

Hinduism 101, What you need to know

A religion which is better described as a way of life, **Hinduism** has no definite and designated order, worship pattern, holy book, founder, religious head, particular service day, etc. It is a truly diverse way of life and currently ranks as the world's third largest religion, following Islam and Christianity, and is mostly accounted for as the oldest organized religion, originating from the Indus Valley, now Pakistan, over 3,000 years ago. Hinduism is a combination of diverse religious and spiritual beliefs that have evolved over the years in India (since about 1500 BC) into a broad and internationally accepted religion.

As in every religion, Hinduism acknowledges the existence and belief in a supreme being. Hindus are, however, not monotheistic in nature. They are better referred to as henotheists (worshiping a single god, but not denying existence of other gods) and/or polytheists (believing in multiple gods). Hindus believe in Brahman, whom they acknowledge as the ultimate reality. Brahman embodies all things, and is embodied in all things. Brahman is divided into three separate Gods, whom are collectively referred to as the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Trinity consists of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Shiva, the destroyer. Hindus acknowledge several other gods and goddesses as manifestations of the Brahman, the supreme deity, and include: Ganesh, the god of wisdom; Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity; Saraswati, good of learning and wisdom; and Krishna and Rama, both incarnations of Vishnu. The numerous and varying gods and goddesses acknowledged in Hinduism are often represented in the *mandir* (temple).

Hinduism is basically one of the most religious tolerant denominations as it allows for freedom of beliefs and practices. The belief is that all religions are a pathway leading to God, hence, Jesus is acknowledged in Hinduism as an incarnation of a God.

Unlike Christianity or Islam, Hinduism has no stipulated day or time for conducting worship services. People visit the *mandir* at their discretion, to give adulations to all the gods. A Hindu temple usually has four or five shrines, or even more around the main hall, each of which accommodates a *murti* (statue of a god who has been consecrated in a special ceremony). Modes of reverence and prayers are usually different. While some people prostrate in front of the *murti*, or bow to it, others may decide to take turns in a clockwise cycle, or simply just stand in front of it and meditate.

Priests are responsible for performing rituals to the *murtis* at specified times during the day, when people gather to partake by watching and receiving blessings. More often than not, during these rituals or consecrated services, sanctified food is shared with the people. This process is referred to as the *prasad*. It is similar to communion as taken by Christians.

Goals of Hinduism

The goals of Hinduism are basically the major binding beliefs, or tenets of the religion. They are the responsibilities expected of all members of Hinduism, and not exclusive to priests. They are mainly four: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha.

- **DHARMA:** This is the principle that orders the universe; and one's conduct in conformity with such a principle. Simply put, it is the order of fair action, moral, and ethical behavior in association with the universe.
- **ARTHA:** This refers to the principle of wealth gathering.

Its primary purpose is the accumulation of wealth to help others, and to prevent any hindrances to dharmic living.

- **KAMA:** Also known as Hindu god of desire, is a principle that advocates fulfilling one's desires. Desires can manifest in various forms, from being wealthy, powerful, sexually satisfied, and/or for recognition.
- **MOKSHA:** Typically known to be the ultimate goal of Hinduism, Moksha is the final liberation of soul from *samsara* (reincarnation). It is the end of the death and rebirth cycle, along with all the sufferings it encompasses.

There are other binding beliefs of Hinduism, other than the four goals mentioned above. There is *Samsara*, which is the belief in reincarnation: a continuous cycle of death and rebirth until one attains the Moksha. It is basically an evolution into an upper caste or lower caste. This is determined by the quality of one's life. If one has lived a fair, just, and selfless life, he/she translates into a higher caste in the next life, while if one has lived a life of deceit, and wrongdoings, he/she translates into a lower caste.

Traditionally, there is a caste system in Hinduism. A show of hierarchy. It was, however, outlawed in India in 1949. Nonetheless, it hasn't been completely expunged, and traces of it have still remained, especially due to the spiritual law of *samsara*. The order of the caste system is: the Brahmin (priest), Kshatriyas (soldiers/nobility), Vaishyas (merchant), Sudras (labourers), the Untouchables (known as Harijans, by Gandhi). Belonging to a higher caste is usually a sign of blessing.

