Holistic Thinking

9 Strategies to Expertly Navigate today’s Highly Interconnected, Dynamic, and Challenging World

Jay Kshatri
Thank you for joining the Think Smarter World community. This document contains an excellent introduction to tools and techniques which will allow you to start putting the concept of Interconnectedness into your life.

The Think Smarter World philosophy is about using Holistic Thinking to integrate and optimize the four major aspects of our lives - the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual. These four areas are strengthened and expanded by understanding and implementing Interconnectedness through the tools of Systems Thinking, Proactive Access to Knowledge, Mind-Body Harmony, and Unity Consciousness. When all four areas are in balance and well developed, we successfully reunite Heart and Mind and upgrade our lives to a new level of Human Achievement, Happiness, and Good Health.
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The Subtle Shift of Mind that Allows You to Harness the World’s Collective Knowledge

By Jay Kshatri
In today’s digital age, one of the key skills required for success is being able to control the massive amounts of information and knowledge we have coming at us from all directions. Because most of us are rightly overwhelmed by this constant barrage, we must go beyond passively receiving information that others think we want or need to proactively target, seek, organize, and understand the information that will make our lives better.

The truth is, the consistent influx of news, images, and video is giving us a digital hangover, much like you get after one too many drinks. And in the case of the digital world, the bottle never runs dry—it just keeps flowing. So just as we need to be responsible in consuming other pleasurable items in moderation, the same goes for our various digitally enabled entertainment technologies, including practicing and teaching our children responsible and effective digital consumption.

The vast amount of information and entertainment at our fingertips is mostly consumed in a passive way. Either through watching a television program, or reading a news feed on a social media site, or through listening to the radio or other audio broadcast. Yes, we’ve made a choice at some level in the sense of what to watch or listen to, but it’s at a high level. After that decision point, we hand over control to the media.

The problem with this is that we often end up consuming information and content that we didn’t intend to or that is particularly useful for our needs. Yet, the irony is that most of the world’s collective knowledge and information is right at our fingertips through the internet. The question is that are we being conscious and proactive in finding the most useful information or are we being reactive and consuming what others have programmed for us?

Journalist John Noughton, writing in the Observer newspaper in 2010 said:

“...the increasing complexity of our environment means that we need the net as ‘power steering for the mind.’”

The futurologist Jamais Cascio adds: “The trouble isn’t that we have too much information at our fingertips, but that our tools for managing it are still in their infancy. Worries about ‘information overload’ predate the rise of the Web. Google isn’t the problem—it’s the beginning of a solution.
And that is in fact what the book - *Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled* world aims to address: how we can use digital tools like Google—and many others—to harness our digital information world and not the other way around. They can allow us to get control over the flood of data and ideas. **In essence, we need to change our pattern of being** in a receiving or *reactive* mode to all the information at our fingertips, and move to a *proactive* mode where we become conscious and explicit of the knowledge we want to acquire, and then use tools and techniques to get it.

So how do we start to take more control of what knowledge we want to acquire on a daily basis? The answer is *By Asking Questions.*
Over the years, great thinkers have realized that it’s in asking questions that we drive ourselves to significant leaps in understanding—and in turn augment our level of consciousness.

“It isn’t the answer that enlightens, but the question” - *Decouvertes*

“If you do not ask the right questions, you do not get the right answers. A question asked in the right way often points to its own answer. Asking questions is the A-B-C of diagnosis. Only the inquiring mind solves problems.” - *Edward Hodnet*

In other words, by posing intelligent questions, we change the paradigm from being passive receivers of an overwhelming amount of information thrown at us on a daily basis (drinking from a fire hydrant) to making deliberate conscious choices of the information we do want to consume by identifying the areas we would like to know more about.
To break this down in simpler terms, here are some examples of broad questions to get you going in the right direction:

**Key Questions to Drive Proactive Thinking**

- What have I not learned that I need to?
- What could I be doing better?
- Is there a better way of doing something I do now? Is there something holding me back from doing it that way?
- What do I wish I knew more about?
- What past experiences have created biases in me that I need to go beyond?
- What beliefs or ways of thinking have I held onto too tightly that have hampered my knowledge of the world or my ability to interact with people effectively?
- What could I learn that would make me more effective at work, with my family, and/or with my friends?
- What current event or issue on the national or global stage do I need to know more about?
- What have I read about, seen on TV, or heard on the radio or in a podcast that I would like to know more about?

The act of asking these questions naturally leads us to wanting to find answers. And this is where it gets interesting - because in the beginning phases of the 21st century, we have incredible access through the internet in being able to find those answers relatively easily. Those of us who can take advantage of the power of the net will have a significant advantage in our professional and personal lives. Information, insight, experience, and wisdom that in the past was beyond our reach is now at our beck and call. However, we need to take the first step and decide what it is that we are looking for. We need to ask questions and become proactive. The next step is to master the art of internet search.

**Resources**

www.ThinkSmarterWorld.com
• *Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled World*, by Jay Kshatri - Chapter Two - Moving from a Reactive to Proactive State of Mind to Harness the World’s Collective Knowledge

• *Smart Questions* - by Gerald Nadler and William J. Chandon - Learn to Ask the Right Questions for Powerful Results

• “A Holy Curiosity’: We Can Vastly Improve Education By Teaching This One Skill” - http://cognoscenti.wbur.org/2014/03/14/ask-the-question-dan-rothstein

• *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas*, by Warren Berger
Have You Found What You're Looking For?
Improving your Internet Search Skills is at the Heart of Accelerating your Professional and Personal success

By Jay Kshatri
In the course of being more mindful and asking better questions about the various aspects of our lives, we subsequently need to improve our ability to find the answers to those questions. The Internet has given us an amazing gift: the organized treasury of the world’s collective knowledge. But in order for us to make the most of this valuable resource, we need to be able to access it effectively.

The best way to accomplish this is to significantly increase our ability to use the major Internet search engines so that we can find exactly the information we’re looking for. And, given how big a body of knowledge the Internet now catalogs (Google says that the Web now has more than 30 trillion unique individual pages), the effective use of search techniques is even more critical.

The task of finding exactly what we’re looking for in this vast sea of data can be daunting. However, armed with specific search techniques, you can cut through that mountain in short order.

Search Engine Basics

First, let’s explore how search engines work. We’ll focus on Google as it’s currently the most popular search engine, but others, like Bing and Yahoo!, work in a similar fashion.

- Google uses automated programs called spiders to search (or crawl) through websites and note how often keywords appear on any given web page.
- It keeps an index of keywords and where it located them.
- Google then ranks the sites using this data, which determines the order in which Google displays those results on its search results page.
- This ranking is a proprietary algorithm called PageRank, which assigns a relevancy score to each web page Google has analyzed.
- PageRank scores a web page by the frequency and location of keywords within the web page. Specifically, if a keyword appears once within the body of a page, a low score will be assigned for that keyword. In addition, the length of time the page has existed is important as well—the longer, the better.
- Also important is the number of web pages that link to the page being ranked. For Google, this determines. So in essence, if a page is often referred to (or linked) back to by other people, its PageRank will be higher. In a way, it’s somewhat like a popularity contest.
So let’s take an example:

You want to search for Jon Stewart.

If you go to Google and type “Jon Stewart,” the Google engine will determine the web pages that may match “Jon Stewart.”

If the first web page contains “Jon” but not “Stewart,” and the second web page contains “Stewart” but not “Jon,” those two pages are out of the running.

If another web page has both “Jon” and “Stewart,” it will be considered.

Once Google has identified what documents are in the running, it determines how to rank those pages.

To do this, it uses PageRank along with 200 other factors (the Google secret sauce as they like to call it) to make its decision. A key factor, of course, is how often the page is cited and linked to.

So now you know why various pages appear in a certain order when you do a search on Google. Essentially, they are ranked in relevance by:

1. How many times your keywords are present on that page
2. How many links have been made back to that page by others (this indicates how often other people have found that page useful)
3. Other data that Google uses in order to estimate how relevant the page is to your search query

What this means to your search strategy is that in order to get the right information and have it appear as high as possible in your search, it’s critical to use the right keywords. And, as we’ll see, how you tell Google to use those keywords in the search makes a big difference.

