

How to Lose Your Mind in Under an Hour

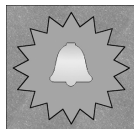
A fun, easy-to-read, and effective
guide to enlightenment

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**A FUN, EASY-TO-READ, AND EFFECTIVE
GUIDE TO ENLIGHTENMENT**

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK FOR FREE

1. Pull up a seat and have at it. This shouldn't take too long if the title is accurate.
2. You could shoplift it. Not your style? Well, it's an option. You look like you could outrun the lady behind the counter.
3. Hide a copy behind some other book that's not exactly a best-seller (e.g. Vintage Farm Tractors, hardcover). Come back when you've got an hour.

DON'T WORRY

Do you recoil a bit when people start using spiritual language, even the word "spiritual"? Be honest. If it helps, I'll admit that I do. For years, if I'd read something with language that sounded even remotely spiritual, I'd picture the author as a pleasantly delusional man or woman trying their best to add meaning to a life that in some way had disappointed them. Later, after receiving an extensive education in the sciences, my prejudices extended to a belief that spiritual folks were simply seeking a substitute for the foundation of science they lacked. Maybe you feel this way a little too.

I do know this – a shift has occurred in the way I see myself and interpret the world around me. No part of this process needs to be described in any spiritual or religious terms, although I can see now why someone else might choose to do so. This transformation of consciousness (does that sound too spiritual?) is undeniably the "enlightenment" of which spiritual speakers speak, and I'd like you to experience the same if you're interested. There is nothing special or unusual about me that has allowed this change to happen, and there is nothing in your past that could possibly keep you from becoming enlightened too.

The goal of this book is to communicate the nature of this change while avoiding conventionally spiritual language almost entirely. Don't be in too much of a rush to get to the end, and try to keep a sense of humor along the way. If we're going to take this process seriously, it's actually important that we not take ourselves too seriously. I promise we'll eventually get to where you want to go.

THIS BOOK IS PROBABLY NOT FOR YOU IF...

1. ...all your achievements, relationships, and possessions have already fulfilled you with a sense of absolute completion and lasting inner peace. Congratulations, my imaginary friend.
2. ...you are illiterate, non-English speaking, and/or blind. While the concepts in this book are still very relevant to you, the ways they will be presented are admittedly biased towards English readers capable of sight. In fact, from a probability standpoint, you may be in a better position than others to undergo the subtle but profound changes that occur during the enlightenment process. But this specific edition of this book is probably not right for you. That's all I'm saying.
3. ...you are looking for a book on starfish. (The nature section is on your right, just past the magazines).

THIS BOOK PROBABLY IS FOR YOU IF...

1. ... all your achievements, relationships, and possessions have *not* fulfilled you with a sense of absolute completion and lasting inner peace. What a loser! (Just kidding)
2. ... you believe that your *lack* of achievements, relationships, or possessions is the reason you are not currently experiencing a sense of absolute completion and lasting inner peace.
3. ...you feel that the existing literature on spiritual matters contains too much awkward phrasing and not enough celebrity gossip / bathroom-related humor.
4. ...you either have an extensive scientific background or you don't have any scientific background (it doesn't matter at all).
5. ...you are either very religious or you are very not religious (it doesn't matter at all).

PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR

I appreciate that there are many choices of books in the arena of spiritual guidance. Given this, it is understandable that you may wish to ask several questions to the author prior to deciding whether this book is right for you. The following have been selected as the most likely questions you would be asking the author, if given the chance:

1. Why should I listen to you?

Any 'spiritual' guide worth listening to needs to acknowledge early on that he or she, as an individual, is irrelevant and, at best, can only facilitate an inevitable process already beginning to happen in the reader. Like a little rudder on the back of a big ship, a tiny shift in direction can make all the difference...but it's still a little rudder.

The next reason is that, if you've already read this far, we're probably cut from the same cloth. We probably both see ourselves as open-minded but skeptical, especially of people with any agenda to change the way we see ourselves and the world around us. With this in mind, this book expresses a variety of ideas in ways that I believe would have been helpful to me if I had read it a few years ago.

2. Are you weird?

This is a fair question. Perhaps you have your own conceptual image of a spiritual teacher as an old guru, staring with a wide-eyed intensity and a slightly creepy smile, wearing a tunic/robe/Viking helmet, speaking only in metaphors and

with a breathy voice. This does not describe me, as I tend to be more sleepy-eyed.

3. Does your shit smell?

Indeed. Are you waiting for some divine entity to prove him/herself worthy of being your enlightened guide? You may wish to reconsider your screening methods. Otherwise, an excellent use of your final question.

LOW-FIDELITY

Imagine getting the opportunity to hear the most perfect song ever written. The song is so great that, no matter a person's tastes, it will satisfy every listener on every level. The catch is that the only CD player available is rather flawed. Scratchy, low-fidelity, mono.

If you wish to hear the beauty in the song you will still be able to do so, but you will need to consciously focus your attention on the music itself. If you do not include yourself as part of the experience, you may hear more of the hissing and scratchiness and conclude that the song is not so perfect after all. And if you go into the process *wanting* to find reasons to criticize, the low quality output of the CD player will give you every opportunity to do so.

Spelling it out...the author of this book is the CD player. My fidelity may not always be high (don't tell my wife), but the message is worth your focused attention. Listen for it. When what you read doesn't speak to you, blame the author for that section and move on.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DAMN PREFACE SECTIONS IN THIS BOOK?

As we'll discuss later, there is kind of a "trick" to shifting one's state of consciousness. Because of this, a book can't just come out and say "do this" or "think that" and the change will happen in the reader. In fact, the opposite would be more likely to occur. There is a natural resistance in most of us to the sort of mental rearranging that needs to occur prior to seeing things a different way, so a book needs to make the reader feel welcome and unthreatened before offering an alternative.