There is also the belief of reaching oneness with the Brahman. Accordingly, this can only be done when one successfully embodies the principle of detachment from all worldly things. Detachment can be achieved using three practical methods; the way of knowledge, the way of works, and the way of devotion.

Major Texts in Hinduism

There are five major texts, Holy Scriptures, in Hinduism. The Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas.

- **THE VEDAS:** These are four books of knowledge, chants, and collected hymns that form the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature, and the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism.
- **THE UPANISHADS:** This is a Hindu text, considered to be an early source of the religion, found mostly in the concluding part of the Brahman, and in the Aranyakas. It lays out the theological basis of Brahman.
- **RAMAYANA:** This is one of the ancient Sanskrit epics of Hindu mythology about the incarnation of Vishnu, the Rama.
- **MAHABHARATA:** This is a Sanskrit epic describing a war between two families of cousins. Within the book is the story of Bhagavad Gita, and elaborations on theology and morality.
- **PURANAS:** These are post-Vedic texts, containing a narrative of the history of the universe, from creation to destruction, genealogies of the kings, heroes and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy and geography.

Hinduism is a vast and deeply rich spiritual way of life. If you have interest in this topic, please start by reading one of the classic texts. I recommend [*The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic*](#) as a great start!

7 Tips for Taking Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility means you are taking ownership over your choices. Choices influence the outcomes in your life, and what you learn from those outcomes informs better decisions in future actions and choices.

When you *own your responsibility* for every circumstance, you take control of your reality.

You are not only responsible for your own persona and daily life, but you also have responsibility in your relationships, experiences, reactions, mental functioning, emotional status, physical wellness, and connection to life as well.

Taking responsibility for actions you've taken or allowing various outcomes provides you with the lessons and opportunities to create change and positively influence your future outcomes. When you *own your actions*, it can create tremendous positive results such as self-control, respect, success, inner peace, smooth interactions, intelligent responses, personal satisfaction, and more.

Use the following seven tips to start taking personal responsibility today!

Don't Blame Others

Why do we so easily often avoid taking personal responsibility, and then resort to the negative approach of blaming others, or developing excuses and some explanations? In the overwhelming majority of cases, we do so because it suits into our comfort zone, and allows us believe or at least make believe that we have done no wrong and that whatever went wrong, was not our fault or responsibility, but someone else's. It can come across as lazy when we put blame on someone or something else so we don't have to address the

real reason behind what happened. Blaming others doesn't change the outcome, and unfortunately can cause the one who blames to appear to be lacking loyalty and integrity.

Don't Take Other People's Actions or Words Personally

A common insecurity we face is assuming that everything is about us. When you are taking any form of controversy as a personal attack, it shows that you consider other people's actions or words personally. Always keep in mind; you don't have control over how other people respond, you only have control over how you respond. Refuse to take anything personally. It is most probably not about you, but about the issue at hand, or the speaker's own personal issues. Instead of making assumptions, ask questions. Questions get you clarity, and also show that you care to find the truth in the situation.

Know That Complaining Yields No Positive Results

Complaining is another form of blaming and playing the victim as if you have no choice. It also signifies that you concentrate on lack, things going wrong, things happening to you. In everything not going according to plan, there is a gift; there is a bigger picture.

Be Honest With Yourself

Be honest with yourself that your life is now. There is only one moment: now. The past is history; the future is a mystery, so there is only now this moment. Take responsibility for this moment and make the best of it to redeem the past and create the future you want.

Know You Have Choices And Stand Behind Each Choice You Make

The job you are doing, where you live, your spouse or partner, the house you live in, the car you drive, the friends you keep. These are things that we chose; if you are dissatisfied with some or all of these things, it is time to make a different choice. Small incremental changes can create significant results! Every moment presents you with a choice.

Make the choice that is right for you in the moment.

Don't Fall Into Victim Mode, Always Feel Calm and Confident

When you take responsibility for your life and experience, you go into a place of calm confidence. You feel calm because you know that you are purposefully in charge of yourself and that you can choose how you respond. You feel assured that you will not fall into victim-mode when other people feel the need to say negative things, or put you in a position of feeling you aren't enough. You are everything you need to be, be confident in knowing you know the right way to respond to the situation.