How to Drive Google

We want to fine-tune how we construct our search query to maximize the chances that the most relevant results are found and shown as high as possible in the list. Otherwise, you might get back a million-plus documents, and the ones that could truly be helpful to you may be many pages down in the search results. In that case, if you persevere you may eventually find the answers you seek, but more often, you’ll tire of the search and give up.
Or perhaps worse, you’ll make do with less than optimal information to answer your question.

In order to understand how to make our search more effective, let’s take an example and explore the different ways we could construct the search (which keywords along with which commands in Google to use) to fine-tune our search.

Say we would like to know the latest information on Global Warming.

We could just enter the words Global Warming into the Google Search Bar and see what comes up. From our earlier explanation of how Google looks at keywords, we know it will look for documents that have both the words Global and Warming someplace in the document. In addition, we know that Google will look at things such as relevance, links, and up to 200 other factors (the secret sauce). In other words, when you type in Global Warming, it will make a judgment that you’re looking for information on that phenomenon and try to give as much relevant information as possible in the search results it delivers to you.

For this particular search, you would get 183,000,000 web page results, and the top three would include the Wikipedia definition of Global Warming, New York Times articles on Global Warming, and a section on Global Warming on the National Geographic website.

Put it into action

Now, to get more targeted results, here are a few things to try:

- **USE QUOTATION MARKS TO SEARCH FOR AN EXACT PHRASE**

  We can type in “Global Warming” to tell Google that we want only search results that have the exact phrase “Global Warming.” If you were to type this into Google, you would see your search results go down to 66,900,000. Your first few results would be the same, but then you would start seeing some different results after that, including ones where the term is in the website name itself.

- **GET MORE SPECIFIC**

  The more specific we get with our keywords, the more we give Google to work with to get the best information for us. In this case, we could identify other terms for Global Warming, such as Climate Change, that may net us better results. By typing “Global Warming” “Climate Change” into Google, we now get approximately 94,000,000 results, and
different pages appear in the top ten. The more keywords you provide Google, the better it will be at finding exactly what you want.

As an example, you could type in: “Impact of Global Warming on world Economic Activity” if that was your specific topic of interest.

-have google look for similar words and synonyms

A neat trick to take advantage of the speed and power of Google’s computing engine is to have it search for similar words to your keywords in order to capture as many relevant search results as possible.

So say that what you’re really interested in knowing is Why is Global Warming or Climate Change an issue? In this case you could type:
“Global Warming” “Climate Change” ~issue

The “~” symbol placed in front of a word tells Google to find similar words to that word in the search. When you run this search, you now get approximately 23,400,000 pages in your results with again a different set of matches in your top ten.

You can also use the asterisk “*” to trigger Google to identify additional search terms that perhaps you aren’t familiar with regarding a word or phrase. If you place the “*” in between two words, Google will return pages with phrases containing your two keywords and another word in between. In our Global Warming example, you would type:

Global * Warming

With this search, one of your top results would be from a site covering “Global Greenhouse Warming.”

-the “or” command

Google, by default, will try to identify pages with all search terms listed (the AND command is automatically assumed for you in the search field—Climate AND Change, etc.). If, however, you have two phrases, and either one would meet your need, you can use the OR command:

“Climate Change” OR “Global Warming”

As you can see, what we’re doing is a process of first being as inclusive as possible in our search keywords—to ensure we capture all relevant data—and then becoming more specific in order to ensure that the most relevant items appear as high in our search results as possible.
EXCLUDE WORDS OR PHRASES

When you run a search, the search engine displays the massive number of web pages that match your search criteria. As you follow these tips to get more advanced in your search capability, the goal is to reduce this number to only the pages that more closely match what you’re looking for.

The exclude command is one way to reduce the number of results by removing those that are less relevant. For example, when researching Global Warming, you may want to focus on learning about the causes of it rather than the costs involved. You would therefore type in the following:

“Global Warming” --costs

Or, you could fine-tune it even further by including some additional terms and commands:

“Global Warming” OR “Climate Change” --costs

This way we’ve included any documents with Global Warming or Climate Change, and excluded any reference to costs or other terms similar to it.

We could get even more specific. Since we’re looking for causes, we could add that to our search string:

“Global Warming” OR “Climate Change” ~cause --costs

Just by using what the techniques we have gone through will dramatically improve your search results. In general the better you are at identifying what you are looking for and what key words would describe that item, the more successful you will be. After, that, it becomes a matter of using particular commands and techniques to fine tune your search results to filter out the less relevant information so that you are seeing the most important items as high up on your search results as possible.

There is much more that you can do with Google and other search engines than we have covered here. If you, would like to learn more, refer to Chapter Four, Mastering Internet Research to Find All the Answers, in my book Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled World.
21 Ideas to Free your Mind from Mass Media

By Jay Kshatri
As we struggle to control the quality of the food we put in our bodies, equally important is the quality of information that we feed our minds. But not only for the usual reason that better information leads to better knowledge.

You see, the mind is much more than the brain, which is essentially a microprocessor with on-board memory. Think of the mind as the operating system with an internet connection. The connection in this case being not the word wide web, but the universal or collective consciousness. The mind in this capacity, takes what you feed it - the daily stream of thoughts and images, and fetches similar things from the universal consciousness in order to create your physical reality.

How? By the physical law of E=mC^2. Einstein’s famous equation essentially says that energy translates into mass. Thoughts are the highest form of energy (vibration) that we know. (See Note 1). So whatever you put into your conscious mind, makes its way into your subconscious, where the always on search engine goes and gets a similar reality to what you are thinking and feeling. If you doubt this is true, just look at the numerous number of pro and advanced amateur athletes who practice the art of positive visualization in their sport to achieve top performance. They know that the act of creating an image of exactly the result they seek to achieve enhances their ability manifest that result. Along with this, they activate the increased likelihood that circumstances will arise for them to have an opportunity to achieve their desired result (the opportunity to take the winning shot as an example). They also know that they must keep their minds clear of distracting or negative thoughts - thoughts that will manifest a different result or cancel the result that they are seeking.

So, how’s this relevant to our daily media intake? Simple. The media we consume directly or indirectly creates images within our mind, which then work at creating our
physical reality. The 10 car pile-up, the botched hold-up resulting in a murder, the daily partisan political hostilities, and the most recent account of any of the many armed conflicts around the globe - all reported faithfully on our 24/7 news apparatus, have a detrimental effect on your mental and physical health. Pay attention to how you are feeling the next time you watch one of these broadcasts, or consume any other form of media. Do you feel positive, negative, tense, relaxed, hopeful, fearful, optimistic? Over the course of the entire show, movie, or article, you may feel a number of different emotions. Either way, the fact is that our thoughts are occurring at a very fast rate. Researchers estimate that our brains create a thought within 20-30 milliseconds after some type of stimulus (see report link in resources section). You can’t stop a negative (or positive) thought from occurring. Once it’s out there, it’s out. What you can do in the case of a negative thought, is to quickly switch your mind into more positive territory.

But a better alternative is to limit your intake of negative, unhelpful, and sensationalist content to begin with. For some reason, our major media outlets believe that based on their research of our viewing habits and attention characteristics, we seem to pay more attention to something that is bad than something that is good. It’s like when everyone slows down to look at an accident on a highway - something has gone wrong, and we need to know why. If everything is normal, then keep on moving. And, with ever more competition for our eyeballs, media outlets feel the heat to amp up the volume on their content so that we pay attention to them versus their competitors.

Why do we love bad news?
Psychology Today magazine reported in 2010 on the evolutionary basis of our addiction to bad news: “Is the media negative? Media studies show that bad news far outweighs good news by as much as seventeen negative news reports for every one good news report. Why? The answer may lie in the work of evolutionary psychologists and neuroscientists. Humans seek out news of dramatic, negative events. These experts say that our brains evolved in a hunter-gatherer environment where anything novel or
dramatic had to be attended to immediately for survival. So while we no longer defend

ourselves against saber-toothed tigers, our brains have not caught up.”

So, news organizations oblige us and shows us as many saber-toothed tigers they can get their hands on. A research paper titled “Bad News Revised: The Portrayal of Violence, Conflict, and Suffering on Television News” by Roger N. Johnson of Ramapo College done in the mid 90’s assessed the content of Violence, Conflict, and Suffering (VCS) depicted by some of the major broadcast news organizations, including CNN and CBS. The results showed that the news programs averaged 54.5% of their content in the VCS area. Viewers, on average, saw about 13 stories per hour in the VCS category. Furthermore, about two thirds of the shows began with a VCS infused story and 64% of the first five stories were VCS fare. They like to hit you early and hard. In contrast, Canadian news channels that were studied, registered half of the VCS stories and content as their American counterparts (still too much, but significantly less). You can imagine that same analysis done today, would produce even more severe results.

