What action did you take before the last straw? And the action

before that? And before that?

It really takes some deep perspective to see how far back the chain goes. And while the “first” action of deceit, bad talking, or yelling may not have come from you, your reaction to those actions played a role in where you are today.

We put up with so much from others because we crave their love, or attention, or help, or cooking. Whatever it is. When we get to the point that we tolerate more than we receive, it builds up walls. In a good relationship, we are open and freely express our reaction, however difficult it may be. If you cannot freely express yourself, you have to ask: Is this a relationship I want to develop and continue, or do I prefer to develop more positive relationships?

If you can relate so far, take a moment and pick a situation from your past (or present) that applies. Let’s assume you want to keep and develop this relationship. Imagine asking the other person why they did/said what they did/said. Do you have a pretty good idea what their answer would be? How do you think you could adjust your prior action(s) to have avoided that particular reaction from them?

Is it possible you feel a little resentful or defensive that you are the only one who has to change their reaction to a situation which was obviously negatively affecting you? It’s hard, isn’t it, to just let something personally negative just be. How liberating it would be if you could not take *anything* personally; but it is especially hard not to when it is someone you love saying the negative thing.

But here’s is the key. Number one key. Don’t get defensive. Do what you can to let it roll off your back, and react as positively as you can. It might mean asking a very hard question: why do you feel that way/why did you do that? Keep an open communication. It is the only way to keep a relationship thriving. And of course to refrain as best we can

from judgement.

This positive action-taking actually makes you the master of your fate. If you look at it long term, you have the ability to avoid future lying, nasty talk, and yelling. One tip is to surround yourself with loving, kind people. Another tip is to direct your relationships in a positive direction so that the argument never happens. Shine your beautiful light into all of your relationships, and take responsibility in all your relationships.

You aren't the victim. You are the master. Keep that in your heart when times are tough. I know it is hard when it seems really terrible, but even the biggest pile of trash can be cleaned up, piece by piece. Share your true, good self with others, take responsibility for your (re)actions, and, as best you can, keep calm in the surrounding chaos.

10 Things About Meditation You Need To Know Today

If you're thinking about getting started with meditation, there are some things that you need to know before jumping into it. Although meditation can certainly change your life for the better, it will only do so if you go into it fully prepared and with as much knowledge about mediation as possible. So, here are 10 things about meditation you need to know today.

1. There Are Different Types Of Meditation

There are many types of meditation, and every one of them is a

little different. There are three primary types of meditation: open monitoring, focused attention, and automatic self-transcending. Within these, there are many other types of meditation that you can do, including heart rhythm meditation, guided visualization, and Qi Gong.

Each type of meditation is different and has various purposes and benefits. That's why it's important to take some time to determine exactly what you want to get out of meditation before you jump into it. You need to make sure that the type of meditation you choose fits your lifestyle and beliefs, and is something that will benefit you. There are some types of meditation that target specific problems such as anxiety, heart disease, or stress.

2. You Don't Have To Stick With One Type Of Meditation

You're by no means stuck with the first type of meditation that you choose. In fact, even if you've taken the time to decide which one is right for you, it still may not end up working for you. The good news is that you can keep looking for another type of meditation to try until you do find something that works for you. You can also learn several types of meditation to gain the different benefits and use them for different situations.

We recommend taking time to learn one type well before moving onto another type of meditation. Because each type requires time to learn and practice, it's better to keep your focus on one type until you've mastered it before you decide to learn another one. However, once you have mastered several types, you'll be ready to use them when you need them.

3. It Doesn't Require A Certain Posture Or Position

When most people think of meditation, the first thing that comes to mind is a cross-legged guru with their hands resting on their thighs, fingers and thumbs forming circles while they hum. However, there really aren't any specific rules about how to meditate, and you certainly don't have to sit rigidly the whole time.

Actually, meditation requires you to be as comfortable as possible so you can keep focused on what's going on in your mind instead of your body. Sitting upright is generally the best position so you don't fall asleep while meditating, but there are some types of meditation that require you to be laying down, like body scan meditations and meditation for sleep.