While we're on the topic, my biggest problem with these sorts of books (even some of the very good ones) is that they tend to use language that feels improper to those with any sort of background in science and logic. Here's an example: if you're having an average day, and you spend 15 minutes with a coworker who's in a foul mood, you'll probably be more irritable afterwards. That's a fairly ordinary observation expressed with normal language. However, some spiritual books will say things like "the negative vibrational frequency of your coworker's energy field resonates with the latent emotional energies in your own psyche, initiating the transmutation of..." Ugh.

For now, let's you and I roll our eyes together and feel the joy of sharing the same critical opinion. Perhaps later on we'll work on being less judgmental, identifying the reasons why we react the way we do...

Anyhow, I just wanted to reemphasize that when approached the right way, there is absolutely no conflict between any scientific background you might have and a legitimate "spiritual" investigation into the answers that may have eluded you to this point.

PART

I

IN SEARCH OF WHO YOU TRULY ARE

Given the centuries of spiritual seeking on this planet, one of two possibilities must be true:

- a. There are no answers to be found.
- b. There are answers to be found, but something about them (or about us) makes finding them a tricky enterprise.

Something within you believes that 'b' is correct. Or 'a', I guess (why are you reading this?). The reason for the trickiness is something you're familiar with, just not in this setting.

For example, you know the plot where nobody can figure out who the murderer is because...wait for it...it's the chief of police! Wow, what a twist. Or when you look everywhere for your sunglasses but can't find them because they're on your head? Or when you have a comeback for every accusation until someone accuses you of being too defensive?

What do these examples have in common? They all involve a self-reflective twist. The question then becomes where do you (and humans in general) have such a blindspot as it relates to seeking the ultimate answers to the ultimate questions?

The answer is: your mind. You don't have to agree yet, but just open yourself to the moderately entertaining notion that your mind's activity may obscure your search in such a way that the "answer" is unattainable by using your mind. The more you value your mind's ability to solve problems, the more difficult this concept will be to accept. Let's look at two examples.

EXAMPLE #1:

Imagine being asked to explain, with spoken words, the concept of silence to someone who has lived his whole life with a bell ringing constantly in the background. Not only is there an interference (the bell) that makes the direct experience of silence impossible, but every additional word you add to the noise brings you further from what you are attempting to describe. As you will see, this is surprisingly similar to trying to use logic or mental concepts to awaken someone's consciousness into an "enlightened" state.

Before trying to explain "silence", you'd probably think to yourself "this is not a complex concept...in fact it couldn't be simpler. No sound." The exchange might go as follows:

You: Someone just offered me five dollars to try to explain the idea of silence to you.

Bell-boy: I've been told it is related to sound. What is it?

You: It is the state of no-sound.

Bell-boy: Like the bell?

You: No, that's sound too. If the bell were to stop ringing and we were to stop talking, you could directly experience silence and you would not need my help.

Bell-boy: Well, I can't conceive of the bell not ringing since I don't recall ever experiencing such a state in my entire life. So, would you care to tell me more about silence?

You: The best I can do is use words that say, "whatever sound I make is not *it*...I can suggest a state of no sound, but the sound of my voice trying to explain it becomes part of what is obscuring it."

Bell-boy: You sound like you are trying to be clever, much like the loonies that speak about spiritual enlightenment.

You: No, no. It's not about being clever at all. It's so simple. No sound. If I could get that bell to shut up, and then if you could get me to shut up, you would be awakened to the underlying reality of silence.

Bell-boy: Why are you getting frustrated? I'm sure if we got enough people to make enough sounds in enough creative ways, we would eventually be able to find a sound like silence. Or maybe I should just be listening harder.

And so on. You can see how trying harder or using more words would not only fail, but they will probably get you further from your goal. You need some external 'act of grace'. If the bell would only stop ringing for one second...that would be enough.

EXAMPLE #2:

Have you ever seen this picture?



Depending on how you look at it, it can be a candlestick or two silhouettes facing one another.* Notice how it is impossible to see both at the same time. Actually, you can "see" everything at the same time, but as soon as your mind chooses to identify the candlestick-shape as a candlestick, the faces disappear. As soon as your mind chooses to identify the face-shapes as faces, the candlestick disappears.

Now imagine meeting people who can only see the candlestick. They have never been able to "flip" the image in their minds to see the faces. Go ahead, here's another five dollars:

You: So...you guys are looking at a picture.

Them: Yes. It contains a candlestick.

You: You know, this is an interesting picture, because if you look at it a different way you can see faces.

Them: You are insane.

You: Not true! Just look at it this way...if this part of the line is the nose, and...

* To see the candlestick, look only at the white part. To see the faces, look only at the grey part.

Them: STOP! You are threatening our current view of reality, which is undeniably correct. We look at this picture and we see a candlestick. We could look at this a thousand times and be able to reproduce our results each and every time. We are satisfied with our view of this picture, certain beyond any doubt that it contains a candlestick.

You: Please, put down the mace...we're just talking here. It definitely *can* look like a candlestick if you choose to see it that way. You can go right back to seeing the candlestick in a moment if you could just briefly allow your mind to free itself from its attachment to...

Them: STOP! You are making us uncomfortable. How about this...we know beyond all doubt that this picture includes the image of a candlestick, but we will be willing to try to see the "faces" while continuing to see the candlestick.

You: Well, that won't work. You can't see the faces as long as you see the candlestick.

Them: We are afraid that letting go of our accepted interpretation of this picture, even for a moment, will cause us to become annihilated. Please go away.