Wow. That’s an enormous amount of negativity to start your day. Now imagine getting a dose of that, then getting in your car, putting on another news or talk show, and then taking another hit. By the time you get to work, your mind has been battered with thoughts and images that are anything but rainbows and unicorns. Those images and thoughts are now deep into your subconscious and will play themselves out in ways you
never intended. If athletes and business people are using positive visualization - creating sustained images of what they want to achieve, then wouldn’t watching images of what you don’t want, have the opposite effect (unless, you are looking to experience anger, sadness, disease, etc).

The same logic of positive versus negative imagery applies of course to other media content besides news. Movies, TV shows, Video Games, Music, Books, Newspapers, Magazines, Blogs, Podcasts, etc.

What to do?

Change your media diet.

Easier said than done, you say. I agree. A main reason why we keep tuning into the same old same old, is that it’s easy - turn on the TV - it’s simple. Pop on the radio in the car, its easy. We don’t need to work too hard. It’s there, it keeps us company, and some times we even think we’re learning something useful (which we certainly do from time to time). So, like any major change initiative, we need to replace what’s easy in a way that is also relatively easy, or at least not too difficult. Only then can new habits be born.

There are a number of different drivers for why we consumer various forms of media:
- To be informed
- To be entertained
- To occupy our time

In each category, if we are currently ingesting low quality media, we can exchange those for higher quality fare more easily if we identify alternative sources and means for getting the good stuff.

Technology
Let’s first start with technology. The television / couch ensemble is still our most favored set up to ingest a lot of our media. It’s easy and comfortable. Many people have large flat screen televisions and some also have good audio systems connected as well. Traditionally, what gets played through this set up is still driven mainly by the major networks and cable channels. But we now have the technology at our disposal to turn the equation around.

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If you are an Apple user, Apple’s airplay feature allows you to stream content via your WiFi network directly from your phone or tablet to a small set to box device called Apple TV ($99), which is in turn connected to your television. **Your iPad or iPhone then becomes a hand held media controller and any content on the internet or from an app can be easily watched on the big screen.** (You can also stream directly from your MAC laptop or desktop). You now no longer need to be limited to what’s on at any given time or what the major media outlets want to serve you. If you are an Android user, you can essentially do the same thing with your Android phone or tablet (or from a Chrome browser on a Windows or MAC PC). In this case, you’ll use a device you plug into your TV called **Chromecast that is made by Google** ($35).

This small technology investment in Apple TV or Chromecast will be a dramatic step in giving you the proactive control to take your media consumption into a more positive territory. Why this is so powerful is that most of the media outlets have put their shows and other content into app format for various mobile platforms. Consuming their content through the apps gives you much more control over what and when to watch or listen. As an example, shows are often broken down into individual segments and you can choose to watch the more positive and nutritious segments and skip the rest.

The second piece of must have technology is a **Digital Video Recorder (DVR’s).** If you want to control the flow of information and images into your mind, then a key place to start is to remove the advertisements from your mental diet. DVR’s of course also allow you to time shift your viewing (record and watch whenever is convenient for you) and provide a key tool to replace other forms of low-calorie media content with higher quality fare. For instance, instead of watching your traditional morning or evening news program, since you’ll have shows and programs recorded on your DVR, you can watch one of them instead. *Meal replacement becomes media replacement!* As for DVR technology, *Tivo’s software and user interface far surpasses what is available from the cable companies.* You will find it easier to use and be more likely to get the most out of using DVR as part of your media diet.

Lastly, for those times in the car, find a way to connect your smartphone into your car’s audio system. The latest vehicles allow you to do this via your bluetooth connection. Otherwise, if you have an audio-in jack in the car, you can connect to that via your phone’s headphone jack.

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So, now that we’ve got the technology pieces covered - Tablet, Smartphone, Apple TV / Chromecast, and DVR. **Let’s move on to the actual list of how we can improve our media diet.**

1. **Use the full power off YouTube.** YouTube is thought of by many people as a place for short funny home made video clips, how-to videos, and comedy shorts. Which it is. But the reality is that YouTube is also the home to a vast array of meaningful and educational content - lectures, webinars, conference talks, documentaries, movies, and a lot more. To harness the power of Youtube to access higher quality media content- use the following approach with their website or IOS or Android App. When you find something to watch - if it’s a channel, then subscribe to it. If it’s an individual video save it to the “Watch Later” menu. If after you’ve watched something you really like and want easy access to it, save it then to the “Favorites” menu (and remove it from the Watch Later menu). Now, instead of watching what the mass media outlets want to feed you, you’ll have built up a library of specific content that you are interested in and can access easily on your PC, Tablet, or beam via Airplay or Chromecast to your Television. *On Apple TV, there is also a built in YouTube app so you can access it directly from there if you like. One tech note - the YouTube site is much improved of late, but their tablet / smart phone app (and especially the apple tv app) doesn’t seem to have all the functionality of the main site.* If you find some limitations, try the free 3rd party YouTube app from **Jasmine.** It’s excellent.

2. **Go to School in your Living Room with MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses).** You’ve probably heard of the company **Coursera** and **Udacity** - early pioneers of bringing courses from various colleges via the internet to people all over the world and free of charge. It’s an amazing opportunity to learn from the same professors who teach the course live at those schools. The format is composed of recorded video lectures, some off line reading, and online forums for students to collaborate, ask questions, and learn from each other. You can participate 100% and do all the viewing, reading, participating, and test taking, or just pick and choose what you want to do and don’t take any tests. It’s up to you. You can access the material any time you want. For our purposes here, what’s interesting is to work the videos of these courses into our media consumption diet. Using the technology platform described above, you could access a Coursera class for example on your tablet, and via Airplay or Chromecast view it on your TV. Instead of watching
some low calorie content while you’re getting ready in the morning or preparing dinner, pop on a lecture instead from a Harvard professor (most are 15 to 30 minutes in length). There are many universities now offering courses directly and there are a number of other platforms besides Coursera and Udacity. A good resource is **MOOC Advisor** - [http://www.mooc.student.advisor.com](http://www.mooc.student.advisor.com). You can also find the listing of over 800 free online courses from universities at **OpenCulture.com** - [http://www.openculture.com/freeonlinecourses](http://www.openculture.com/freeonlinecourses). MOOC platforms:

http://www.coursera.org
http://www.udacity.com
http://www.edx.org
http://futurelearn.com
http://open2study.com

3. **Use Apps of major news shows instead of watching broadcast versions.** PBS, CBS, ABC, CNN, MSNBC, and many more have apps that will allow you to pick and choose which shows to watch (and even segments within shows sometimes) and when. Though as we discussed, much of what’s on the major news networks is less than healthy for us, these stations also carry some interesting and useful content. These apps allow us to find those morsels more easily.

4. **Substitute music in place of other media.** “Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything.” Plato said that. Deep stuff. Music that elevates your mood and increases your energy is priceless. We are of course very fortunate to have almost an endless supply now at our fingertips. If you like live concert videos try Qello. You can view on your PC or MAC, tablet or phone, or there is a built in app on Apple TV. Of course, the usual music streaming services get better daily - Spotify, Pandora, iTunes Radio, Rdio, Songza, and more. If you implement Apple TV with your stereo / TV system you could of course stream content directly from one of these apps to your main system. Apple TV also has a built in app for internet radio stations which is excellent. Other apps to capture the power of radio on the internet include:

- Radio Paradise
- Calm Radio
- NPR Music App

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5. **Save interesting articles and other web content to Pocket for reading and viewing at a later time.** The amount of content available is endless and when we first encounter something we want to read, we usually don’t have the time right then to do it. Pocket (formerly read it later) solves that problem - it’s a parking space for all your online content. It also formats it for you in a very clean and easy to read fashion. See my previous post on Pocket - http://www.thinksmarterworld.com/2013/11/01/tivo-box/

6. **Watch less. Read more books.** The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a study in 2007 titled - “**To Read or Not To Read - A Question of National Consequence.**” The study found the following: “All of the data suggest how powerfully reading transforms the lives of individuals—whatever their social circumstances. Regular reading not only boosts the likelihood of an individual’s academic and economic success—facts that are not especially surprising—but it also seems to awaken a person’s social and civic sense. Reading correlates with almost every measurement of positive personal and social behavior surveyed. It is reassuring, though hardly amazing, that readers attend more concerts and theater than non-readers, but it is surprising that they exercise more and play more sports—no matter what their educational level. The cold statistics confirm something that most readers know but have mostly been reluctant to declare as fact—books change lives for the better.” With e-books becoming ubiquitous and tablets making it easy to carry all of your new and old books with you anywhere you go, there is no excuse to read more.

