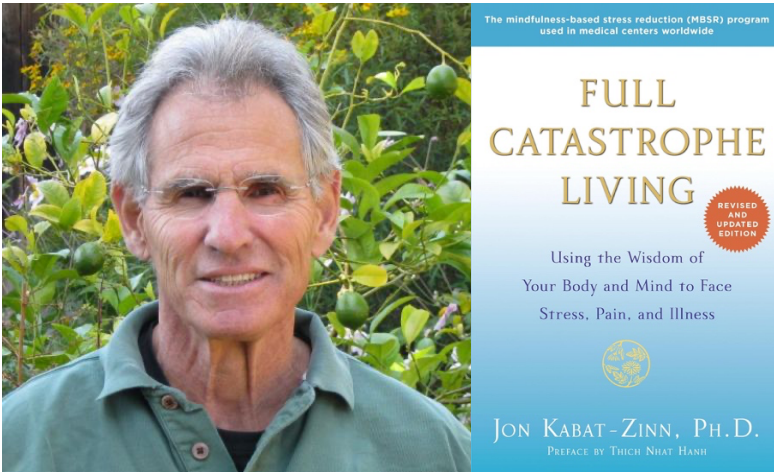


John Kabat-Zinn



I define mindfulness operationally as the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. Awareness is not the same as thinking. It is a complementary form of intelligence a way of knowing that is at least as wonderful and as powerful, if not more so, than thinking.

[MBSR Training by Jon Kabat-Zinn - Mindfulness Training](#)



mbsrtraining.com

<https://mbsrtraining.com>

MBSR stands for **mindfulness-based stress reduction**. Developed by Professor **Jon Kabat-Zinn**, MBSR is a **program** that offers mindfulness **training** to help people to use the wisdom of their body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness.

MBSR training includes awareness of body sensations, internal mental states, thoughts, emotions, impulses, and memories. **This reduces stress and anxiety and increases well-being.**

HH Dalai Lama

“My religion is kindness.”



“Be Kind whenever possible, and it is always possible.”

“

**IF YOU WANT
OTHERS TO BE
HAPPY, PRACTICE
COMPASSION.
IF YOU WANT TO BE
HAPPY, PRACTICE
COMPASSION.**

DALAI LAMA XIV

80.COM/QUOTES

“

**DON'T LET THE
BEHAVIOR OF
OTHERS DESTROY
YOUR INNER PEACE.**

Dalai Lama

YOURFATES.COM



If you think you are **too small**
to make a difference,
try sleeping with a **mosquito.**

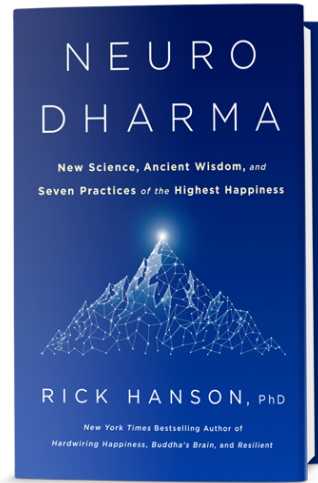
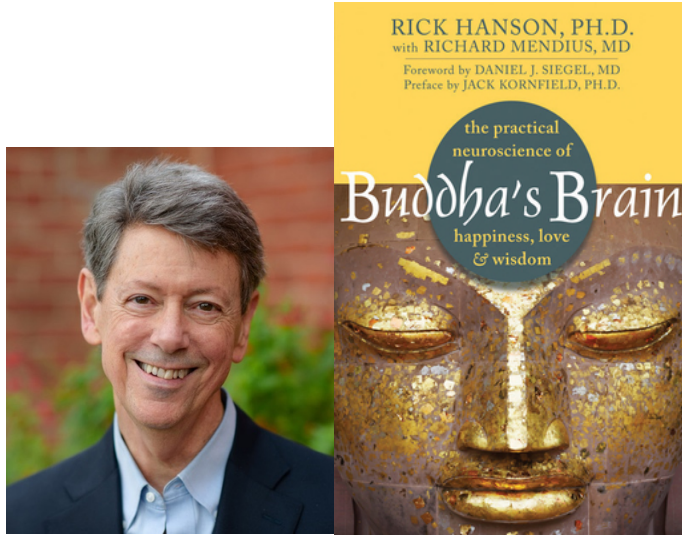
– Dalai Lama

AZ QUOTES

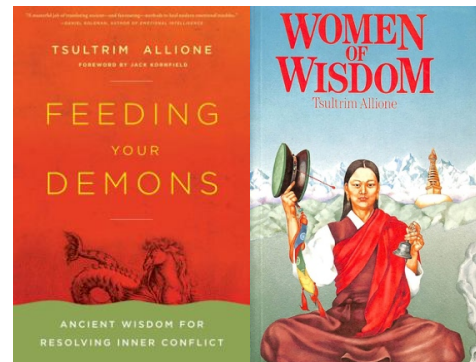


Rick Hanson

<https://rickhanson.com>



Lama Tsultrim Allione



Founder of Tara Mandala.

<https://www.taramandala.org>

“Breathing in, I
calm body and
mind. Breathing
out, I smile.
Dwelling in the
present moment I
know this is the
only moment.”