Create Intention Behind Every Action

You have the power to choose. In fact, you are making choices all the time. Tea or coffee, red dress or black dress, hair up or down, yoga or go for a run. Even by not making a choice, you are making a choice. So become intentional in making choices by having a vision in mind. A vision for your life, your business, your relationship, your health, wealth, or anything else. Living intentionally by deliberately making choices to move you forward toward manifesting your vision or outcomes means you are deliberately taking responsibility for your life.

The power us within you to always take personal responsibility for your life. Being responsible for your actions may not be easy, but choosing to be responsible is very empowering. Allow yourself to be in control of your life and handle the various hurdles life throws you with grace and determination.

When In Doubt, Smile!

Chances are this isn't the first time you are reading that a smile is contagious.

Why is that important for us to remember?

When you share a smile with someone, the instinctual response is to smile back. It is almost like saying hello.

When the brain is genuinely feeling happy, it produces endorphins and transmits a signal to your facial muscles to smile. The smiling face sends a signal back to the brain that it is happy (more endorphins released), which, if left to continue, can repeat on loop *ad infinitum*.

What a pleasant thought... an endless loop of happily smiling!

Smiling can alleviate one's mood. Smiling can also, incredibly, lower heart rate levels after recovery from stressful activities. This [University of Kansas study](#) introduced brief stressors to participants, and found that smiling during difficult times can help reduce the intensity of the body's stress response. *The findings were the same with both fake smiles and genuine smiles, regardless if a participant actually felt happy.*

The two facial muscles that get a great workout while smiling are your zygomaticus major muscle and orbicularis oculi muscle. Studies have shown that exercising these muscles can trick your brain into thinking you are happy, so it releases the endorphins that can ultimately make you feel better.

How can we use this scientific information for the good of the world?

By smiling at a stranger on the street, or at the grocery store. Consider spreading endorphins for the benefit of others!

Smiling is an easy way to communicate with others without even speaking. You can connect on a level that words sometimes cannot achieve.

It is possible the person you smile to will take it as an insult, and become more sullen. But chances are pretty great that the other person will smile back. And you know what? It'll make you happy to see that, and you'll smile for real all over again.

Have you maybe been challenged to smile lately? Are the blues overtaking the reds and yellows in your life?

Some self-help is in order! Take a moment to think about some things that make you smile. Even if you get just a little upward turn of the lips, this is the right direction!

Ask yourself: I wonder what will make me smile today?

Daily, give yourself a reminder of what makes you happy. Write it down in great detail if it helps you really feel the pleasure.

Those who smile more live longer, healthier lives, have better relationships, are more successful in careers, receive faster promotions, and have better marriages.

Help your mind find things that will naturally make you smile so that you can continue the loop of happy feelings and more peaceful and relaxed state of mind. And as always, share this pleasant feeling with others as much possible.

The Stresses of Being Stressed

In physics, stress is defined as the internal resistance of an object to an external force that tends to deform it.

WHAT? Stress is caused from the inside?!?!

Yes, that's why we are able *create* heart disease and worsen symptoms of cancer!

Don't just take it from me... even the mainstream experts are chiming in...

Check out WebMD's article [10 Health Problems Related to Stress That You Can Fix](#).

What are the 10 ailments they cover? Heart disease, asthma, obesity, diabetes, headaches, depression, gastrointestinal problems, Alzheimer's disease, accelerated aging, and premature death. Um, hello?!?! No thank you.

What does it cost to invest in yourself? In your own peace of mind?

I hope you know your value!

We have it in our power to create *dis-ease* in our bodies, we *also* have it in our power to live in complete *ease*.

Let's look at 6 ways to build our resistance to the external pressures of stress.

Exercise

Exercise doesn't have to mean running a marathon or bench pressing double your weight. It can mean a walk around the

block, or slow yoga. Ideally your body works up to a sweat at least 3 times a week, 5 is even better. Each person likes their own thing, so embrace what lets you have fun. For some, exercising in groups helps with the fun factor as they like the energy of other people to keep them going through the exercises more rigorously than they would on their own. Most people say they exercise harder when they go to group sessions. Even if not, the camaraderie at gyms and/or studios can help keep one motivated.