7. **Use Netflix or Amazon instant video.** They both have Interesting new shows (House of Cards, etc), but don’t forget the old classics - some were just much funnier and more positive than what we have today. Frazier re-runs anyone? Portlandia and Lillehammer are worth watching for a fresh approach to comedy and drama - both on Netflix.

8. **Go off the beaten path** - The Flipboard and Zite apps make it easier to harness web content. Both of these apps bring you curated content from a wide variety of
sources allowing you to essentially create your own custom magazine. Flipboard also allows you to link your Twitter and Facebook accounts and create a visually stunning display of tweets and FB posts and the associated content people have posted. One of the more interesting uses of Twitter is to tap into the content shared by fellow users who have similar (or not so similar) interests. Flipboard makes viewing these shared links more accessible and inviting.

9. **Rediscover long-form journalism** and other more in-depth, professionally edited writing. Our overly stressed and multitasked brains have gotten used to in information in small chunks - from the minuscule 140 characters of Twitter to the blog post “golden rule” of 500 words. But to really understand a topic, there really isn’t any way around it, you need to consume more in-depth writing. A large number of magazines have excelled at it over the years. A few definitely worth considering include The New Yorker, The Atlantic Magazine, and The Economist. There is also a renewal underway at The New Republic. For a shortcut, try a site called Longform - [http://www.longform.com](http://www.longform.com), that curates the best of long form writing from magazines and websites across the globe. In addition, there is a new site called Medium, that has was founded last year by ex-Twitter founders to promote long-form writing.

10. **Do an audit on your current newspaper.** Having travelled to over 30 countries and 40 U.S. states, I’ve had the chance to read a lot of different newspapers. There is certainly strong writing going on in a lot of different places. But for overall depth and consistency, the New York Times takes the prize. Here’s a recent piece on why NYT is so good - [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/blake-fleetwood/new-york-times_b_4733274.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/blake-fleetwood/new-york-times_b_4733274.html). The Times also has an excellent tablet app that makes reading the paper a pleasure.

11. **ITunes University** - Though MOOC’s are getting all the attention now, don’t forget ITunes U. They have content that MOOC’s don’t, so it’s worthwhile to check in with them. [http://www.apple.com/education/ipad/itunes-u/](http://www.apple.com/education/ipad/itunes-u/)

12. **The Internet Archive** - The Internet Archive is a non-profit digital library with the stated mission of "universal access to all knowledge." Wow. Books, music, videos, and a lot more. This is an amazing resource. [https://archive.org](https://archive.org)
13. **Khan Academy** - with over 5,000 video tutorials covering an enormous array of topics, Sal Khan’s contribution to the advancement of knowledge for everyone cannot be overstated. Using our tech savvy content consumption method discussed earlier, we can certainly gain a lot of from including the Khan Academy in our media diets. https://www.khanacademy.org

14. **Tune into Silence** - With our abundance of ways to be entertained and educated, one thing we’ve forgotten to cherish is the benefit of silence. When we’re quiet, we can achieve greater calmness and focus, as well as generate the link to our true spiritual selves and the Universal Consciousness. With the various multimedia devices at our side nonstop, our ability to achieve stillness and silence has dwindled, and along with it the insight that comes in these moments. The good news is that we can get it back quickly; all we have to do is turn those devices off for a while, breathe deeply, be still, and listen.

15. **Be surprised - StumbleUpon** - The web is vast and we manage to interact only with a minuscule piece of it in our online travels. The site StumbleUpon helps remedy this and introduces serendipity into our web surfing. You tell SU what you like, and it will then introduce you to amazing web pages, videos, photos and more that you wouldn’t have found on your own. http://www.stumbleupon.com

16. **Build your own media library.** If we build our own collection of media, it can help us to side-step the negative fare that may happen to be on at any given time. We can then become proactive instead of reactive to our media environment. You can create a healthy collection of books, audiobooks, videos, movies, music, podcasts, and magazines that you can access easily from your multimedia devices. With so many cloud based apps, this becomes even easier and most apps allow you to create folders and playlists to keep things organized and easy to find.

17. **Gaiam TV - Step up into Higher Consciousness** - Gaiam TV streams inspirational movies, documentaries, and educational videos on six different on-line channels. http://www.gaiamtv.com. You can also try Spiritual Cinema Circle, which is a sister site to Gaiam TV. Spiritual Cinema Circle sends 4 actual DVD’s to you per month (which you keep) and also includes a subscription to Gaiam TV as part of their offering. http://www.spiritualcinemacircle.com
18. **Read these magazines to keep your mind focused on the positive and the possible** - The Intelligent Optimist, Mindful Magazine, Yes! Magazine, Good Magazine, Utne Reader

19. **Read these websites and blogs to feed your mind and soul healthy, insightful, and nutritious fare:** Open Culture, Farnam Street Blog, Truth Dig, Big Think, Brain Pickings, Asian Efficiency Blog, Conscious Life News, The Daily Good. There is a big, positive, beautiful world out there that the mainstream media doesn’t want to cover. These resources, and many others, will show it to you.

20. **Turn off all your devices take a 20-minute meditation break instead.**
   Meditation, the practice of calming your mind by slowing down and eliminating random thoughts, is perhaps the best stress reduction technique available to us. Scientists and Physicians are even finding it useful for treating depression, as consistent meditation is being shown in functional MRI scans to positively alter the areas of the brain that are used in emotional response, memory capability, and even our ability to learn. For an outstanding resource to view explanatory videos on meditation, visit: [http://www.how-to-meditate.org/videos](http://www.how-to-meditate.org/videos)

21. **TED talks. Tap into the cutting edge of thinking in 18 minute portions.**
   TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics — from science to business to global issues. [https://www.ted.com/talks/browse](https://www.ted.com/talks/browse)

I hope you’ll try some (or many) of the 21 ideas. I am confident they will make a very positive impact on your life. For now, I’ll leave you a brief paragraph from Reiki teacher Ted Murray on Starting and Ending your day well:

**End your day well, start your day well**
~ Ted Murray

What is the last thing you fill your mind with before going to bed and the first thing you begin your day with in the morning? This time is very critical, as it will determine what your subconscious brain focuses on during sleep and what sets your mood for the
day. Watching TV or scary movies may help cause disturbed sleep or dreams, whereas jumping immediately into the problems of the world by reading the newspaper may not lead to a great frame of mind either.

Why not try developing a habit of reading something uplifting just before dozing off to sleep and immediately upon awakening? If this becomes your habit you will be reinforcing the positive changes you wish to experience. Your mind processes what is being input into it. If you continually input empowering statements and inspiring thoughts about the pure source energy of the universe you will naturally increase that presence in your life. Why not put one of your favorite books as your bedside inspirational reading and begin to develop that habit today?

Notes
1. “String theory (within Quantum Physics) holds that everything in the universe is composed of tiny vibrating strings of energy. In this view, every particle in your body, every speck of light that lets you read these words, and every force of gravity that pushes you into your chair is just a variant of this one fundamental entity. The denser something is, the lower its vibration, and the smaller its footprint. On our world, humans interpret a stone as being denser than a tree, and vibrating at a slower frequency. A tree is denser than a human. After nothingness, a thought is the least dense thing in our experience. Therefore, its first intriguing property is that it has the highest energy of anything we can conceptualize. It can kill or cure, invent a nuclear weapon or a romantic moment.” Furthermore, “The Law of Conservation of Energy is a law of physics that states the total amount of energy in an isolated system (such as a thought) remains constant over time. It cannot be destroyed, and it does not deplete if we simply forget we had it. Einstein’s theory of relativity shows that mass is energy, and the two are interchangeable. Energy becomes mass and vice versa. A thought has no other role than to try to become its physical equivalent (mass). Therefore, because their energy remains conserved, the reality of your life experience today is the result of the thoughts you emitted in your life up to now, regardless of whether you remember having them.” Excerpt From: Trevor Blake. “Three Simple Steps.” iBooks. https://itun.es/us/bRmaC.