———— THICH NHAT HANH

Thich Nhat Hanh



Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche (Tibet: ཡོངས་དགེ་མི་འགྱུར་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། Wylie: yongs dge mi 'gyur rin po che)^[1] is a Tibetan teacher and master of the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. He has written five books and oversees the Tergar Meditation Community, an international network of Buddhist meditation centers.

The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness

Turning Confusion into Clarity: A Guide to the Foundation Practices of Tibetan Buddhism.



Mingyur Rinpoche's Understand Monkey Mind on YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-JiQubfMPg>
 many other short teachings



Father Thomas Keating Centering Prayer

Meditation varies with whatever word is connected with it. In terms of quieting down, a lovely one comes from Father Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer. It's on You-Tube Thomas Keating Centering Prayer Timer. An excerpt:



'Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation.'

Centering Prayer:

- It is a method of contemplative prayer, a tradition of inward prayer that seeks a direct experience of God.
- It was developed in the 1970s by Trappist monks who were interested in making contemplative prayer more accessible to laypeople.
- Centering Prayer involves sitting quietly and letting go of thoughts and distractions as they arise.
- A "sacred word" is often used as a mental anchor to bring your attention back to God when your mind wanders.

Centering Prayer is practiced by people of many different Christian denominations. There are many resources available online and in libraries to learn more about it.

Father Thomas Keating was a prominent figure in the world of Christian contemplative prayer.

Father Keating's meditation at Folsom Prison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvsnoH8zIBs> Folsom prison

Various Books & Websites Tip of the Iceberg

Tsoknyi Rinpoche, *Open Heart, Open Mind.*
Why We Meditate. With Daniel Goleman

MIngyur Rinpoche Understand Monkey Mind on YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-JiQubfMPg>
many other short teachings

Jack Kornfield
A Path With Heart
No Time like the Present
The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace
by [Jack Kornfield](#)

Tara Brach
Radical Acceptance

Kimberley Snow
Writing Yourself Awake.
In Buddha's Kitchen

Lama Tsultrim Allione
Women of Wisdom
Feeding Your Demons
Tara Mandala Retreat Center

Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg

Pema Chodron
When Things Fall Apart
Start Where You Are

Journals
Lion's Roar
Tricycle

Miscl
Fleet Maull - Heart Mind Institute

NEURO-SOMATIC MINDFULNESS COURSE

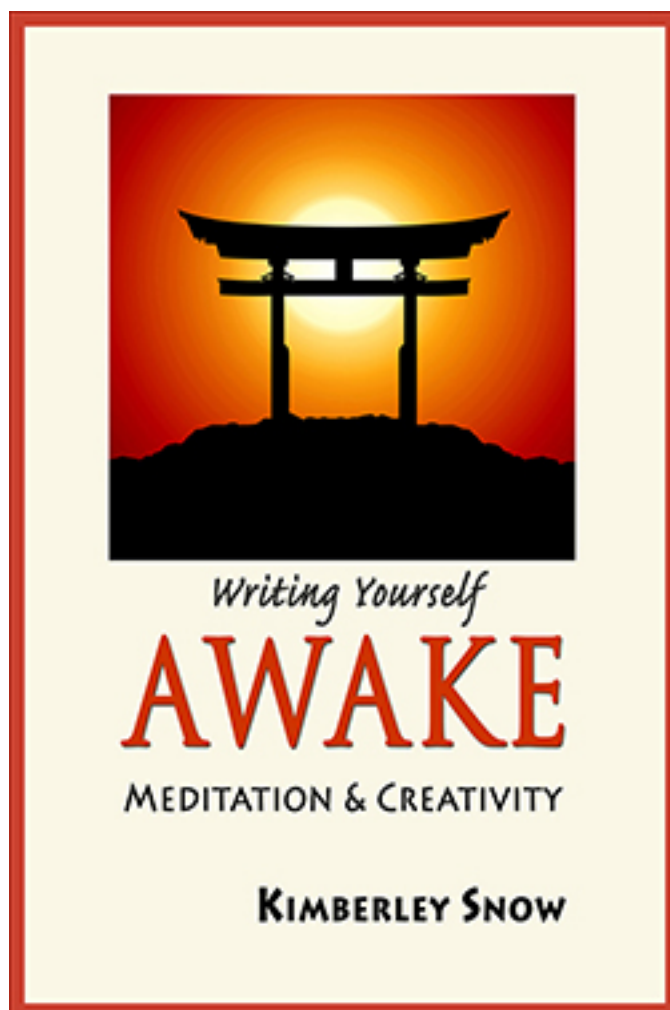
Courses & summits

<https://www.heartmind.co>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7YKF02hqxo>

Mindful Heart Programs

<https://www.mindfulheartprograms.org>



A unique method for enhancing creativity, increasing spontaneity and gaining insight through integrating writing and meditation.

From Amazon:

Writing Yourself Awake creates a simple approach for enhancing creativity, integrating the emotions, gaining insight, and increasing spontaneity by integrating writing and meditation. Drawing from both Eastern and Western sources of wisdom, author Kimberley Snow, Ph.D., uses short teachings, writing suggestions, meditation techniques, and active imagination to lead the reader toward deeper awareness.

Back Cover

What are we waking up from? Let's call it the daze of the isolated, reactive, limited self. What are we waking into? A larger, more easeful world, where things are not fixed, but flow.