Connection with Others

On the topic of camaraderie... Reaching out and communicating with loved ones is an incredible way to de-stress. This doesn't mean getting on the phone and bitching about the current problem in your life. Connect with family and friends on a meaningful level. Catch up, laugh, enjoy your time connecting. In fact, the more positive you can be in your communications with others, the more positive you will remain after the discussion. And even more so when you meet with someone face-to-face.

Meditation

Sitting still while being fully present and awake helps strengthen the resistance necessary for balanced living in our hectic society. Sometimes all pressures aren't external. Our inner voice can also be a terrible critic that tends to deform from within (see physics definition of stress above). Meditation can bring a feeling of being balanced, not reactive, but responsive, to situations and actions by people in our lives. Allowing your mind to not think for a few minutes a day helps put things in perspective at other times of the day, for example when you are in the rush of getting food on the table before rushing out the door to your

volunteer meeting. If you aren't meditating 5 minutes a day, today is as good a day as any to start. Actually, stop reading this now, set your timer for 5 minutes (if that's too much, do 4 or 2), and just sit with your hands on your lap. When the timer goes off, either come back to finish this article, or go to your next destination.

Relaxing Activity

Some fit people might consider a relaxing activity to go kayaking one afternoon. Another person might feel the same about reading a good book in bed. Find what makes you happy and is easy to accomplish. Some people call this me time and that you are selfish to do it. But the truth is that ensuring that you get something fun to do every day, or at least every week if you are going big, is so important to keep stress down. What is the point of rushing to work and other activities and beyond if some part of it isn't something we enjoy?

Affirmations

If can be hard to use affirmations if this is new to you. Writing out 1 or 3 affirmations to say every day This can be the time when you are giving your daily gratitude. You might find affirmations more powerful if you write them down and/or say them aloud. Ensure that statements are in the positive (I don't have stress sounds like I have stress). Here are some examples to get you started. Affirmations are most powerful when written on your own, but feel free to use any that resonate with you!

My true purpose as no time limit or deadline.

I believe in my freedom.

I'm willing to change how I'm experiencing my life.

My appreciation brings me great joy.

Everything is happening around me.

There is no obstacle I cannot overcome when I put my mind to it.

Set Goals and Priorities

Take stock in the small and big wins every day. It is that simple. If you want to get something done, give yourself a deadline, set three main goals to accomplish, create a task list for each goal, and create the order to accomplish the tasks. Every time you tick a task off the list, congratulate yourself. You made a choice to live the life you want to have. An action toward forward momentum. Priorities comes in that sometimes you have to say no to come things. Know your boundaries, and don't over-commit. You love to help, but you can only volunteer so much of your own time before you naturally break down. When you say yes and then can't fulfill what you've said, it only increases your stress level. So be your best advocate!

Hopefully some of these ways will help you manage the external forces in your life. Remember, you must not allow the external forces that tend to deform have an impact on your life. It is practicing detachment in a very loving and present way. ([See my earlier article on topic.](#))

Aim to reach a place where potentially deforming external forces just don't matter enough to change you. They are there, they exist, and sometimes persist, but it is all in your reaction. Don't give those forces a chance for even a slight dent through maintaining your joy and balance. Remember to start small.

5 Signs of Sleep Deprivation

Sleep deprivation is practically an epidemic.

Have you noticed lately how many people are saying they aren't getting enough sleep?

It is a condition running rampant in society.

It is making us sick, irritable, depressed, hungry, and unproductive, to name a few woes.

What's the difference between being tired and being sleep deprived, anyway?

With such busy lives, active kids' schedules, family and social events, not to mention work obligations... It is no wonder that less than 65% of American adults are getting the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep per night. [[Excellent article on sleep by Business Insider's Kevin Loria.](#)]

Increased stress throughout the day can lead to less-than-ideal sleep, so even if we are in bed for eight hours, it doesn't mean we are getting quality rest.

Let's take a moment to look at cues that you might be falling short in rejuvenating slumber.