Resources

www.ThinkSmarterWorld.com
• “To Read or Not To Read - A Question of National Consequence.” - http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/ToRead.pdf
Systems Thinking

By Jay Kshatri
Systems Thinking is essentially another way to say “Look at the complete picture.” Any given topic, issue, or event has multiple inputs and outputs that influence its outcome, so our ability to grasp the big picture of the many challenges we face in the world today is paramount for us to understand and deal with them in an effective manner.

I sometimes think too many of us look at various situations and current events as if we believe we can figure out the entire jigsaw puzzle by only looking at a couple of the pieces. I’m sure you can imagine how difficult that would be, if not impossible. But the more pieces you have, the better you can put the puzzle together and solve it, right? You can see different parts intersecting, and you can make the connections to the overall whole. That’s what systems thinking is: seeing the interconnection among the small pieces and then perceiving how they create the big picture.
When you don’t proactively seek to understand all the pieces of the puzzle and how they affect each other, in essence what you do is make a snap judgment based on one small part of the picture. You might pick up one piece of the puzzle and say, “Hmmm, this looks like a cat, and I don’t like cats! And, hey, this other fellow on the radio or TV says he saw that puzzle piece, and he doesn’t like cats either. I’m with him; we have to stick together, we cat haters!”

Doesn’t that sound silly?

The only way to avoid missing the big picture and to understand the complete story is to seek out all (or most) of the puzzle pieces, see how they fit together, and then get clear on what you’re really looking at.

Now, one word of caution: there will be people out there who will try to “supply” you with additional pieces that—wait for it—will make you think you still see a cat! What that means is that you must be vigilant in making sure you get high-quality, validated information to put your puzzle together. Otherwise ... yup ... cats everywhere.

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We’re all living within systems of one sort or another, and we ourselves are a system (the human body). There are closed systems—those that don’t need any external input for their survival, and open systems—those that maintain their existence through external input. All systems, however, maintain their existence through the mutual interaction of their parts. To manage the system optimally, it’s important to understand how its parts are connected, and how it interacts with other systems. When the parts stop interacting effectively, the entire system breaks down. We need only look around us to realize that many of our personal, civic, and corporate systems are in trouble.

Therefore, as systems thinking expert Linda Booth Sweeney has said in her excellent primer, systems thinking allows us to:

- See the world around us in terms of wholes, rather than as single events, or “snapshots” of life
- See and sense how the parts of systems work together, rather than just see the parts as a collection of unrelated pieces
- See how the relationships between the elements in a system influence the patterns of behavior and events to which we react
- Understand that life is always moving and changing, rather than static
- Understand how one event can influence another, even if the second event occurs a long time after the first, and “far away” from the first
- Know that what we see happening around us depends on where we are in the system

We, individuals, are part of a number of systems: our workplace, our community, our country, and our extended family. For you to function effectively, you need to understand the components of those systems, how they interact, what inputs exist, and the desired outputs. When we start seeing the world we live in as dynamic networks with many moving parts, we stop looking at black and white answers to complex problems.

Systems thinker Michael Goodman has written that:
An inherent assumption of the systems thinking worldview is that problems are internally generated—that we often create our own “worst nightmares” ... The systems thinking worldview dispels the “us versus them” mentality by expanding the boundary of our thinking. With the framework of systems thinking, “us” and “them” are part of the same system and thus responsible for both the problems and their solutions.
Nature is an example of a complex system that has many feedback mechanisms to maintain its balance. As with any system, however, if the self-regulating feedback mechanisms are subverted or ignored, then the system can become unstable or break down.

A superior illustration of this is the human body. It’s a marvel for its automatic feedback mechanisms that regulate the proper functioning of body processes, alerting us anytime something is wrong. If, for example, we don’t get sufficient sleep, don’t eat the right foods, or experience too much stress, our bodies let us know. It provides feedback either through disease, fatigue, or other symptoms of a problem in the system.

It’s our ability to understand these complex systems—their individual pieces, how they interact, the feedback loops, the inputs, and the desired outputs—that ultimately determines our mastery of the world around us. In any given endeavor we undertake—from our jobs to our hobbies, from our spirituality and religious practices to raising our families, and even in our roles as active and informed citizens within a democracy—our
ability to execute these roles effectively is enhanced by our understanding of the systems we operate within and exert influence over.

If, for example, we only look at one or two pieces of the whole, we may choose actions that don’t work in the best interests of ourselves or the larger system. This is what can happen when our understanding of the news is through “sound bites” from various television or radio shows, or from brief, high-level articles in a newspaper. These will show you one part of the puzzle, but often it’s to fool you into thinking you’re looking at a cat.

By seeing the connectedness among us, we avoid the mistake of believing our actions exist in a vacuum that is isolated from the rest of society. We clearly see how we affect others and vice versa, which helps us make better decisions about how to operate in the world and how we need others to do so as well. Furthermore, we can see how the combination of the various parts of a system working together will effectively outperform the individual pieces working alone. This is what the concept of synergy is all about: 1+1=3. Great teams of all types thrive on getting the individual components to work well together to create above-and-beyond results for the team as a whole.

In fact, one organization—The Waters Foundation—is working to introduce systems thinking principles throughout grades K-12 in schools across the country. Their stated vision is “to deliver academic and lifetime benefits to students through the effective application of systems thinking concepts, habits and tools in classroom instruction, and school improvement.” At a high level, they aim to teach children habits of a Systems Thinker and get kids started early in understanding the world in a more effective manner.

**The Habits are:**

- Seeks to understand the big picture
- Observes how elements within systems change over time, generating patterns and trends
- Recognizes that a system’s structure generates its behavior by identifying the circular nature of complex cause and effect relationships
- Changes perspectives to increase understanding
- Surfaces and tests assumptions
- Considers an issue fully and resists the urge to come to a quick conclusion
- Considers how mental models affect current reality and the future
- Uses understanding of system structure to identify possible leverage actions
• Considers both short- and long-term consequences of actions
• Finds where unintended consequences emerge
• Recognizes the impact of time delays when exploring cause and effect relationships
• Checks results and changes actions if needed (“Successive Approximation”)

I think these are habits both young and their elders around the world would do well to emulate. Here’s hoping 2014 is the year more of us decide to embrace Systems Thinking in order to make the world a better place for all of us.

Jay Kshatri
www.ThinkSmarterWorld.com
Mindfulness - Experiencing Life in HD

By Jay Kshatri
Mindfulness at its core means Being in the Moment, or Being in the Now, as the spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle has described it. This means we recognize that the past has already happened, the future doesn’t yet exist, and the only thing that IS, is the present moment.

Unfortunately, much of the time, our minds are so preoccupied with past events or what may happen in the future, that we forget to be present. The result of this is that we don’t fully experience our lives. Another effect is that when we’re not fully focusing on the present moment and seeing it clearly—but instead being affected or influenced by past events or fear of future outcomes—we end up distorting reality. Our view of a situation today may in fact be a reaction to the buildup of past experiences, which is coloring our current perception and causing us to react or act in a way that may be detrimental to us or others.

Being Mindful and developing a mindfulness practice delivers many benefits:

• Mindfulness allows you to by-pass the pitfalls of our conscious and subconscious brain activity that seeks to cause stress and anxiety in our lives.

• Mindfulness removes the filters of our perception that have become clouded by memories, fears, and resentment. When we strip those away and perceive only what is right in front of us at the present moment, things become much clearer.

• Mindfulness heightens your experience of the physical world, it even makes time seem to move slower. You understand more, because you allow more of what’s actually there to come into your awareness.

• Mindfulness allows us to contemplate and understand where our habits are coming from and why. It opens up the pathway to renewal and new ways of being.

• Mindfulness leads us into asking the question - ‘Why?’. As we focus, concentrate, and comprehend things that were hidden behind jumbled thoughts, clarity naturally emerges and what we took at face value previously, no longer seems sufficient.