It's natural that both writing and meditating work so well in tandem. Both are seeking what's real, what's authentic. Both allow us to gain insight and wisdom as we learn to witness our lives – both past and present—not merely to react to them. Both are grounded in the body through mindful breathing or through the moving hand, allowing us to go deeper, allowing the conscious and unconscious to unite and integrate. Through meditation we come to see reality as it is; through writing we learn to find ways to live comfortably with things as they are.

“By combining authentic Buddhist sources of wisdom with her own extensive experience as a writer and writing teacher, long-time practitioner, Kimberley Snow has created a unique book that will be of benefit to many. For all that she writes with authority and from a platform of broad knowledge and understanding, her tone remains that of a spiritual friend, grounded in compassion, always encouraging the readers to uncover their own innate wisdom.” ~Tulku Orgyen Phuntsok, Vairotsana Foundation.

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[Kimberley Snow's teaching notes, excerpts from workshops & books, especially Writing Yourself Awake.](#)

About Meditation, Writing and Well Being

Meditation is simple. In the end you don't need anything but your body, your breath, and your mind. In the beginning it helps to have instructions. Plus motivation. In time you'll gradually realize how to adapt them to better suit you personally.

Writing is simple as well. If you made it through the second grade you know how to write. To write the way you think you should write takes longer. As with meditation, it helps to slow down.

MEDITATION

Meditation is one of those words like cooking that covers a variety of activities.

Insert

Back in the '60 and early seventies men and women from the US brought back from Asia a model for meditation, especially Vipassana meditation, that became the default way to meditate: sit quietly, follow the breath for 20 to 24 minutes, bringing the attention back to the breath when a thought carried you away. Do this everyday or twice a day preferably in the morning and evening. Since then, more and more people adopted this as their meditation practice. In many cases, the result have been extraordinary improvement in ability to focus, mental stability, and relaxation. Many found that an added bonus they became less judgmental, less angry, and more compassionate. Since then, meditation practice has expanded in many different directions and has spawned a number of teachers, retreat centers, and presence online.

Traditional meditation has tended to present practioners with two separate paths: path of spiritual attainment and transcendence & the other, the path of healing, often connected to neuroscience and/or therapy. If you follow the first path of spiritual attainment, you'd study such subjects as the four noble truths; emptiness, relative and absolute reality; awareness of awareness; non-dual awareness and so on. For the second, you don't need to study Buddhist Nature of Mind teachings but you do need to find a practice of meditation that is rooted in the body, fits your own needs and circumstances, and teaches you how to be non-judgmentally present in the moment.

APPROACHES TO COMBINING MEDITATION & WRITING

The first is to alternate between meditation & writing, to use meditation as a means to write better. Alan Wallace told me that he uses this technique - writes 2 hours, lies down in supine position with a pen & paper close at hand & does mindfulness of breathing or one of the other shamatha or calm abiding meditations _lets the brain cool down, refresh itself for 24 minutes, then writes again. Works quite well. Last April, I did a private meditation & writing retreat using this method & it worked like silk. Seamless writing in my meditation room. Writers probably used to do this naturally,

they'd stare into the fire and watch the clouds. Things today are more scheduled.

Lots of variations on this, meditation time varies but when the writing begins to run down, start meditating. Here writing is the primary focus, meditation is seen as a support to writing.

Problem with this is if this is the only time you meditate, that is you're accomplishing something through meditation instead of just sitting there or lying there, then you're short-changing yourself in terms of what deep meditation offers in terms of opening up the inner world of wisdom and insight. Again it depends on motivation. When you sit down to meditate with a pad & pencil in your hand, then the written product is really the focus. Fine, as far as it goes. Need to balance this with other periods of meditation as I'm sure Alan does.

Another approach is to take a more meditative approach to the writing process itself. Light a candle or incense before you start to write. Find some sort of ritual, bow to the writing table, start with a prayer. Create a sense of space and calm, remain very mindful when you are writing. The act of writing itself becomes sanctified.

This approach could be very helpful depending on your temperament and what you are writing. Can't see it working for screenplays, probably better for poetry.

In addition, if you insist on calm and quiet, you'll be excluding a lot of real life in your attitude and therefore in your writing. Sometimes you might need a calm atmosphere so you can deal with demons & a lot of emotional turmoil that comes up in writing. It depends on the person, the material and the intent.

Third - there is the basic problem of dualism: if you declare writing to be sacred, if you elevate it to the level of the holy, then by implication, you also relegate other activities to be profane. Start creating categories of opposites — sacred, profane; right, left; good, bad; acceptable, not acceptable. Ideally, meditation should lead to integration & flexibility, not reinforce a fixed dualistic view.

You can also use writing and meditation in tandem:

Keeping journals that parallel your spiritual life write a meditation journal that keeps track of various insights & issues that come up in

meditation or contemplation; write a blessings journal — what you are grateful for — a person, a sunset, a book - very helpful to counteract a tendency toward negativity.

Our culture is very geared toward the written word.

Many teachers suggest that you write down what you discover about the inner world in meditation rather than just mentally noting it during a sit. Learn to focus through meditation so that you become more productive. Use meditation to cut through what is called the internal censor. Do that by making friends with yourself on the cushion, locating the voice and rooting it out.