1. Mood

Probably all of us can relate to this. I'm tired, didn't get enough sleep, and anything can set me off. Heaven help the first person I see who is talking too loudly, saying annoying things, making a mistake, or taking too much time! When our brain doesn't get enough down time, it has trouble regulating emotions, and thus mood. If you notice that you are irritable, snappy, or impatient

– in the morning, but really at any time of day, this is a sign of sleep deprivation.

2. Trouble falling *back* to sleep

We all wake up in the middle of the night, but naturally fall right back asleep. Do you wake up in the middle of the night at least four nights a week and struggle to fall back to sleep? We all experience the occasional sleepless night and groggy morning. And difficulty sleeping is to be expected during life's transitions and stresses. But, when it becomes a regular occurrence unrelated to circumstances, it points to sleep deprivation.

3. Increased Appetite and/or Weight Gain

Have you noticed when you think you are eating super well, you are even exercising regularly, yet you are gaining weight? Lack of sleep can increase your appetite and lead to weight gain. The body's need for energy produces cravings for sweets, carbohydrates, junk food in general. Sleep deprivation also causes imbalance to the hormones, which can also increase appetite.

4. Silly Mistakes

We've all been there... forgetting simple things, messing up the schedule, dropping stuff, being off balance (trip over your own foot, anyone?). When we don't get enough or quality sleep, the brain can't work as fast as it usually does, so the normal signal of the eye-to-brain-to-leg takes longer than walking up to the step you are about to trip on.

5. General Depression

Sleep deprivation has been noted as a symptom of

clinical depression, not a sign, to be clear here. When you are deprived of the sleep needed to rejuvenate your body, it is hard to not see the dark at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. When poor sleep builds up over days, your usual chipper mode turns a bit dark and gray. Sometimes you might feel down but can't quite pinpoint why. Chances are a few hours more sleep will help!

With long daily to-do lists and the whole world to tackle, it is easy for sleep debt to creep up.

Lack of sleep is sometimes used as a measuring device of one's self-worth. Let's face it, most of us want to feel wanted. So we do for others despite how it impacts what we need ourselves. Staying up late to catch up on tasks not completed during the day, or over weekend, for example. Could be Susie's school project or typing up the minutes from the volunteer committee meeting you attended last week.

Exposing yourself to sleep deprivation, besides making you fuzzy-headed, irritable, and exhausted, can also lead to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and memory loss. [Learn more from Harvard's article.](#)

It all adds up. So be sure to give yourself quality sleep every night.

For those of you suffering from insomnia or anxiety, guided audio recordings are a great tool for your bedside. Use whatever tools you need to keep yourself at your peak of health.

Sweet dreams....

Active Listening for Greater Understanding

Do you ever find yourself misunderstanding what someone you know well is saying to you? Do you subsequently find yourself questioning your responses to them?

Most people hear others speaking to them, but too often our interactions are not focused and while we may listen to people speak, we aren't truly hearing what they are trying to say.

Learning how to listen is a skill that helps us to clear our mind of thoughts and behaviors that may interrupt our ability to hear what the other person is trying to say, rather than what we think they are saying.

Learning how to listen to people around us is also a journey of self-discovery. Instead of responding to people's comments and thoughts as a reaction, we take the time to understand what they are saying and in thinking about how their words are impacting us, we are identifying the natural way we react to people's words and think about how we would prefer to react to them.

We can then develop and practice self-control techniques, to assist us in responding more appropriately to what people say to us.

You may have heard active listening referred to as reflective listening. It involves listening to others around us talk to us and taking time out to ensure we understand their words and the meanings behind those words.

We can ask questions like "so you mean this?" to reflect back to the person what we think they said. We use words like "I

feel angry when you say that” rather than lashing out in anger and using a “you” phrase like “you always do this.”

You might also consider asking further questions if you maybe think you have misunderstood someone. The sooner you can find clarification, the better!

When our focus is not on the words spoken, we spend time (over)thinking about the person speaking and what they *meant* by their words.

If we reverse this, as in eliminate any consideration of the speaker or their motivation, and rather listen only to the words spoken, it will help us better able to fully hear what is being said. This way of listening can take some getting used to, but once we learn the skill, we change the way we relate to people and interact with them, and learn about ourselves in the process.