As we become more mindful, we realize the power of our thoughts. Our thoughts are constantly creating and manifesting our physical reality. When we start to master mindfulness, we become more intentional about our thoughts. We regain control of our minds, and in so doing, our lives.
Mindfulness and meditation are often coupled together, even as a phrase - “Mindful Meditation”. It is in fact meditation, that allows us to strengthen our ability to be mindful. At its core, meditation teaches us how to still our mind, to let go of our thoughts, and to stay centered. Andrew Olendzki in *Unlimiting Mind* says “Meditation can be understood as an intentional action of paying attention, of being present with, or of otherwise choosing to be aware of what is arising and passing away in the field of experience. Even if one is trying not to direct the mind too much, as in the proverbial ‘choiceless awareness’, there is nevertheless a specific intention to attend carefully to whatever arises.” In fact, as you improve your meditation practice, you will naturally become more mindful when you are not meditating and you will be more easily able to focus your mind and attention at will.

Mindfulness makes all the tools that are part of the *Think Smarter* philosophy work better. The more we see things as they truly are, stripped away of any distorting effects, the better we synthesize information, make decisions, and see the connections between the various systems we are part of. An example that those with children will relate to is the following:

We may grow exasperated that we have to repeatedly tell a child how to do something correctly. The child may not understand, or not be willing to see things your way, or you may not be skillful enough at explaining how to do the task in question. So the next time the opportunity comes up to explain how to do the activity, you’ll likely come at it with the built-up frustration of all the past attempts, impacting your judgment of how the child still hasn’t learned it.

**But this time is a new moment, the current moment.**
If you approach the situation irritated by the previous encounters, you’ll continue to struggle and so will the child, because you’re not fully engaged in the present. Your view of the current situation is being biased by past experiences. Perhaps at this moment the child has learned some of the things you want to get across and now needs a varied approach to bring him across the goal line. If you’re mindful and fully present, you’ll calmly recognize this, and in your patience, you’ll be able to provide the necessary teaching in a new way.

Overall, the heart of mindfulness is experiencing things as they truly are. What gets in our way of achieving this is our stray thoughts. Our mental chatter, judgements, and labeling of various sense perception clouds our vision and understanding. Training ourselves to quiet the mind, and focusing on the situation or task at hand develops the capability to experience reality at a much deeper level. In our current 21st century environment of multitasking, non-stop distraction, and ever present stress, developing this skill is vitally important for improving our mental and physical health. So, how can we become more mindful?

**How do you develop mindfulness:**

1. **Focus completely on what you are doing at the present moment.**

In your day to day chores, in sports, or in your work, when you are completely immersed in the task at hand, you are mindful and have entered the Flow. Thich Nhat Hanh even describes the benefits of simply washing dishes with a mindful approach:

“The fact that I am standing there and washing these bowls is a wondrous reality. I’m being completely myself, following my breath, conscious of my presence, and conscious of my thoughts and actions. There’s no way I can be tossed around mindlessly like a bottle slapped around here and there on the waves.” - from The Miracle of Mindfulness

2. **Embrace Silence**

This has always been difficult for me personally as I love music and enjoy having it with me always. But over the last couple of years I have come to embrace periods of silence. It is during the quiet (both internally and externally) that we are most connected to the universal consciousness. This is where insight and intuition arises and where our powers of observation are the highest.

“When the night is still, you can hear the silence. When the mind is still, listen to the silence and let it guide you.” - Zen saying
3. Observe without Thought and Judgement

It’s amazing how much we don’t see, don’t hear, and don’t feel when we are not being mindful. Try this simple experiment, next time you are driving on a familiar route, heighten your attention and your field of view, and see what you notice that you had not seen during previous trips. I assure you, there will be many things on your list. The more we pay attention, the deeper our understanding. From not jumping to quick conclusions about situations or people to everyday current events. Mindfulness increases the information we take in, the more information, the better our understanding.

4. Accept the Present Moment

Much of our suffering arises due to disturbances in our moment to moment existence. Someone is angry, a dog is barking, irritating news reaches us via email, etc. Many times, our reaction to those events is less about the actual event than our state of mind at the time of the occurrence. When we are calm, centered, and peaceful, then even unpleasant things will affect us less severely. And, we tend to be more peaceful, when our minds are not distracted by unpleasant thoughts of the past or future that may be bothering us. We are present, in the moment, calm, and happy. So, when a disturbance does arise, we are able to be less reactive, and stay mindful and calmly observe the new moment that has arisen. We accept it, don’t judge it, but take it for what it truly is - an impermanent phenomena that will pass. When we meditate, we learn to do this with the thoughts that arise and look to distract us or cause us discomfort - we observe them arising, and then push them along, out of our perception, and return to our calm, clear state. The more we practice meditation, the more we are able to be non-reactive throughout all moments of our day.

“Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of present experience. It isn’t more complicated than that. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without clinging to it or rejecting it. There are three ways, I think, to understand the purpose of mindfulness practice...The first way is to see how it leads to wisdom. As a person is increasingly able to stay alert and balanced from moment to moment, the fundamental truths of life will present themselves as insight...The second way to understand how practice works is that the very practice itself de-conditions the mind from its habitual pattern of running from discomfort...The third way is to think of mindfulness practice as freedom, rather than leading to freedom. Any moment of clarity undisturbed by the tension of judging or preferring, rejecting, or desiring, is a moment of freedom.” - Sylvia Boorstein, It’s Easier Than You Think, The Buddhist Way to Happiness
5. Express Gratitude

The act of being grateful, immediately creates a mindful experience. We focus in on the object of our gratitude of course, but we also get in touch with what is important to us, our values, and embrace our experience. Expressing gratitude throughout our day may be one of the most powerful things we can do, for what we focus on with emotion, we attract more of into our lives. When we are in a deep state of gratitude, we tend to eliminate distraction and enter into a deeper state of connection with what we are grateful for. It’s a nice place to be.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity.” - Melody Beattie

A state of thankfulness allows us to see the interconnectedness of all things and lessens the grip of the ego. Gratitude can lead to feelings of love, appreciation, generosity, and compassion. All things our society could benefit from having more of.
Overall, being Mindful is like living life in High Definition. Once you start viewing life with that level of resolution, you won’t want to go back.

Jay Kshatri
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Resources to Explore:
• GPS of the Mind, by Sylvia Boorstein in Shambhala Sun - http://
  www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?
  option=com_content&task=view&id=4137&Itemid=0
• To learn the basics of meditation, visit http://www.how-to-meditate.org
• See my previous post on Effortless Meditation - http://
  www.thinksmarterworld.com/2013/11/19/effortless-meditation-2/
• For an introduction to meditation, see chapter four in Think Smarter in a
  Digitally Enabled World: A 21st Century Life Manual for Amplifying
  Your Knowledge, Achieving Your Potential & Changing the World
• Mindful Magazine - http://www.mindful.org
• Unlimiting Mind - by Andrew Olendzki

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Using Technology to Learn from Each Other

By Jay Kshatri
In 2006, “You” were chosen as Time Magazine’s Person of the Year. Time wanted to recognize the millions of people around the globe who were generating unique content on the world’s blogs, social networks, and personal websites, and as such, a more fitting choice could not have been made. The Time editors stated in explaining their choice:

“It’s a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before ... It’s about the many wrestling power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes. The tool that makes this possible is the World Wide Web ... The new Web is a very different thing. It’s a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0, as if it were a new version of some old software. But it’s really a revolution.”

Over the last decade, new Internet technologies such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Podcasts, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn have unleashed our abilities to create and share our expertise, insights, and wisdom with our fellow citizens easily and economically. But yet when the Time Magazine choice was released, it was heavily criticized. Why? Perhaps because it edged out various high-profile events around the world and numerous people making dramatic impacts at a global level.

In retrospect, however, it should be clear this was a bold and insightful pick—the accessibility of the world’s collective knowledge through our new digital technologies has and will continue to dramatically change our world. Those of us who can tap into this seismic shift will have a sizable advantage on both a personal and professional level.

Of course, “amateur experts” or enthusiasts have always been among us. We’ve all known people who have deep insight into various hobbies and interests and have developed expertise in those areas. Now, if we happened to live in the same area as these people, we could perhaps attend a lecture or group meeting and learn from their expertise (assuming a group exists, and that the particular person was willing and able to share that knowledge). But if not, we would be out of luck.

We’ve also had access for many years to specialty magazines from which we’ve benefited. These publications make efforts to harness expertise from around the globe; however, they can only do so much with a limited amount of time, copy space, and money. They also tend to focus on covering information from professionals in the field, rather than from advanced amateurs who sometimes know quite a bit as well.
Professional views are always valuable; after all, these are people who get paid for their efforts and do it often (as their primary occupation). Amateurs, however, may likewise spend a great deal of time on the subject, and thereby develop similar levels of expertise. They may also come with different experiences and perspectives than professionals, who often need to stay in a certain mold to be in alignment with the needs of their profession. Amateurs can therefore be a bit freer, and this can provide us with interesting takes on a given topic that we might not otherwise receive.