The more you watch your mind on the cushion, the more you realize about yourself in a less than flattering light. Use meditation to remove blockages, address afflicted mind states.

Use meditation as a way to not just enhance creativity, but to keep the door to the unconscious open by dissolving fixation and judgment.

Imagination

Art, Norman Fischer reminds us, can save us from freezing. It warms and melts us, creates flow. We freeze our sense of self and the world in order to control it or at least make it feel less chaotic. Unfortunately we often use spiritual practice to aid and abet this freezing process even though it is designed to do just the opposite.

Imagination reveals things that are often hidden by analytical thinking, it surprises us with insights and new ways of awareness. It is our friend in a way that our conceptual mind isn't. The conceptual mind works for the ego, strives to keep things in order, fixed, in safe boxes. The imagination operates free lance. Wild and irreverent, it's more fun, more spontaneous, full of surprises. It can turn around and bite you as well, just as you feel you have everything under control. Especially when you are congratulating yourself on having it all together. As it does in dreams, sometimes in meditation and often in the writing process, the imagination finds a side door, an open window, a pin hole, to slip through and mix things up, break up the ice, let things flow.

Part of the work of finding your own deep writing comes from awareness of the body. It's easy for us to forget the importance of the body in the writing process. . . . Our cells have memories. Our bodies have stored all of our experiences—those expressed and unexpressed, even those forgotten. They are there, waiting for us.

~Laraine Herring

Use Your Senses

Some writing seems to take place in an unfurnished, unventilated room, located somewhere in midair. There's no juice to the writing. Only ideas.

The senses don't have to be described in the writing (no "the lushness of the cream on the tongue" sort of thing) so much as to be part of the overall open awareness of the writer.

Do this:

Smell a rose.

Stroke a piece of velvet, a suede coat, a cat.

Eat a piece of crystallized ginger (or ginger snap) tiny bit by tiny bit. Or a raisin if you don't like ginger. Taste it thoroughly, completely. Note your reactions to food in your mouth. Is it too hurry to swallow it so you can eat more? What happens when you slow down and truly experience each morsel?

Sing your next thought.

Meditation with an object: place your attention on an external object. It can be anything, from a computer mouse to a holy relic. Rather than bringing your attention back to your breath as you normally would, let it return gently to rest on the object with bare attention.

The next time you meditate, pay attention to sounds. Focus on each sound as it arises, abides, disappears. Note your reaction to the sounds, the way in which the mind is taken away by thoughts, memory, and reactions. When the sound of a siren comes into the meditation, do you react with aversion? Can you just hear it as sound waves hitting your ear drum without wanting to push it away?

As a writer, visualize your characters in detail, color of hair, eyes, the way they move, what they are wearing. What do they themselves smell as they interact with the world? How open are their senses?

Eavesdrop on random conversations and listen to speech rhythms, tone. Create a distinctive voice for each of your characters, speak it out.

Describe a vivid landscape through use of specific details, use photographs as well as your own memory for inspiration.

Relax the Mind

Alternate writing with relaxing the mind.

Write until you start to give out, then meditate for about ten minutes Simply sit. Breathe.

If you are feeling speedy, breathe through the belly, expanding the abdomen, and holding each breath for a short time, then a long release.

If your mind is feeling cramped, go outside and take 21 deep breaths. Look at the sky. Breathe out your mind and keep it there.

After the breathing, simply relax the mind, rest in a state of awareness without center, without circumference.

Stretch.

Go back to writing.

Repeat as needed.

Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.

~Thich Nhat Hanh

Breathe in the World

Go out into nature and breathe in the elements. Feel them enter your body, displacing fixation and neurosis.

Stand in the sun and breathe in the warmth of the fire element.

Sit on the ground and feel the solid energy of the earth element as you breathe it in.

Stand in the ocean, a river, pond or puddle. Experience the sense of flow in the water.

Watch the wind blow through trees or as it ripples the surface of water. Let the movement of air fill your body.

Find an unobstructed spot and look at the space of the sky. Breathe it in, letting it expand the mind into sky.

MINDFULNESS & CONTEMPLATION

Meditating means bringing the mind back to something again and again. Thus, we all meditate, but unless we direct it in some way, we meditate on ourselves and on our own problems, reinforcing our self-clinging.

~Lama Yeshe Dorje

Meditation allows us to directly participate in our lives instead of living life as an afterthought.

~Stephen Levine

Meditation is not a means to an end. It is both the means and the end."

~J. Krishnamurti

Although meditation is actually very simple, it is easy to get confused by the many different descriptions of meditative practices. Forget them all and just sit quietly.

~Tarthang Tulku

Contemplation

Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, raised in the old ways in Kham, Tibet, used to say that just to sit and meditate was like placing patches over the holes in your trousers when you sit. You stand up from the cushion and they fall off. He said that we needed to sew the patches on through teachings, study and contemplation. He went on to say that implementation through compassionate action was the final step of the process.

Today contemplation is often the most neglected part of dharma practice. We are going too fast, our world is going over its speed limit. That's probably why our dharma trousers are still so full of holes, so to speak.

Contemplation or reflection means thoughtful concentration on a particular topic. The mind returns again and again to the topic without judging or rejecting it, but with openness toward understanding its true nature. We are

contemplating when we fall into a “brown study” or when we let ourselves be spontaneously carried along by a flow of images and ideas as we stare into a fire.