This conversation seems ridiculous, right? You will see that it is exactly the same as what happens when the possibility of an enlightened consciousness is presented to a mind that isn't ready to hear it.

THE MIND

For many people, the incessant stream of thinking that goes on in their heads is the bell that never stops ringing. And like Bell-boy who couldn't imagine a state of the bell not ringing, for many people a state of non-thinking is, well, unthinkable. It's also like the faces and the candlestick. Your whole life you may only have been aware of one version of reality, the one that your mind is constantly processing. And, like the candlestick-people, there is no questioning that your perception of the world and yourself is correct...from your point of view. But there *is* another way to see things. And with a little experience, like the picture, you can go back and forth at will, choosing the perspective that you prefer.

TIME

The issue of time is a fascinating variant of the candlestick / faces illusion. Your current understanding of time is completely correct...from your perspective.

Like a car driving down the road, you are moving through time, starting from the point you were born and steadily coasting forward towards the future. Right?

Similarly, you could illustrate your journey through time by placing your finger on the left part of the timeline below and moving it across from left to right. The field of time is in the background, and you are moving along “over” it.

Figure 1: detailed timeline of your life

[-----you're a baby-----you're a fossil-----]

This is how most people view the passage of time and their place within it. Again, like the candlestick, it is completely true when this is how you choose to perceive it.

But let go of that perception for a moment, knowing that you can go back to it later. From another perspective it is fair to say that you don't move at all. You are not coasting, not moving from left to right. You are always right here and it is always now. Put your finger back on the left part of the timeline and don't move it. Use your other hand to pull the *book* from right to left. Ultimately, there is no difference in the relative movements of your finger and the events that pass beneath it. But you (the finger) are still.

Be still. Imagine all of the time in your life as a Big Book being pulled under you from right to left. You aren't moving through time...the experiences of life are passing through *you* while you remain still. In order to "live in the moment" like everyone tells you to, you don't have to keep up with a coasting car. In fact, from this point of view you have no choice but to live in the moment. No effort is needed. You just have to be aware of what is happening right now, and it's always right now. What is happening in this present moment changes continuously as the Book is steadily pulled beneath you, but you only exist in the one moment where everything happens. This one. Now.

IN PRAISE OF YOUR MIND

Your mind is amazing. It deserves to be addressed directly:

Dear Reader's Mind,

You are amazing. Some of the pages that follow will probably appear threatening to you and your awesome abilities, but your fears are unfounded. All learning, understanding, and knowledge are in your domain. Your ability to remember the past, anticipate the future, process languages, and perform mathematics is astonishing. And, no matter how profoundly the reader is affected by the pages that follow, your performances on the SAT's and on trivia night (...you were the only one that knew that Quito is the capital of Ecuador!!) will remain unchanged.

MIND AND TIME

Have we mentioned that your mind is amazing? It is, but there is one thing it cannot do. It cannot be aware of this moment right now. It can only prevent you from being aware of this moment right now. Your mind can remember the past. It can think ahead to the future. It can process things that happened mere moments ago and things that likely will happen moments from now. But it simply cannot perform its functions in the present moment. Only in the state of thoughtless awareness (which means ‘completely aware of what’s happening, but not thinking about it’) can you experience and appreciate the present moment where all of life’s experiences ultimately take place. This takes a little practice and honest introspection to realize that it’s true. So let’s do that.

Pick an object in the room and look at it. It is very difficult not to have the mind immediately begin its automatic process of naming, explaining, and categorizing that item. For example, perhaps you choose to look at a potato. It is possible to simply be aware of the potato in the present moment, but more likely the mind takes over. “That’s a potato” it says. And then it goes on to think about any and all potato-related experiences in your past until one of those thoughts triggers a different line of thinking...which is fine, but then you are no longer aware of the present moment. *Even identifying it as a potato* is enough to pull your awareness out of the present moment and into your mind (which, we should add, is amazing). Redirecting your awareness of the present moment into thinking is not a problem. However, problems arise in your life when you constantly deprive yourself of any choice by remaining unaware that this is continuously happening.

This is not a failure on the part of your mind. Einstein's mind couldn't process the present moment. Oprah's mind can't. Mine can't. Yours can't either. But you can learn to keep it from monopolizing your attention.

TAKING YOUR MIND DOWN A NOTCH

As you prepare to usher in your impending enlightenment, you may need to adjust the way your mind responds to the topic of "yourself". When asked about who you are, it's your mind that runs to the front of the stage, highlighting various achievements, relationships, or items of particular emotional significance. For example, when asked "who are you?" you might reply with something like, "I'm Bob Barker, host of the Price is Right, avid golfer, animal neutering enthusiast," etc. This may well be true. But your mind, like a petulant child, needs to be put in its place. (Especially you, Bob).

Fact is, our thinking minds are incomparably weak and impotent compared to the greater intelligences that run our bodies. "Greater intelligence" has a religious sound to it, and if you are a religious person, the miracles of the human body are indeed a compelling reason to reaffirm your beliefs. But atheists and pope-lovers alike have little choice but to admit that the complexity of the circulatory, pulmonary, immune, endocrine, and every other system of your body far outshines the capacities of a thinking mind. If "you" (the way you see and define yourself currently) were responsible for the smallest fraction of the responsibilities of your pancreas, let's just say it would not be a banner day for digestion or sugar metabolism.

So, regardless of the method you choose to describe its origin, (evolution, intelligent design, the Matrix...it makes no difference) the spectacular intelligence occurring within you makes up a larger percentage of "you" than the life story your mind has accumulated. This isn't such a big deal...we're just acknowledging that some things happening within you are so

impressive that the term "you" should not be completely defined by the stories that you carry in your mind. That's all. It's actually a promotion to take this small step and align part of your sense of self with the miraculous inner workings that run the show.