Of course, not all amateur content is created equal and we certainly see a lot of variability. Think of YouTube as an example. There is no doubt that there’s a significant amount of poorly presented and untrue information floating around on the Web. Anyone with an “Internet microphone” can say whatever they like and they have no editor or publisher to ensure that certain quality levels are being met. So it is certainly a “buyer beware” situation.

At the same time, there’s a fair amount of “peer-policing” that goes on. If someone posts something silly or flat out wrong on a blog or chat board, fellow readers will often...
reply to voice their objections. Sometimes that devolves into a bunch of mud slinging, but done correctly it keeps people on their toes.

With all of that said, there are substantial efforts made by individuals and groups to present meaningful information, insight, and resources through podcasts, blog articles, Wikis, online courses, YouTube-based video training, and more. And certainly, some of the non-serious stuff is fun as well.

Whether you’re seeking fun or education, the trick is always to find the high-quality content and not get bogged down in low-value material. We need to be proactive in knowing what we want to learn and then utilize better internet search techniques to find the most useful information.

Along with using search engines, there are also many sites dedicated to helping us find the content most relevant to our interests. So next we’ll look at some of the different ways for tapping into information, expertise, and entertainment from the collective “You.”

**Blogs and Websites**

*Blogs and Websites*

**Blogsearch**

http://www.google.com/blogsearch

Here you can look at the recommendations from the more traditional specialty publications, where they highlight which online media they feel are of high quality.

**Alltop**

http://alltop.com

Alltop describes itself on its website as the “online magazine rack” of the Web. By subscribing to thousands of sources, they aim to provide “aggregation without aggravation.” Alltop pages are essentially starting points as opposed to destinations, where the goal is to enhance your online reading by displaying stories from sources that you’re already visiting, as well as helping you discover sources that you didn’t know existed.

**Blog Catalog**

http://www.blogcatalog.com

www.ThinkSmarterWorld.com
The blog catalog is a great tool to browse by topic.

**Social Media**

You’re most likely well versed on many different social media platforms. For this article, then let’s focus on how to get more out of one of them in particular - *Twitter*. In terms of learning from each other, Twitter can be an especially good option. The reason is that Twitter has evolved for many people from being a place to tell others what you had for breakfast, to sharing useful content (links to articles, reports, presentations, and more) in their area of expertise or interest. Through carefully choosing who to follow, you can dramatically amplify your knowledge in a certain area through being introduced to certain content that you may not have located on your own.

Here are five Twitter tips you can use right away:

1. Use [TwitterLocal](http://www.twitterlocal.net) and [Nearby Tweets](http://nearbytweets.com) to find tweets about information in your area.

2. Use [ExpertTweet](http://experttweet.com) to locate experts in your area of interest. In order to find new and interesting people to follow, look at who high-profile tweeters and experts are following; you can then follow them yourself.

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3. **Wefollow** (www.wefollow.com) is a great site to find people to follow in targeted areas. Beginning as a Twitter directory in 2009, it has since grown to a community of over 1.3 million users who share their interests when they join, allowing you to search for people by interest and sort them by what’s called their Prominence Score. This ranking system lets you quickly discover, follow, and learn from the most prominent people around the world.

4. Use Twitter’s advanced **Search Option** to help locate people to follow based on their background, schools attended, geographic area, etc.

5. Stay abreast of trends via Twitter’s **Trending** option (on the Home, Discover, and Search pages on the Web, Trends appear in the column on the left side of the page.) You can also use third party tools such as TrendsMap (http://trendsmap.com).

**MeetUps**

We’ve thus far been speaking about interacting and learning from others in our online communities; however, there comes a time when we need to turn off the electronics and
get out and meet people in person. The problem is that we often don’t know how to connect with people with similar interests, or we don’t have time in our ultra-fast and busy lives to seek out these like-minded people. This is where Meetup.com (www.meetup.com) comes into play. It’s a great example of using the communication and coordination advantages of the Internet to make our face-to-face lives better.

Self-described as “the world’s largest network of local groups,” Meetup makes it easy for anyone to organize a local group or find one of the thousands already meeting up in person. As of this writing, there are more than 9,000 groups in local communities providing get-togethers each day, each with the aspiration of improving the members or their communities. Meetup’s goal is to help people change their personal world—or the whole world—by organizing themselves into groups that are powerful enough to make a difference.

I’ve been using Meetup.com for a while now and can’t say enough good things about it. After registering for free, you can identify your interests and Meetup.com will suggest groups for you in your local area (you can designate what geographical radius you would like to search). You can then view each recommended group, its objective, the profile of its members, and the listing of recent events or meetings the group has held to determine if it’s a good fit for you.

Some groups were specifically started on meetup.com while others existed previously and now list themselves on the site to help coordinate member activities. Definitely give it a try.

The Life Hacking Community

Life Hackers are those among us who have decided to re-examine the accepted modes of living, working, and being in our world. They are
deconstructionists on a life scale and are willing to challenge accepted models of what it means to live a fulfilling and rewarding life in the 21st century.

Some life hackers have become quite high profile, such as author and entrepreneur Tim Ferris. Tim wrote a classic life-hacker book called *The 4-Hour Work Week* (the title alone should put you in the life-hacker mind frame). *An entire work week in four hours?* you ask. *How can that be accomplished?*

Tim answers that question by applying elements of some of the topics in this book, such as systems thinking and the latest low-cost technology, apps, and services. Tim also writes an excellent blog and has published two additional books: *The 4-Hour Body* and *The 4-Hour Chef*. In the latest installations in the series, he teaches how to more quickly and efficiently attend to two of our most important life areas—keeping our bodies in shape and cooking well—in a fast-paced society.
Tim, of course, isn’t the only life hacker around; numerous others have decided to get off the traditional path and explore alternative ways of living. Most are people like you and me who simply decided to ask questions the rest of us haven’t contemplated yet. While some life hackers focus on how to streamline small things in our day-to-day lives, others approach bigger-picture questions such as: *Why am I doing this or that at all?*

The good news is that they’re prodding us to ask our own questions and providing us with specific answers as guides. For an introduction to the world of life hackers, check out this video overview on LifeHacker.com:


These are just a small sampling of ways to tap into the global explosion of knowledge, expertise, and guidance now being made easily available to anyone with an internet connection. Skillfully done, we are all in a position to radically accelerate our learning and personal growth curves like never before. You can learn many more tips on Learning from Each Other in chapter eight of my book - *Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled World: A 21st Century Life Manual for Amplifying Your Knowledge, Achieving Your Potential & Changing the World.*

*Jay Kshatri*

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Becoming Goal Oriented in a Continually Changing World

By Jay Kshatri
Once we start to understand the world around us better through tools such as systems thinking, we’re naturally going to identify areas for improvement. We’ll begin to see where making some changes can vastly improve how we do things, and we may even decide to create new goals for ourselves. Having a high-level map of what we would like to achieve is a key step in moving from the reactive to proactive mindset we covered earlier in the e-Course and in Chapter One of Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled World. But the reality is that over 90% of people don’t actively set, write down, or track their goals. Why? It seems to often stem from a few common themes:

- **It takes time and energy**
  There’s always something better to do, right?

- **Fear of failure**
  Not hitting your goal is a form of failure. Failure feels bad, so why put yourself in that position?

- **Questioning if it generates results**
  Things change, circumstances change, so why even create goals in the first place?

These are all understandable reasons to resist goal setting; however, study after study shows that people who create and track goals are more successful in their lives.

Those of you working in corporations are likely steeped in your company’s goal-setting process, as these are found in most mid-to-large businesses and every venture-funded start-up. Goals, and the milestones needed to achieve them, are the lifeblood of these companies. This is how the various employees are directed to work toward the same corporate objectives.