Writing can serve as a form of contemplation if we retain an open attitude to the subject at hand. Often the act of the pen moving across the paper (or the fingers tapping a keyboard) grounds us as our mind gives itself over to contemplation.

Nature of Mind

How Our Mind Works and What We Can Do About It.

Meditation for relaxation is fine, but we also need to examine how our mind works, to look under the hood, so to speak. By investigating the ways in which we are hard-wired by our default operating system, we can learn how to adjust it in ways that create less suffering for ourselves and others.

First, we have to slow down. All too often we are “going over our own speed limit” and seem to be leaning into the future rather than being in the present. A friend once told me that she was on her honeymoon for two days before she stopped planning her wedding. Our thinking mind can take over as we go faster and faster. No longer aligned with the present moment, we lose a felt sense of being at home in the world and start to feel isolated.

First, we need to catch up with ourselves and learn to settle into living in our own skin. Meditation helps us do this as we train in following our breath. We can't breathe in the future or the past, only in the present. Once we slow down and are able to focus inward, we can begin to understand a few basics of how our mind works.

As we learn to take a step back from our minds, we learn to witness our thinking rather than simply react to it. In time, as we continue to meditate and to gain insight, we begin to understand that our minds are capable of conjuring up all sorts of nonsense

mixed in with intelligent responses. In time, we learn not to identify with our immediate response, but to just watch our thoughts, our emotions, and our sometime crazy reactions. In this type of meditation, we don't do anything but view the mind in action without reacting. We don't think about watching the mind, we just watch it. This often requires patience.

When we start paying attention to our minds, we find certain patterns that are apparently hardwired. When we see something, we tend to want it, push it away, or be neutral. When we want it, we reach out to grasp it. Or we see it, don't want it, then push it away. In addition, we make judgments about it. It's good, it's bad. In this way, attachment and aversion are born and perpetuated.

According to both Buddhists and neuroscientists, our minds have developed in certain ways to make us more efficient in dealing with a situation. Having a mega-sorting system in the brain – we want it, we don't want it, we don't care – makes it easy to make quick decisions, but also has a downside if we want to live a more nuanced life. An awful lot goes on in the middle.

Basically, in terms of evolutionary development, in terms of survival, the neuroscientists say that we've developed what they call "a bias toward negativity" that comes from scanning the environment for what will harm us. Clearly, the person who scans the steppes for a charging woolly mammoth is going to last longer and reproduce more often than a person who stands watching the sunset, thinking "it's all good." Although this is the old brain speaking, we can use a newer part of the brain (the neocortex) to both become aware of this tendency and to do something about it. Rick Hanson, in *Buddha's Brain*, advises us to balance out this negativity by thinking of something positive that happened to us during the day for at least two minutes before we go to sleep at night. Also he points out that it takes about 12 minutes a day for about three weeks for our neurons that fire together will wire together and it becomes a habit.

Neuroscience explains the mind as it relates to parts of the brain and new insights are being brought forth all the time. Although the language they use is different, much of the research in neuroscience resonates with age-old Buddhist psychology as taught in the secular

“nature of mind” teachings. Witnessing the contents of the mind is enormously helpful in understanding how the mind works, but we also need to study not just the contents of our minds, but how certain different modes of consciousness operate.

There are a number of different ways of talking about the various aspects of the mind, but a very basic model, suggested by Tsoknyi Rinpoche in *Fully Being*, focuses on four different modes of the mind: knowing, the moving mind, awareness, and clarity. Although these work together in practice, we’ll discuss them one by one, focusing on the moving mind and awareness.

First, as we look out to perceive the world, there is knowing, we know a bird is a bird, a flower is a flower, we don’t need to be told. It’s just there automatically.

Thinking, the next mode, is part of the moving mind. It can involve some reflection or analysis or judgment of the object we “know.” For example, we may wonder about the name of the flower, or remember a garden with similar flowers we played in as a child. Or worry that our roses are getting aphids. It goes on and on.

In the West, this mode of the moving mind is dominant and has accomplished tremendous things: cities, medical advances, and the arts to name just a few. Little of the advanced material world we live in would be possible without our moving minds. On the other hand, neither would guns, roadside bombs, nor wars.

On a personal level, our moving mind is always reacting, making decisions, planning, judging. We need it to do all of these things, but it also can become fixated and self-identified, leading to the creation of a sort of false self or “mini-me.” This self-enclosed consciousness defends what it sees as “me” or “mine” and builds walls to keep out an awareness of what is “not-me.” This is bolstered by an inner narrative voice spinning out “fake news” about ourselves to ourselves. In this sense, we can become a figment of our own imagination.

Happily, there is a way out of living inside this self-imposed bubble. It begins by learning how to shift from the moving mind into other modes of consciousness, specifically to awareness.

Awareness, like knowing, is naturally there. When we work with the mind in meditation, we are working through awareness or combining awareness with the moving mind. It can and should be trained, developed and strengthened. First, we have to become conscious of it since it is quiet and our normally speedy, moving mind tends to be pretty loud. It is through awareness that we develop our natural capacity to watch our minds, to reflect and to become self-aware. The capacity to do so is innately there, we just have to activate it.