THE NEXT STEP

Once you can allow your mind to accept that it is *part* of you, but not *entirely* you, a new perspective becomes possible. Give yourself 30 seconds to answer the following question, and closely observe what sort of responses your mind comes up with:

"When you are not wearing pants, who are you?"

...

C'mon, that was like 4 seconds! That's okay, but please really do this...watch your mind for 30 seconds as it comes up with various responses to the question:

"When you are not wearing pants, who are you?"

Well, that was still only 24 seconds, but that should be enough.

Were you able to watch your mind? It's not the responses you came up with that are important, but the answer to this

question: Were you able to watch your mind? Yes?

What do you mean? If your mind was coming up with responses and **you** were watching your mind...who are **you**? Who is doing the watching?

This moment may be the first step towards the irreversible process of your enlightenment. Are you a little weirded out? No? Yes? Everything is going to be fine. Maybe you should take a nap.

For some people, being aware of your ability to observe your mind is the equivalent of stopping the bell so that silence can be recognized. When you actively watch your mind, you temporarily lose your previously unbroken identification with the thoughts you've been thinking. A realization occurs that there is another part of you that is actually the one watching your life unfold...the part that was watching your mind try to answer the question. Thinking doesn't stop, but your complete submersion beneath your thoughts does. It's a little like coming up for a breath of air after being underwater.

(By the way, if all of this seems like a steaming pile of meaninglessness, don't worry. Just play along for now.)

Let's say this again - the part of you that is aware of your mind is not the same part of you that does your thinking. There are two states in which you can live:

1. Identified with your thinking mind, completely unaware that this is the case.
2. Identified with the "awareness" part, completely aware that this is the case.

It's possible that as you read this you are stuck in #1 and none of this seems to make sense, which is perfectly fine. In later sections, we'll discuss several ways to help get you back to #2. If you have even an inkling that there is something significant being discussed here, you probably already live your life alternating back and forth between these two states, perhaps unknowingly. You cannot be in both states at the same time.

It is not an overstatement to suggest that nearly all the drama and problems in your life are created while you are in state #1, and all the creativity, joy of living, and effective, lasting solutions come out of state #2. You are free to live either way you like at any time, but clearly there are reasons why it's worth learning more about #2. The majority of the world has been trapped in state #1 for a couple of millennia. But things are starting to change a bit now.

Let's learn more about how to develop the art of switching your sense of self from thinking to awareness.

THE PART OF YOU THAT IS AWARE

How do you feel right now? Bored, enthralled, maybe a little gassy? It's a simple question, but let's look at the series of internal reactions that occur when you begin to answer it. As soon as your brain processes the written words 'how do you feel right now', you respond by using that non-thinking, awareness part of yourself to examine, within yourself, how you are currently feeling. We are so used to doing this that it may be a shock to realize how bizarre and intangible a phenomenon this actually is. No words are quite right...you could say that you are "looking" within yourself or "feeling" your internal physical or emotional state or "hearing" what your current urges or impulses are. It's a credit to your creativity that these substitute words can even get the idea across. Take a moment to appreciate that you are able to use this non-thinking, awareness function to observe your inner state whenever you choose.

Maybe you'd like to learn more about the qualities of this 'non-thinking, awareness' part of you. You can't. Here's why: "learning" and "understanding" are functions of your thinking mind (which is amazing). Again, in the same way that silence is related to sound, your 'non-thinking awareness' is related to your everyday 'thinking' mind. Because silence is defined by the absence of sound, any sound that you create causes silence to be undetectable, although you could say it still exists "underneath" the sound. Because the 'non-thinking, awareness' part of you is defined by the absence of thinking, any thought that you create causes non-thinking awareness to become undetectable, although you could say it still exists "underneath" the mental activity. This is not being clever, or invoking magical terminology...it's actually a very simple

concept that just happens to exist in the blindspot of your mind. You cannot "understand" it like you would a concept or idea. However, (and this is the key) if the conditions are right, you can be *aware* of the awareness itself, and therefore *know* it by your own direct experience. You just have to be out of your mind, literally, to experience it.

Q: You say that thinking and alert awareness, like silence and sound, are mutually exclusive and therefore can't happen at the same time. But it was during the last section while I was *thinking* about my pantless identity that I became *aware* of my ability to watch my mind. Can I have a refund?

A: If you'll look more closely, you'll realize that you were not actually thinking *and* in a state of alert awareness at the same time. Your mind is so well-developed (and unrestrained) that it runs almost continuously without taking a break. Because the question "who are you when you are not wearing pants?" was so silly and strange, there were occasional *pauses* in your thoughts while your mind tried to tackle it. It was during those pauses that your background awareness, which is always "on", had no thoughts to distract it, and was briefly aware of itself. And yes, if you kept your receipt.

Q: Okay, I can accept that it is always 'now'. I can also accept that whenever I am processing words or thoughts in my head, I'm using my mind. I can even start to see, although it's a bit fuzzy, that whenever I'm using my mind I cannot truly be aware of what is happening in *this* moment.

My question is...what's the point of all of this? I'm even more skeptical than I was before.

A: What a healthy mind you have. Please read on.