If you sometimes feel misunderstood when you are talking to people, you probably have an understanding of the importance of really being heard and not just listened to.

As we begin to practice active listening, you will soon learn the phrases and body languages that you personally find difficult to deal with. You will develop important techniques and qualities that enable you to remain in control of your thoughts and emotions when having discussions with others.

You will also be able to better express yourself so that others can understand you better as well. A real win-win situation!

Listen and you will be rewarded!

Control Your Emotions Through Your Thoughts

You've been there, right?

The crippling feeling of overwhelm. That moment when you can't even get one thing done because there is just so much to do.

I've been there. I've felt it. Especially right before traveling, meeting a work deadline, or throwing my son an unforgettable birthday party (um, too personally specific?). Stressed, thinking to myself, "if only I had one more day..."

Responsibilities build up and overwhelm takes over.

It is pretty simple. Yet it isn't the direction most of us want to go.

Breaking out of a cycle is hard, but the best thing to do when feeling overwhelmed is to think of what we *do* want in life.

When we put our attention or focus on how much there is to do, and how crippling it feels to accomplish anything, that's what we attract, more to-dos for the list.

So we put our focus and attention on what we *do* want in life. This can be hard for some people, but you must be specific in what you want.

How do I know what I even want?

A powerful exercise to help you get clear on what you want is to write out a perfect day. Imagine not a few years in the future, but one month from now, or even next week. Write out

what happens from the moment you wake up until the moment you go to sleep.

As you describe your day, be specific in how you are feeling. Describe your emotions and what you see around you. And be sure to keep your language in positive terms. For example, rather than say I wake up without a long to-do list, say, I wake up refreshed, and feel excited to accomplish my tasks.

With Law of Attraction, the universe doesn't hear negative words, as in the "without" above. It just hears "I wake up with a long to-do list" – so be sure to state everything in the positive.

The first time you write out your perfect day, you might get stuck on how long it should be or how detailed to make it. Just start writing and see where the exercise takes you. Then revisit the exercise tomorrow, or in a couple days, or next week, or every day.

If you put your focus on being happy, for example, and you train yourself to think of your happy place at least 10 times a day, your brain will recognize you are happy. So this is how we control our own emotions.

If you are stuck really deeply, I know it can sound ridiculous to just wish away negative feelings, especially when we've been hurt.

As you get clear on what you want, know that you can achieve it – and by *it*, I mean *anything*. Keep your thoughts positive and gratitude free flowing.

Keep thinking positively, and when overwhelm is really bad, take a deep breath, make a list of the top 5 things you have to accomplish, and do them one-by-one. Even if it is "late." Then take stock in what you achieved, however "small" it might appear.

Creating a journal to practice the perfect day exercise repeatedly will help you get clearer on how to bring positive thoughts and emotions into your daily life.

Overwhelm happens, but how we react to it is the key. Maintain positive awareness and keep your alarm set for happy.

Don't Be Shy... Ask For Help

We all need help.

The sooner we can recognize that, the sooner we can feel some freedom.

And let's face it... people actually like to help. I know I do!

What is help?

Help doesn't always have to mean doing an errand or even lending money. Help can also come in conversations. Talking with another person about something important in our lives can help us process information and articulate our perspective.

Help can also mean watching your kid. I don't like to ask my friends and family to "babysit," but once I do, and let it happen, I see that my kid has had a good time away from home and generally the host has enjoyed quality time with my kid.

It doesn't have to be this simple either. You could ask a friend to help you with a task you've been stumbling on. It depends on the friend and what you really want help with, but I'll tell you that if any one of my friends asked me to help them figure out any basic computer skill or even software/app usage, I would be happy to meet them at their computer in that moment (yes, even virtually).

Maybe you need help repotting some over-growing plants in your home (I know I do!). Do you have a green-thumb friend, neighbor, or family member who could come over some Saturday afternoon to help you out, to make the task a little quicker *and* more enjoyable?

How about someone who is great at thrift sales? Perhaps she'd be willing to share her organizational skills by helping you sort through your basement pile for a couple hours?