We do so by first experiencing it. We turn our consciousness backwards rather than looking out. "Turn your eyes and look at the back of your skull," is a typical suggestion among Tibetans when giving nature of mind teachings. Then, ask yourself: "Who's there?" "Who is asking this question?" Or we can just be very quiet and let it emerge on its own. If the moving mind's dialogue – that tendency to narrate our lives as we're trying to live it – tries to dominate, there are a number of work-arounds we can try.

Achieved awareness is a little like a video camera: it is always in the present, has no opinions but is neutral, and sees things as they are.

A different approach comes from Lock Kelly, author *Shift into Freedom*, who suggests that we simply repeat the word "blah" over and over, then start paying attention to the space between the words, eventually expanding into that space.

Working with expanding our sense of space is a traditional part of awareness training. Once when I told a teacher that I felt a tightness between my eyes when I followed the breath, he suggested that I expand my consciousness beyond my physical skull into something like a sombrero around it. Kalu Rinpoche used to tell his students to visualize an orange going first three miles to the left of the head, then three miles to the right. Then up, then down.

The recommendation is to do these awareness techniques several times a day in short sessions. In addition to developing awareness, they help to integrate inside & outside and to enable us to see things as they are rather than as we would like them to be.

Neuroscience suggest that it takes twelve minutes a day for three weeks to establish a new mental habit. During that time, the neurons that fire together, wire together.

In addition to the more active methods of developing awareness, one can remain still, shift away from thinking, and simply rest in awareness. Another very effective method is called “sky gazing.” Sit facing a clear sky away from the sun, and let your mind “merge with the sky and stay there.” The outer sky activates the inner sky.

Body awareness, through yoga, tai chi or other methods can also allow you to drop out of the thinking mind and into the senses. From there you can begin to become familiar with non-verbal awareness. Dropping into the heart and sending out feelings (rather than thoughts) of loving kindness can also by-pass the confines of the moving mind in addition to cultivating bodhichitta.

Behind knowing, moving mind, and awareness is clarity or lucidity which functions like a backdrop illuminating everything. Clarity, like knowing and awareness, is just there. If we are meditating as part of a spiritual rather than secular path, lucidity or clarity plays an important part in advanced meditATIONS. Establish visual clarity by looking up and out into empty space and this will often bring a sense of inner clarity.

The good news is that we have any number of methods and techniques to train the mind, to develop the capacity to shift from the moving mind into awareness and clarity. **The bad news** is that we actually have to practice them. We can’t just talk or read about awareness or awareness. We actually have to experience it for ourselves through our own minds.

So. Remember to meditate. Go to teachings, read dharma books, explore websites, listen to podcasts.

Keep going.

Suggested Reading: *Shift into Freedom* by Loch Kelly; *Fully Being* Online Course with Tsoknyi Rinpoche; *Buddha’s Brain* by Rick Hanson. *Mindsight* by Daniel Siegel.

SHAMATHA MEDITATION

Shamatha Meditation:

Shamatha meditation, also known as mindfulness meditation, is a practice aimed at cultivating a calm and focused mind. It's considered the foundation of Buddhist meditation and a vital first step for other mindfulness practices. Here's a breakdown of its core aspects:

What it accomplishes:

- **Inner Peace:** Shamatha meditation aims to quiet the constant chatter in our minds, leading to a sense of tranquility and peace.
- **Improved Concentration:** By training your attention to stay focused, you enhance your ability to concentrate in daily life.
- **Greater Self-Awareness:** Through regular practice, you gain a deeper understanding of how your mind works and how thoughts and emotions arise.

How to do Shamatha practice

- **Finding a Comfortable Posture:** Traditionally, a seated position is used, but comfort is key. You can sit on a cushion, chair, or even lie down.
- **Focusing on the Breath:** A common anchor for shamatha meditation is the breath. Pay attention to the sensation of your breath entering and leaving your nostrils.
- **Gently Bringing Attention Back:** When your mind inevitably wanders (and it will!), don't judge yourself. Acknowledge the distraction and gently guide your attention back to the breath.

Here are some additional points to keep in mind:

- **Start with Short Sessions:** Begin with short meditation sessions (2-5 minutes, many times a day) and gradually increase the duration as you become more comfortable.
- **Be Patient:** Like any skill, mastering shamatha meditation takes time and consistent practice. Don't get discouraged if your

mind wanders frequently, as it will. Thinking is not bad, it is necessary, only needs to learn not to dominate.

- **Guided Meditations:** There are many guided shamatha meditations available online [YouTube] or through apps that can help you get started.

Shamatha meditation Instructions

In any meditation, it helps to sit up straight so that the air flows freely through body. First just sit. Don't try to do anything. Just sit. Next comes relaxation: become aware of the the muscle groups in the face, the forehead, around the eyes, the cheeks, the jaw area. Let your attention lightly scan this area just as a brush lightly touches a canvas. As you scan, relax the muscles so that your face is as soft and open as that of a sleeping baby. Continue to scan down the body, noting where there are knots of tension and releasing them as you go. Become aware of the sensations of the body, just noting them. Center on the sensation of the breath as it flows in and out. When thoughts arise, and they will, don't fight against them but try not to get carried away by them either. Just return your attention to your breath, in and out, in and out.