THE RESTLESS MIND

If you're like most people, you are unaware that your mind is now starting to reassert itself aggressively in the battle for the attention of this background awareness. "Who cares?" it asks. "How will any of this nonsense benefit me in the future?" "These are just silly mind games that aren't nearly as important as the other things I need to think about..." and then you get lost for a while thinking about how you probably left the oven on (you didn't).*

You can only be fully aware of one thing at a time. Squeeze your thumb and index fingers together so that it just starts to get uncomfortable and direct all your attention to that feeling. Okay...relax. While you were doing that, all the anxieties that comprise your current life-situation were ever-so-briefly out of your awareness. Of course, they're back now and your life is every bit the same mess it was before that seemingly meaningless digital exercise. So what's the point?

*did you?

EGO

Remember the police chief / murderer, sunglasses-on-your-head bit from one of the earlier sections, and how they were examples of ‘self-reflective twists’?

The Ego is the ultimate self-reflective twist. It is created when your amazing mind looks at itself and says, “This is me!” It thinks about all your possessions and relationships and achievements and opinions and says, “This is all ME! These are the things that make me who I am!” And it’s right. The mind has a complex identity made up of all these things, and it is correct for it to refer to itself as ‘me’.

But it is not *you*, or at least not completely who you are. And without labeling it as bad or as an enemy, it is accurate to say that it is within the very nature of your ego to draw all of your awareness into itself, even at the expense of your happiness, the happiness of everyone around you, and your ability to fully experience the joy of being alive.

Why is this? The best way to try to answer this is to pretend for a moment that an ego is its own organism. Before we go on, I’d like to be clear that I’m not really saying that it’s a separate organism...it’s just a metaphor that happens to work well for descriptive purposes. So, if we *pretend* that it’s an independent organism, then it makes sense that it would be in its nature to fight for its own survival. We discussed earlier (and you may have verified by your own direct experience) how your mind and ego are briefly out of commission whenever you are fully aware of the present moment. If you were somehow capable of fully shifting your awareness into the present moment permanently, your mind and your ego would cease to exist. The ego therefore acts in such a way as

to avoid this scenario at all costs. The primary way it does this is by telling 'you' that 'you' and 'it' (the ego) are one and the same. If 'it' ceases to exist, even temporarily, then 'you' will cease to exist, or become a zombie, or something along those lines.

You can be the mediator of this conflict. Invite your ego and your thoughtless awareness to a nice potluck dinner and reassure them both that you love them equally, and that you have big plans for both of them. Tell your ego that you're not going to turn into a hermit who fully renounces time and mind...you enjoy the dualities of good and bad, pleasure and pain, Red Sox vs. Yankees too much to give them up just yet. You can see that these elements of life can only be experienced by using the mind.

On the other hand, you may also be ready to accept the fact that when your awareness is focused *fully* on the present moment, there cannot be drama, conflict, or unhappiness in your life, and that this option is available to you at any time, always. At most there might be internal physical sensations that, if you allowed your mind to interpret them, could be turned into an unhappy story. But all you can ever find in the present moment is complete peace and the joy of life.

Q: Bullcrap. I've been trying to be aware of the present moment for the last 10 pages and I can assure you that my life still stinks.*

A: Your life situation will probably continue to stink for quite a while. If you want the external circumstances of your life to change, you'll have to start adjusting your state of consciousness right now.

*"Care to comment?" is implied, so yes, this counts as a question.

To be fair, your ego is *extremely* good at what it does. In fact, if we wanted to imagine your life's quest as a battle between "you" and "your ego" for control of your awareness, I'd say that you are a huge underdog. However, in order to level the playing field, the next part of this book will reveal the ego's playbook so you can learn its favorite strategies. After that, I'm betting on you.

PART

II

THE THREE AGENDAS

The agenda of your ego = safeguard its survival by convincing your awareness to stay completely identified with thoughts, problems, and time.

The agenda of many spiritual/religious books and teachers = help you to free yourself from your ego and reach an eternally blissful state of no-self, no-time, no-mind.

The agenda of this book = help you to better understand the two agendas above. After that, there's no agenda. However you'd like to try and balance these two complimentary perspectives is up to you.

The reason I say this is not to imply that any one of these agendas (including the third) is superior to any of the others. It's just that the mind can be a very sensitive creature, and your ego will probably be better behaved in the upcoming chapters if it knows that there's no real anti-ego agenda here.

EMOTIONS

Some feel good, some feel bad. All require your mind to be active.

An emotion is a three step process involving your mind twice and your body once. First, your mind thinks a thought ... “I forgot to show up to my dentist appointment today. Shit.” Next, your body reacts to this thought in a conditioned pattern – a bunch of neurotransmitters are released within your brain, your shoulders may tense, pupils slightly widen, several sphincters may contract, etc. Then, your mind recognizes this familiar pattern of reactive body changes and tells you that you have the emotion represented by that pattern.

If you are not able to bring conscious, present-moment awareness into your thoughts and emotions, they will form a self-perpetuating loop that will greatly prolong their duration, and likely cause you to unknowingly recreate external events in your life that will start the cycle again.

As mentioned before, in any given moment your awareness can only be fully focused on one thing. In the example above (where you realized you missed an appointment), there is a high likelihood that the subsequent body reactions and mental interpretations of these reactions will go “unwitnessed”. That is, you won’t be focusing your awareness on them the way that you are right now, in a relatively safe and unstressed environment. In real-life situations our awareness is almost completely lost, absorbed by the swirl of thoughts and emotions. This is how most people live.

There is nothing in your past that can keep you from successfully preventing this phenomenon from happening right now. And it's always right now. Bringing your full awareness to any step of this process (see next section) will have profound effects on your happiness and quality of life.

HOW IT WORKS

The four step sequence of emotional consequence can be listed as:

1. A new thought
2. The body's physical reaction to that thought
3. The mind's interpretation of that reaction as an emotion
4. New emotional thoughts generated while in this state

For now let's just say that going from step 1 to step 2 is beyond your immediate control. What most people don't realize is that going from 2 to 3, or from 3 to 4, can be entirely within your control if you are aware of how things work.