Here's a super healthy request for help: find an exercise buddy. Who in your life is motivated to keep their health up? Reach out and see if there is a time you could meet to go together to the gym, for a run, or to a yoga class. When possible, try to find time to also sit and chat for a while, so the meeting is even more meaningful for you both.

Look at all your relationships and recognize the many valuable skills these people around you possess. When you are ready to ask for their hand in help, start by telling them you recognize the knowledge they have and if they are willing to share their strength with you.

Help comes in so many forms, and when you can approach getting help as a means to connect more deeply with someone, it is never a chore.

Now let's take this one step deeper.

Sometimes you have to ask yourself for help.

And I don't mean help with washing the windows. I mean reminding yourself of your *own* valuable skills, and all the good you bring to the world. Ask yourself to bring out your treasured gifts!

It is quite likely that if you continued through the end of this article, you like to help, too. If a friend needed help with one of your skill sets, you'd step right up.

Well, step up for yourself!

Sometimes you have to ask yourself for help... as in: "hey mind, would you be so kind as to not think those negative thoughts anymore?"

When in doubt, ask for help. You'll be surprised how many out there are willing to offer it when asked, especially when it is so greatly appreciated.

So appreciate the people around you, and also yourself!

Let Your Feet Find the Focus

The other day I went for a run on my favorite local trail in a beautiful county park. I just love being in nature, breathing that fresh air, seeing all those colors, hearing animals

scurrying or the creek babbling.

I also love the challenge that the trail presents. Navigation in the woods requires a much more alert mind. You have to really pay attention so that you don't trip. Jumping over curbs is one thing when running outside, but constantly scanning for roots or fallen branches is something else in the woods.

What's the beauty of that? My mind HAS to focus on what's ahead on the ground, which means it gets a break from thinking the squirrely thoughts it normally does all day long. The kind of break that meditation provides. Trail running is moving meditation? Indeed!

Besides the physical aspect of the run, which in the end always makes my body feel more relaxed, being so close to natural elements provides a release that no medicine can. I can go in feeling down and by the end I'll be back to positive.

But let me tell you, I've had some tumbles on the trail. Fortunately it doesn't happen often. Once you fall the first time, you realize: YOU ARE NOT INVINCIBLE! You are perfectly human.

I'd been running on the trails for a couple years before I fell the first time. It was during a 12.5K race, which I hadn't trained for very well. I was tired that morning, and I had neglected my pre-race nutrition.

I knew I wasn't in top form for the race, but it is an annual one I do and I was determined to give it my best.

I stepped to the start line with eager anticipation, believing I would do great.

Half way through the race I realized I was running on empty, with no fuel or water in my belt.

My mind started to move away from the trail and onto the path of monkey mind... how far away is the fuel station? How is my time compared to last year? Why don't my legs move faster? There were probably 100 other questions I asked myself and considered the answers to.

Probably my mind should have been on the ground three feet ahead, but it was wandering widely.

With all this build up, you won't be surprised that I fell three times during that race. Each time I grew more humiliated. Then, worse, I started to feel sorry for myself. How could I not fall with all the negative reaction going on?

I basically lost my confidence and drive to finish the race. I allowed myself to walk in sections, I beat myself up mentally. For a while. Fortunately with about a mile left in the race, I started to look at the ground in front of me.

I pleaded with my feet to pick themselves up higher.

And then something magic happened: I didn't fall again!

I started to feel so grateful that I didn't quit. That despite the dirt on my hands and the bloody scrapes on my legs, I had the power to complete this journey. That gratitude got me to the finish line and has stayed with me since that race day.

Cut to my trail run the other day. I've been training well lately and when I started out I was feeling good. I was grateful to be in the park, and was ready for the run.

Then, you guessed it: My mind went wandering away from the roots and branches onto something else and, boom, I went down. Sometimes it isn't the physical pain that causes the trauma. In this case, since I hadn't fallen for so long, I was startled to find myself sprawled out with dirt under my fingernails.

Determined, I brushed myself off, and carefully proceeded. About 20 minutes later the second fall came. By that time I had stopped shaking from the traumatic fall earlier, and was feeling good about the run again. Great, in fact, and as we were heading toward the end of the run, I picked up speed. I was proudly thinking about how I was actually achieving a negative split. In that moment, I tripped again and fell. Surprised?