ON WRITING:

When an exercise or prompt says "Write," this generally means for 20 minutes without stopping. Do not edit as you go along. Forget grammar, forget style, forget everything but the subject you are dealing with.

Be honest when you write, don't pose, don't write for an unseen audience of cheering fans or a panel of critical judges. Write for yourself, make language your own. In time, this will develop your own way of saying things, your own natural style. Simply concentrate on the subject at hand.

Many people feel a subtle sense of self consciousness when they write. There is no way around this but to keep writing. Setting a clock and keeping the pen moving across the page also helps. If you find that you get absolutely stuck, go back and read what you have

written so far, then try to reenter the process. Some say it is helpful to rewrite the word you can't get past over and over until the pen takes off.

Use writing itself as a means of discovery. Remember, no one is watching. It doesn't matter whether you say what you mean at first or after a dozen pages. You don't have to read aloud what you've written or share it in a small group unless you wish to do so.

If you stop and try to correct and polish as you go, the editing side of the brain may interfere with the creative side. The flow of ideas and images can falter and stop, dried up by rules and regulations. It's much better simply to let yourself go, to learn to write without inhibitions and without stopping. Sometimes I find that I'm writing in a voice that I don't like, a voice that sounds stuffy, or whiny, or prissy. I discovered that if I let that voice have its say, I can write beyond it to something else, but if I try to block it, I can't write anything at all. In later drafts, I simply cut the lines "she" wrote, that ninth grade little twit who still survives somewhere in my head. My own method is to write through all the voices that insist on speaking up, to write and write until something else takes over, something larger than personal ego.

Once when asked how she knew when to stop working on a piece, Sandra Cisneros said, "When something surprises me, when I've learned something I didn't know before, then I know that I've reached the heart of that particular piece of writing." So, write for the surprise turn of event in the story or poem, the unexpected twist in the essay, the unanticipated revelation.

Contemplation

If you don't wish to start writing immediately, then contemplate the topic. First quiet your mind by concentrating on your breathing, a fine stream of air going in and out, in and out. Read the exercise several times. Don't think. If a thought does pass by, just let it think itself, without having to pay much attention to it. Like a child watching television.

If obsessive thoughts keep popping to the surface of your mind like boiling soup, you might want to stop and take a vigorous 20 minute walk to work on these specific thoughts so you can return and go deeper into the contemplation. Simply be with the subject without praise or blame. Don't force a conclusion or storyline. Just wait until clarity and insight or understanding arrive on their own.

Whether you write words down or contemplate the subject quietly, in the end it is all using the imagination to improve the quality and clarity of your own life.

When I was teaching writing at UCSB, I would usually start the class by having them write about their relationship with writing. Often they would report that they used to like to write but Mrs. So & So, their teacher in Jr High made them read it allow to the class and was so full of corrections and criticism that they'd never like to write since then. Almost without exception the best written essay, they most articulate and imaginative, would be about they couldn't write.

Writing Prompts:

Fear of Writing

If you are afraid of writing--and many people are, especially when they first start out--these exercises may help to lessen anxiety.

1. Visualize and describe a private place where you feel safe to write. It may be anywhere--your real writing room, a spot outdoors, somewhere in another dimension. Visualize it in detail. Return to this place each time you begin to write.

Student sample:

"My room is big and yellow. I am the only person who is allowed here. I feel safe in this room since there are bars on the windows to keep out every English teacher I ever had. Nobody can see what I write or how I write in this room."

2. Imagine yourself as a kindly, compassionate editor or teacher and give yourself advice on writing.

3. Write as badly as you can. Use every awkward construction, vague reference, or unclear concept you wish. Pile it on. Go on to double negatives, dangling modifiers, split infinitives. Lay into verbs that

don't agree, references that don't connect, and the passive voice without end. Write across the margins and upside down on the page. Write until you like the feel of the pen in your hand, until you are having fun. Repeat this exercise every time you sense you are not in control of your writing.

4. Visualize your fear of writing: a teacher with fangs, a professor with a whip, yourself with a copy of Henry James, etc. Give them names and ask them their origins. Talk to these fears. Find out what they want. Show them to the door and lock it behind them.
5. Ask yourself: "Who is it that is afraid?" Then ask: "Who is writing?"
6. Try to locate the fear in your mind. Where does it come from, where does it dwell, where does it go when it leaves? Feel the fear in your body. Stay still and experience the fear simply as sensation without attaching a story line to it. What happens?
7. Remember a peaceful scene after you sit down at your desk. Visualize yourself as your favorite writer. Pick up your pen and begin.
8. Take 20 deep breaths before you start to write.
9. Meditate for a few minutes, following your breath. Keep doing so as you begin to write.
10. Place inspiring statues or empowering photographs on your desk. Contemplate them as you write.

Adapted from *Writing Yourself Home* by Kimberley Snow

Journaling on Fear

We wrote mainly on fear & did an exercise in which we wrote down what we were most afraid of (1) as children (2) in grade school (3) in high school (4) college (5) as we started a family and/or a career (6) three of our biggest and three of our smallest fears in the present. Then we looked for a common thread in the fears, i.e., what our triggers for fear might be. We talked about how fear is often for something in the future that never comes to pass and how living in the moment corrected those fears. We also talked about the use of

mantra (a repeated phrase used as a "mind protector") and how the following quote could be used as a mantra:

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain." Frank Herbert, *Dune* ^a- Bene Gesserit Litany Against Fear

Note: wisdom is where you find it.