It may be easier to start with a positive emotion.* Think of something you have accomplished that makes you proud. As soon as you do, the body has begun its physical reactions to that thought. Now (and this is difficult at first), try not to define that feeling as "pride" or even as "good". Just feel it, and try to feel physically what is happening. Observe that your mind is constantly attempting to assign words or thoughts to the experience. At some point you will discover that, prior to being labeled by the mind as a specific emotion, there is simply a collection of individual unnamed sensations.

*Believe me, I'm aware of how "new-agey" this sounds, and if you're at all 'cool' in a conventional masculine sense, this sounds like being asked to fingerprint rainbows and unicorns. But this is such a worthwhile exercise that you should still do it, maybe when no one is watching or during an Ultimate Fighting Championship Pay-Per-View special.

It is worth noting that if you have been able to do this at all, you are again using only that background awareness ‘no-mind’ part of yourself to witness it. The active, thinking part of your mind gets to rest while you become aware of internal physical sensations.

Clearly, it’s hard to stop thoughts from reappearing. Fortunately, being able to completely inhibit new thoughts isn’t the goal. When you are alert, any new thought that appears requires your stamp of approval before becoming a full-fledged train of thought. You’ll soon discover how many new thoughts aren’t worthy of your time, especially when any one of them can start the cycle all over again.

As you might expect, when you can prevent reactive emotional thoughts from triggering the cycle, your subsequent actions and interactions with other people take on a different quality. Not only do many old problems suddenly start getting resolved, but many new ones never get created.

THE EGO'S PLAYBOOK

Have you ever watched one of those Nanny reality shows on tv? The basic idea is that a stern but loving nanny enters the lives of a couple whose children are holy terrors. The parents are unable to enforce rules or maintain authority, so the nanny comes to the rescue by helping to establish clear rules and methods of discipline. By the end, we learn that the children aren't the hell-spawns that they first appeared to be...they just needed their parents to be firm and consistent. After an initial resistance (i.e. screaming, tantrums) the kids see that this is actually in their best interests too.

This is exactly what it will be like to gradually take control of your awareness back from your ego. One sure sign of a tantrum is if you find your mind disagreeing with anything written in this book ☺. Seriously though, if you do feel uncomfortable or wanting to argue about what you're reading ...take a timeout.

Here are some of the many things your ego does to maintain control of your awareness:

1. Your ego will tell you that what is missing from your life exists in the future.

Do you believe that you will finally feel complete once you get that job, promotion, significant other, baby, grandbaby, financial security, car, house, fame, respect, recognition, sports victory, or other future goal? If you happen to get any of those things, congratulations...for a short period of time you may actually feel complete. Interestingly, it is *not* the completed goal that makes you feel that way. Rather, for a

brief time after achieving a goal, your mind/ego is no longer looking ahead to the future in search of an identity. You are temporarily allowed to experience the present moment. So it's not really the new boat or the high score in Ms. Pacman that makes you feel at peace, but a brief liberation from the impossible task of "finding yourself" in the future.

Unfortunately, regardless of your achievements, relationships, or possessions, your ego will soon attach itself to another problem that needs the future for its resolution. "Sorry, but you can't enjoy the present moment quite yet," it will say, "...not until this *next* problem is solved. And this next problem is the one that *really* matters." Can you see that this has already happened to you repeatedly? You can observe this pattern in your own life, as well as in coworkers, friends, neighbors, celebrities, and other people who seem to have the things you covet. For some reason, they don't feel complete yet either.

The second best thing that could happen to you would be to suddenly achieve all of your goals. That way, when you discover that you *still* don't feel complete (and you wouldn't), you would have little choice but to consider an alternative perspective. The *best* thing is to realize *now* that the ego will always find new problems that prevent you from being fully aware of the present moment.

Q: So, should I stop trying to achieve my goals?

A: Not at all. But instead of thinking about a future state that can only exist in your mind, focus your awareness on the step you are taking now. Incidentally, doing so will greatly increase your ability to achieve your future goals.

2. The ego will tell you that becoming *completely* aware of your internal physical state right now will either be horribly unpleasant or a boring waste of your time.

You're probably not in too bad a mood right now if you've got a few minutes to be reading this. But unless you're the Dalai Lama*, you're sure to have some residual anxieties or unhappiness dwelling inside of you. Completely allow yourself to feel those physical sensations which are precursors to emotions. They don't feel great, but they're not *that* bad, right?

Why does your ego tell you they will be either very unpleasant or a boring waste of your time? Because your ability to face them completely in the present moment causes the ego to cease to exist. While you are in that state, you are unaware of your name, your history, your anticipated future, or your problems. It is a brief death of the ego. In the spirit of fair play, think about your name, your history, or some of the problems in your life now. Your mind/ego can see that you've not become a zombie after all.

* Hello, Dalai.

3. The ego will tell you that your life is very problematic right now.

What problems exist in your life now? Pick two of your favorites.

It is entirely possible that while you were considering your options you were struck in the thigh by a javelin. In that case, if you had the wherewithal to include that among your two

problems, I tip my cap to you. That does appear to be a problem right now.

But your other choice is very likely *not* a problem right now. I need to be careful here, because you have presumably chosen something important and troubling to you, and I don't want to appear as though I am minimizing it. Your choice is undoubtedly a legitimate concern...but is it really a problem *right now*? Almost certainly not, if you are able to sit here and read this.