4. It Won't Make Your Mind Go Blank

Something that many people incorrectly believe about meditation is that it involves emptying your mind of all your thoughts and reach a state where you think of absolutely nothing for a period of time, and it's that blank slate that allows you to accomplish a greater level of enlightenment and self-awareness. However, this is simply not true, nor is it possible.

The mind naturally jumps from thought to thought, and trying to stop it from doing that will only leave you frustrated and very much not relaxed. What meditation actually does is gives you tools to keep your focus on only your meditation. Being aware of the thoughts that come up during meditation is an important part of it and is what will help you come to a deeper understanding of your own mind.

5. You can learn from a variety of sources

Some people believe that there's only one way to learn how to meditate, but there are actually several different ways. This is great news because everybody has a different learning style, so not everybody is going to be able to learn meditation the same way, just like learning anything. Fortunately, for as many learning styles as there are, there are tools and techniques to learn how to meditate.

You may find that reading a book is the best way to learn meditation. Others may instead listen to that same book on audio to learn. You can also get help from someone who has already mastered the type of meditation you want to learn. This can be the best way because they can help guide you and work through any specific problems that you have. What's important is that you find what works best for you.

6. You Might Fall Asleep During Meditation.

Even if you're not doing meditation specifically to fall asleep, you may find yourself falling asleep while meditating because it puts you into such a relaxed state, especially if you're doing it at the end of a long day at work. The good news is that this is totally normal and if you do, don't worry too much about it. If it does seem to be turning into a problem, then you can try a few techniques to keep yourself alert during meditation.

7. Meditation Physically Changes Your Brain

Although meditators have known that there are profound changes that happen in your mind when you meditate, only recently have researchers taken the time to study the physical changes that

take place in your brain because of meditation. Some studies that have been done looked at the differences between meditators and non-meditators, while others looked at the changes that occurred in a group of people who started meditating.

One of the changes seen in the brain of those who meditate regularly is that there's more gray matter which means more brain cells. Another change involved the amygdala which is where the "fight or flight" reflex is triggered. In those that meditate regularly, this area was physically smaller which means they're more likely to handle stressful situations without reacting with fear.

Another interesting thing to note when it comes to physical changes that happen when you meditate are the brain scans done of people who have been meditating for many, many years. Their scans when they were not meditating looked like an inexperienced meditating while in a state of meditation, meaning that the changes that occur during meditation eventually become permanent.

8. There Are Many Health Benefits To Meditating

The health benefits that occur in the brain from meditating are only the beginning of the many things that meditation can do for your body. Meditation has also shown that it can increase blood circulation which helps lower your blood pressure and your risk of developing heart disease, which is the leading cause of death for people in the United States.

One of the reasons that meditation has such an impact on your health is that as you become more aware of your inner self, you become more protective of it and begin to make healthier choices for your body. Many people have successfully used meditation to quit smoking or get out of other addictions because meditation allows them to deal with the underlying

reasons for their addition.

9. It Doesn't Have To Take A Lot Of Time Out Of Your Day

This may be one of the most common misconceptions with meditation is that it takes up a significant part of the day. This belief has led many people to not even bother to meditate since they don't feel like they'll have the time to do it. Although there are certainly some types of meditation that expect people to devote an hour in the morning and an hour at night, there are many more that require significantly shorter amounts of time, as little as 5 minutes, that are easy to fit into your day.

For people that truly understand how important meditating is, they will make it a priority and make sure that they devote the time they need to meditate every day. As you start meditating regularly and see the benefits of it, then you, too, will be willing to get up a little earlier or put your phone down for a few minutes to meditate.

10. It Takes Time To Master

Like learning any new skill, meditation takes time to master. You won't get it right the first few times, and that's ok. Just like you don't be able to run a 6-minute mile the first time you step onto a running track, you need to practice to master meditation. It will also take time for you to begin to see the benefits of meditation, so don't give up if you don't immediately start sleeping better at night or feeling less stressed throughout the day.

This is why self-evaluation is such an important part of meditation. You need to take a step back every once and a

while to really evaluate how you are so you can see that the meditation really is working. One way to do this is by keeping a journal where you can note your thoughts and feelings. Over time, you'll see how meditation is changing you and the way you see the world.