When we allow our mind to waiver, our body follows along.

Trail running isn't for everyone, but trails can be used as an analogy for many challenges.

Know that you will fall sometimes, be prepared to pick yourself up, and, when you get back on the trail, remember to keep your mind focused. On whatever is right for that moment.

Don't judge the thoughts and gently remind yourself that the obstacles on your path are there to keep you focused on where you are going.

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Making Decisions with Positive Awareness

Have you ever caught yourself not being able to make a decision?

You waffle back and forth, weighing the options, unsure what is the best way to go? Sometimes the hesitation is due to a limiting belief such as a lack of confidence that you will be able to achieve what you want to do, sometimes you aren't sure you are worth the financial investment, sometimes you are just plain tired and don't want to do anything, let alone make a decision.

The decision could be as small as what to cook for dinner, or huge such as deciding whether or not to leave your miserable job.

No matter your inner struggle when (not) making a decision, the issue I want to address is what that (in)action does to the final outcome. Let's use Lynn as our example. This 40-something mom of two works full time, as does her husband.

Lynn really likes writing, and feels there is a fiction book in her, she even has the general story line mapped out. She learns about a 12-week fiction writing class offered at her local university's continuing education department – for only \$129!

When she first opens the university's email, she is instantly excited, thinking, "this is it, finally my big chance to write my book!!" And then she gets busy with work or life or family. Later that evening she tells her husband about it. He encourages her, even though their finances are tight, as he sees his wife sparkle as she talks about it.

Lynn, however, has grown more skeptical over the 6 hours since she first read the course offering. As she drifts off to sleep, she starts making excuses why she shouldn't attend it. Tuesday night is Susie's piano lesson, who will take her? That \$129 *should* really toward their growing credit card debt. Lynn even starts to think she probably wouldn't write a good enough book to even make her time worth it.

That's a lot of skeptical, am I right? Can you relate at all

to Lynn's story?

The next several days, Lynn continues to think about the class. She does some research on the teacher. She looks into other fiction classes offered online as a sort of price comparison. She talks about it to friends, reviewing her hesitations over and over.

All the while, Lynn is very excited about the chance to take the class, she just isn't sure yet if she should commit.

A full week after she first learns about the class, Lynn decides to just go for it. She pays the \$129 and she is very excited, if a little hesitant.

So here Lynn is... 7 days later signing up to do what she wanted to do in the first place. Lynn is ready for a transformation. But you might not believe it. She's spent no less than 8 hours talking about and thinking over if she should take the class, which was basically 8 hours reviewing her inadequacies and limitations – to herself and to others.

Lynn could have been spending 8 hours writing out the outline of the book. That 8 hours could have gone to sleeping, exercising, meditating, spending time with her kiddos, talking to her friends about how great her book will be, what it will be about, etc.

Besides missing out on those productive 8 hours, she spent 8 hours reinforcing negative beliefs. This is the opposite of what we want. We want POSITIVE in our life! This is basic Law of Attraction stuff here.

We are (rightly) encouraged to embrace saying yes to opportunities that will challenge us and open up our creative powers. But sometimes opportunities come at the "wrong" time in that the answer isn't always clear.

What I hope you will consider and take away from this is not

that you have to rush decisions, but be cognizant of how your mind is operating during the time of decision. If you go into limiting beliefs, or self doubt, or easy-out excuses about something you really have excitement for, you aren't allowing YOURSELF to grow.

My advice is to just say NO when you get to that place. Ideally say NO to the negative thoughts, but if you can't, then just say NO to the opportunity and move on. Keep your thoughts positive. Especially your SELF thoughts. This is the most important thing.

The next most important thing is to save yourself the time and headache of wasting that precious time.

If a similar opportunity comes up for you, something great, but you just aren't sure... Go ahead and take your time, but please do so mindfully. If it is bringing up negative thoughts, then just say NO! If you can manage it, try to envision how wonderful you will feel after having participated in the transformative opportunity.

Absolutely keep yourself open to grow and to challenge yourself. Say yes to opportunities. But be ready to say no to others. Keep as positive as you can... for your health and your own .