The reason it's worth making this point is that your body, unlike your mind, can't tell the difference between a real problem right now and an imaginary problem that may or may not occur in the future. For example, if you lie in bed at night consumed by fears of someday being eaten by a shark, the body's reactions will be very similar to being in a flimsy underwater cage where such a threat actually exists. In the latter case these reactions can be life-saving; in the former, they do little more than interfere with the normal functioning of virtually every system of the body.

So, take that problem you picked and ask yourself if it truly poses an immediate threat to you in any way. If yes, put down the book and grab the shark repellent. If not, recognize how the ego has fooled you into thinking compulsively about the future instead of experiencing the relative peace that exists now, in this moment.

Q: But my anxiety serves a purpose! By worrying, I am reminded right now that there are problems I've not fully addressed. It's beneficial to me. Are you suggesting I sit here and bask in the sunshine while my life's problems go unattended?

A: This is a common question that most people ask at some point. I encourage you to observe the truth of the following response within your own life experiences:

The question contains several assumptions. It assumes that an anxious mind generates solutions, that a peaceful mind is empty, and that a person with a peaceful mind is likely to remain inactive. What you will find is that an anxious mind contains solutions hidden in a haystack of competing anxious thoughts, while a peaceful mind removes the haystack. You will find through experience (and not through reading this) that productive thoughts and actions occur with astonishing proficiency when your awareness is not drawn into compulsive emotional thoughts. You may have to get used to appearing smart, insightful, and productive to others, when in reality you're just seeing and responding to the present moment with clarity.

Of note, if you have ever gained a high degree of proficiency in any craft, you may have experienced this phenomenon without any *thoughts* even being required. In a state of present awareness, the actions simply seem to happen, and the quality of the work becomes higher than it would be if you were worrying about doing it right.

Finally, when you say 'my anxiety serves a purpose', you are correct. When you feel anxious, it is a reminder that your mind has pulled you out of the present moment. Without this reminder, you might have forgotten that you have a choice.

4. The ego will tell you that you are good and special.

The ego is very, very clever. Who doesn't want to be good and special? Most people can recognize the problems caused by their faults.

But people are almost universally unaware of the constant problems they cause for themselves and others on account of their *good* qualities. Perhaps you are a person who is extremely punctual and considerate of other people's time. You are not in the habit of showing up late, and if for some unavoidable reason you are going to be late, you make every effort to call the other people in advance. If you can't reach them, you'll offer a sincere apology upon your arrival and make it up to them in some way later without them having to ask. That's great! What a wonderful quality to possess!

Well, if this is the kind of person you are, then people are likely to praise you for it. And for almost any ego, this is an irresistible opportunity to establish an identity. "You are good and special because you are punctual and considerate of other people's time," says your ego to you. This is a win-win, because not only does it feel good, but it makes other people's lives better. Right?

Well, there's a hidden side to this. Each action that reflects this personality trait is, in and of itself, a pretty good thing for all parties involved. But the thought "you are good and special" can only exist if your mind can find a contrast in someone else. If everyone else possessed these qualities, you would no longer be good and special, at least not in this way. Without you consciously knowing it, your ego will seek its opposite everywhere you go. It *loves* to be inconvenienced, or to watch others be inconvenienced, by people who aren't as considerate as you are. It feels so good to be good and special!

Why stop at feeling wronged by (and yet unknowingly happy about) any given transgression? Tell everyone you know how inconsiderate this other person was! Spread the news! Or, alternatively, watch your mind tell *itself* over and over how bad some other person or situation is.

Okay, next example: I'll play the percentages here and assume that you are not a supermodel. Imagine overhearing two supermodels criticizing you as a human being for your alarmingly average looks. You would probably be able to quickly recognize the shallow beauty-based ego-identification of their minds. You might be tempted to call some of your average-looking friends to make fun of their (the models') unbelievable shallowness.

Do you see where this is going? Not judging others on the basis of looks is undeniably a good trait to have. By itself, whenever you apply this quality, you make the world a better place. But when your ego says, "you are good and special because you don't judge people on their looks," you unconsciously seek out your counterpart. You and your friends bolster your egos by pointing out how others bolster theirs. With only trivial changes in the details, you become that which you are criticizing.

One last example: so now you've become an enlightened person, spreading love and joy and balloon animals wherever you roam. You regularly perform acts of considerateness and compassion, but you do not seek your identity within those acts. When others appear inconsiderate, you realize that their awareness is trapped in their egos, and they know not what they do. "Poor unenlightened mortals," you say to your enlightened friends. "I hope someday they'll see the light the way we have."

The ego is very, very clever.

5. The ego will shift gears without you knowing it.

Maybe at first your mind felt uncomfortable with the concepts in this book. It is possible that somewhere along the way you began to enjoy the process, and now it feels as though you've been clearing the cobwebs from old truths you've always known.

This is a beautiful thing, but it often is followed by a common pitfall:

Any conceptual identity you create around “being someone who ‘gets it’ in contrast to lesser folks who do not” is just the ego wearing a new cocktail dress.

Next, you become someone who has risen a level above the people who ‘get-it, but-identify-with-getting-it’ and become an even more elite specimen of spiritual awesomeness.

And down the rabbit hole you go...

6. Your ego will tell you that you are absolutely right.

This is almost the same thing as needing to feel good and special, but it deserves its own section.

Hang on - your ego may not respond well to this next paragraph:

Every time you feel frustration, anger, aggravation, irritation, or moral superiority towards another person or situation, the emotion is due entirely to *your* ego's identification with one side of the story. It is irrelevant whether or not your point of view is correct or if the other person has actually done something truly awful. The personal collection of sensations that occur

within you, which your mind subsequently interprets as emotions which make *you* feel lousy, is due entirely to your ego's need to feel right.