We also used the above as a contemplative exercise of feeling the fear, not reacting to it, and how this was a Buddhist technique called "liberating an emotion in its own ground."

The homework was to look over what you've written & keep looking for triggers for our various fears, and also to write a short piece that was from a fearless point of view.

This week, be mindful of: What does fear do to me? What are the coping mechanism I've worked up to deal with fear? What are the results of being afraid? How does it limit me? What would I like to do if I were not afraid?

JOURNALING on Gratitude:

Write down five things that made you happy in the last 24 hours; three things that you are grateful for; one thing that you did to make someone else happy.

Continue to develop positive emotions by including others: journal acts of loving kindness you'd like to perform to make someone else happy. Journal or contemplate something you'd like to do in order to bring more happiness into the world.

Emotional Mindfulness

Become aware of your bodily sensations—not just of the breath—when meditating, but the physiological sensations in the body that accompany

different emotions.

Become intimately aware of your general emotional landscape—what emotions do you feel the most? Which do you avoid?

Which emotions would you like to have more control over?

Be mindful of the range of your emotions. How would you wish to expand this range?

Be mindful of the specific triggers that set off each of the different emotions for you.

Be mindful of your own narrative about your life.

Watch how you respond emotionally to different people and situations. Too much? Too little? Inappropriately? Balanced except sometimes? Just right most of the time?

Become mindful of other people's emotions, how they are displayed, acted out.

Become mindful of pockets of resistance when different emotions arise. For example, which of these questions evoked a feeling of wanting to shove it away?

Become mindful of the effect of other people's emotions on you.

Become very mindful of the effect of your emotions on other people.

EMOTIONS

Fear

Fear demands to be felt, and it can be felt most readily in the body, as a powerful sensation. The experience may be uncomfortable, but as you watch fear manifest in the body, the truth of the Buddha's words is revealed: It does arise because of conditions. It is not a wall of emotion, but a constantly changing process. And it finally ends. It has its say and departs.

~David Guy

Fear

Fear is often part of other emotions as well as standing alone. We need to know what triggers our fears, how it effects us physiologically, and also the strategies we've worked up to deal with it. The most talked about reactions are flight or fight, but there are many variations within these two.

Ask yourself: is this fear based on facts or am I manufacturing some future disaster? On a trip, I'm afraid I'm not going to get to the airport on time. Got to the airport fine, now I'm afraid that the flight is going to be late and I'll miss my connection. I made the connection, now I'm afraid that they've lost my luggage....

A certain type of fear is almost always about the next thing. The feeling of anxiety is real, but the reasons our minds create around it are conjuring up the worst case scenario.

As in the above case, the thoughts are not true, but the feeling itself is real. Be with the feeling as sensation, separate it from your narrative about it, see that the expectation may not be true. Creating a narrative gives us something to do with the emotion. Fear can create a sort of mental spinning top that distances us from the feeling itself as we imagine what can go wrong – often very creatively. But this response can become a habit that limits us, robs us of the present moment.

We don't want to give up fear. Think of it as a warning system that we need. If we can't swim, then we should be afraid of water. When we feel panicky, it's a sign that we are going over our own speed limit. Fear often fuels speediness. It's a signal that we need to calm down.

Write FEAR in the middle of the page. Free associate and jot down whatever comes to mind. Explore three of these jottings in more detail.

Make a list of the things that you currently fear. Make another list of things that you feared in the past but fear no longer. What do they hold in common?

How much of your fear lies in the future? Make a list of things you have been

afraid of that never happened.

Fear is meant to protect you. Describe the ways in which a fear does its job well.

Describe the ways in which being afraid limits your life. What would happen if you gave up these fears?

How much of your mental activity is taken up with fearful thoughts? What is the story line connected with these fears? Feel the emotion without the story line.

Write for ten minutes from a fearless point of view.

Recreate a situation in which you were afraid. Try to feel the fear fully and to recreate its emotional intensity. Turn it into a poem.

Describe a chronic fear and the effect it has had on your life. Give the fear a name and enter into a dialogue with it.

Visualize your fears—large and small—see them as animals, insects, funny looking creatures from the deep. Get to know them, befriend them, feed them, and let them go.

List five ways in which you deal with fear or have dealt with it in the past. Star the ones that seemed the most effective. Put an X by the ones than never work.

Take 20 deep breaths as you visualize your fears, then write for 20 minutes without stopping on whatever comes into your mind.

Sit in a chair, facing an empty one. Visualize a specific fear in the chair opposite. Give it a face, a name. Ask this fear what it wants. What it needs. Change places and, as the visualized fear, answer these questions. For more on this technique see Tsultrim Allione's *Feeding Your Demons*.

Meditation/Contemplation: visualize a small fear in your life. Spiders, parking, interacting with certain people. Bring it to mind vividly, then back away from the narrative and sink into the feeling; feel the fear, don't back away from it, just feel it

as a sensation. You're safe, this is remembered fear. Now go into the narrative, into the story line. Is it true? What would happened if you didn't have this story line?

*For more see Writing Yourself Awake, available on
Amazon for \$1.99
Also in paperback.*