“How can that be true?!? I just watched my neighbor launch a kitten from a cannon! I'm appalled and furious about this! You can't tell me that I'm not justified in my outrage!”

Well, I would be appalled and outraged too, since my ego also identifies with being the sort of person who doesn't launch kittens from cannons. But, theoretically, an individual *could* react to your neighbor's actions with indifference or even approval.

There are two separate events that occur in your mind when you believe you are right. The first is a straightforward assessment of the facts. You see that an injustice or factual error has been made by someone else, or that a certain situation is unfair. This part is emotionally neutral and you do not take it personally. The second part is your ego's emotional attachment to this perspective...it feels *good* to be right, even if the overall situation makes you miserable. Your ego *wants* to take it personally. When your mind clings to this component, a part of you no longer wishes to fully resolve your problems, since doing so would deprive you of the good feelings that come from being right. Most of us are too addicted to these feelings to give them up entirely. However, if you can consistently become aware of this phenomenon as it is happening, your ego will gradually lose its ability to interfere with your problem-solving skills.

This is a genuine challenge. It not only requires your self-honesty, but a willingness to give up a reliable (albeit dysfunctional) method of feeling good. It's worth it. Compulsive, angry, reactive thinking can go unchecked for hours or days (or years) if you are not aware of how completely absorbed your awareness has become in your mental activity.

Experiencing emotional reactions is part of life. Losing your ability to reestablish present moment awareness is a common source of prolonged suffering for yourself and everyone around you...and is preventable. You just need to be aware of what is happening within your mind.

7. “What’s the point?”

Your mind/ego is constantly asking this question in some form or another. How will this be useful for me in the future? What effects will this have on my life? Will these new concepts help me to solve the existing problems in my life? From the time-oriented perspective of the mind, these are logical, practical, and very appropriate questions to ask.

Fortunately, it turns out that there *are* extremely practical, future-based reasons for cultivating the art of present moment awareness. Anyone who regularly lives in this state will tell you that unexpected solutions start appearing in your life the moment you set your awareness-dial anywhere above zero. You don’t need to be in this state all the time...even just a few times a day makes an enormous difference.

The ego may then conclude that you need time to practice and perfect the state of ‘thoughtless awareness’.

8. “You need time to practice and perfect the state of ‘thoughtless awareness’.”

This is perhaps the most convincing trick of all.

Being aware of the sensations of the present moment...things you see, hear, smell, taste, feel, or experience internally through thoughtless perceptions, are always simple and offer you an unadulterated experience of the world within and around you.

In addition, (and you'll just have to take an outsider's word for it until you experience it regularly yourself), being fully conscious in the present moment turns you from an imperfect, tiny speck of humanity into a channel of creativity and quality. You remain an imperfect tiny speck of humanity, but something amazing starts to happen 'through' you. You become the flawed CD player that plays the perfect song.

In this state you are fully awake, fully alert, and fully alive. The non-negotiable cost of this experience is a temporary suspension of your thinking mind. As a result, you relinquish all sense of identity, all sense of self. Is your ego still telling you to be afraid of this? The fear evaporates when you realize that you can always switch back to your familiar identity whenever you'd like. You won't lose access to your mind, just like you didn't lose access to the candlestick by seeing the faces (and vice versa). So, the title of this book is actually misleading...you don't really lose your mind. You simply learn that it has an "on/off" switch, and *you* control it. Allowing yourself to flip this switch without fear is your awakening. It is enlightenment.

"I want to experience that for myself!" says the reader's ego. The word 'want' implies a future state, which only exists through the talents of your mind. The switch is still on.

"I'm trying to be aware of the present moment. Am I enlightened yet?" asks the reader's ego. The word "try" implies a future state, which only exists through the talents of your mind. The switch is still on.

"I'm too lazy or easily distracted to be any good at this. Maybe next week I'll be more motivated to be aware of the present moment". It doesn't work that way.

The only way it works is to be in that state now. Surrender to the reality of *this* moment. You need to accept your flaws, the

apparent flaws of everyone else, the crazy state of the world, and everything else exactly the way it is right now. You are not conceding that the present state will be acceptable for the future, but you have no choice but to allow this moment, and this moment only, to be precisely the way it is, now.

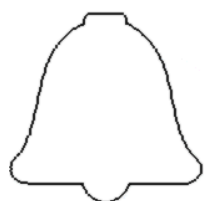
“I can’t do that! There are some pretty awful things happening in the world, and some very unfair things have happened to me too. I don’t intend to accept those!”

In time the tantrums of your ego will settle down.

No matter how many times you think you’ve failed at the task of being fully aware and accepting of the present moment, nothing is lost. Yet again it is now, and you have unlimited chances to get this right. You can’t fail, but you can experience unhappiness along the way if you don’t accept this moment as it is. In fact, not accepting the present moment in whatever form it comes is ultimately the only thing that has ever kept you from finding the peace you’ve been looking for.

Everything that is important to your ego in this world – all your possessions, accomplishments, relationships, opinions, and qualities that make you good and special – will all come and go. There is nothing in any of them that can satisfy your deepest feelings of incompleteness for very long. The only way to feel complete is to enjoy the transient wonder of the things in your life while remaining aware of the other half of consciousness...the half that reveals itself only when the mind is quiet. In time, when all the people and things you care about start to fade away (as all things eventually do, including your own health and physical form), the timeless state of thoughtless awareness remains unharmed, unchanged, instantly accessible, and free of charge.

Just like this shoplifted book. ☺



Suggested Reading:

What? Your mind wants to learn more in the future? I recommend the books and teachings of Eckhart Tolle (*The Power of Now*, *A New Earth*, and others).