In our era of technology and media abundance, having daily, monthly, quarterly, and yearly goals becomes almost a necessity. We don’t necessarily have to script our entire day in tremendous detail, but it’s important to at least have major guideposts. It’s so easy to be distracted by our overabundance of social media and other diversions that we can easily lose a few hours or more of our precious time every day—with little to nothing to show in terms of meaningful achievements. But when we have goals, they serve as our guide to what is most important, urgent, and meaningful, allowing us to become clear on what needs to be accomplished first before other things divert our attention.
The pioneer in goal setting research is Dr. Edwin Locke, Professor (Emeritus) of Leadership and Motivation at the R.H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, College Park. In his 1968 article “Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives,” Locke pointed out that the act of working toward a goal actually provided motivation to reach the goal. This, in turn, improved performance. This concept has now become mainstream thinking, and the oft-quoted line in management circles is: “What gets measured, gets achieved.”

Locke, et al, wrote in 1981:

“A review of both laboratory and field studies on the effects of setting goals when performing a task found that in 90% of the studies, specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance than easy goals, “do your best” goals, or no goals. Goals affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development [i.e. different ways of achieving the goal].”

In 1990, Locke published a major update to his work in a book titled A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance. The book outlines Five Principles of Goal Setting and states that for goals to truly be motivational, they must have the following characteristics:

- **Clarity**
  Goals need to be clear and measurable.

- **Challenge**
  More challenging goals produce higher levels of motivation.

- **Commitment**
  Goals that are understood, and to which there is a clear commitment, are most likely to get done.

- **Feedback**
  You need to have periodic check-ins to see how you’re doing against the goal and if there should be any adjustments made to your effort or to the goal itself.

- **Task Complexity**
  Goals should essentially be attainable, given their complexity level.
Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson leveraged Locke’s work and in the mid-80s developed the **SMART** goal system (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 1985). The SMART acronym stands for:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-Related

*Now, one caveat is in order. Sometimes we can become too focused on our goals and that in fact can lead to less than desirable outcomes. Things are changing in our environment all the time, and it may make sense to change our objectives slightly, or to abandon a particular goal all together. This may be necessary as our current goal is taking us down a less than satisfactory path (or harmful one in some cases). Or, perhaps a new more desirable opportunity has arisen that may make more sense for us to pursue. In many ways, it is advantageous to stay focused on the big picture, be comfortable with some level of ambiguity, and not get too obsessed with any particular numerical target or milestone. And, if we stay open and mindful, we’ll get better at spotting these change-points and how to deal with them effectively.*

*“People often say that motivation doesn’t last. Well, neither does bathing, that’s why we recommend it daily.”* - Zig Ziglar

**HOW TO STAY MOTIVATED**

Over the years, individuals and organizations have developed certain techniques to help them stay positive and motivated as they strive to attain their goals. Whenever we’re embarking on something that’s difficult, it is possible to become deflated as we encounter difficulties in our path. These approaches can help us stay on course.

**Break down big goals into chunks**

A big, challenging goal that’s broken down into more manageable pieces is more likely to be achieved. You’re less likely to fail at the smaller, more attainable sub-goals, and each small success bolsters your motivation.

**Celebrate**

As you reach the intermediate milestones, reward yourself. This could be as simple as a cup of coffee at your favorite café or buying something you’ve had your eye on for a while. Just remember that the perk should be relative to the magnitude of the accomplishment.
**Acknowledge the good things**

Consciously recognize when something positive has occurred. Too many times we’re quick to point out how bad things are, and not as quick to recognize the good things when they happen. Positive, upbeat, and motivated people make a habit of taking a mental inventory of the things that are going right in order to keep their momentum.

**Tell people**

Studies have shown that if you tell people your goals, you’re more likely to achieve them. One reason is because it creates accountability —people like to follow through in front of their friends and family. Secondly, those same people can be effective cheerleaders. You’ll want to share your goals with people you feel you can trust and who will be positive and supportive in your efforts. You may even choose an individual to jointly pursue some goals so you can mutually support each other. A common example of this is a “workout buddy.”

Now that we know what goal setting is, and how it improves our probability of success, we want to create a plan for the various aspects of our lives that we care the most about. Here are some steps to take when developing an effective **Goal Setting Plan:**

**DETERMINE WHAT’S REALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU**

![Changing Priorities Ahead Sign](image)
When you look around at the people who are very successful, one trait stands out: their clear view of what they deem important and are passionate about. When you have clarity about this, it’s harder to get distracted.

To determine what’s important to you, or what your priorities really are, try asking yourself the following questions:

- What do I care about the most?
- What do I tend to get most passionate about?
- What do I never get bored of doing?
- What makes me feel most alive and connected to the world?
- What do I tend to argue about the most?
- What do I wish I could change about myself?
- If money was not a consideration, what would I like to spend my days doing?
- What are the few things that, if I accomplished them, would radically change my life?
- What habits would I like to create and which ones would I like to eliminate?
- Is my spiritual life where I want it to be? What questions do I have in this area? How should I go about finding out the answers? Are there new experiences I would like to have?
- How would I like my family to communicate better and function more effectively?
- Did I become the person I thought I would become when I was younger? If not, why? What would I do differently from here on out?
- Are my finances where I would like them to be? What could I do in the next 1–3 years to get them to the right place?
- Am I happy with my current state of health and fitness? What are my options to improve?
- Am I satisfied with my level of communication skills with my spouse, family, and colleagues?
- Am I satisfied with my current job? What 3–5 things would I change about it if I could?
- What arouses my curiosity the most?

The answers to these questions are your main drivers— the core values and things you care about that create your “Why” in life.
Once you have a sense of these, you can then start to create goals in the areas of your life you find important. In general, you’ll start seeing that your goals fit into certain categories. For most people, these would include:

- Life Goals
- Family Goals
- Financial Goals
- Career Goals

You can add as many categories as make sense for you.

You’ll also see that these questions guide you in identifying the big things in life:

1. The **Life Experiences** you want to have

2. The **Personal Growth and Development** you want to **achieve**

3. **What you want to Give Back to the world**

Thing big, really big. Don’t hold back. Go for BHAG—Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals! If you’re going to create a vision, you might as well make it a dramatic and compelling one.

Lastly, put your goal setting into action. There are a number of things to do - from creating a long range goal setting plan using a simple spreadsheet approach to using a number of different apps. Both approaches are detailed in my book *Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled World*, along with a more detailed discussion of goal setting and other tools and approaches to use. In addition, the book discusses how to use various techniques to increase the likelihood of manifesting your goals.

But to get you started, one thing that works extremely well, is to daily write down your top 3-5 tasks in support of your goals that you must complete for that day. Anything accomplished beyond those will be a bonus. These are the items that create major forward momentum for you - they are the objectives that if only they were completed, you would still achieve the majority of progress you seek. This simple technique also creates focus and clarity among the many competing priorities you face on a daily basis. It also allows you to be flexible in your goal setting - each day’s objectives are dynamically set based on the changing circumstances in your life. Try using it with the Nozbe to-do app.

Jay Kshatri
www.ThinkSmarterWorld.com
Intelligent Risk Taking

By Jay Kshatri
Contrary to what you may believe—or have been taught to believe—failure is good. It teaches, builds character, instructs us how not to do something, and leads to understanding of how to do it correctly. Sometimes the only path to success is through failure. In fact, venture capitalists often prefer to staff their start-ups’ leadership teams with people who have a few failures under their belt, the theory being that they know the path of what doesn’t work, and now in a different set of conditions, they’ll find the path to success. Of course, the team is ideally comprised of people who failed a few times and then eventually succeeded. Failing perpetually isn’t the objective.

Failure, risk taking, and success all go hand in hand. *If you’re afraid to take risks, statistically you’ll have low failure rates; at the same time, you may also have low success rates.* As the old saying goes: “You gotta be in it to win it.”

But like many things in life, there are good and bad ways to take risk, and although at some point you’ll fail, the key will be how effectively you learn from it. Fortunately, there are several tools and models we can use to help us take risks in a thoughtful way, as well as additional methods that allow us to understand the results of our risk-taking efforts so that we can learn more quickly and improve.

**SCENARIO PLANNING**

One excellent tool to map out your risk-taking efforts is called *Scenario Planning*. It originated at the RAND Corporation in the 1940s by Herman Kahn as *the creation of plausible future realities*. The essence of the technique is to look at the goal you want to achieve and clearly think through all possible outcomes that could occur, starting from your current baseline. In other words, you begin with “This is what I would ideally like to have happen,” and then proceed to “What are all the things that could go wrong?”

Art Kleiner describes the process in his book, *Doing Scenarios*, as follows: “Scenario planning forces us to learn to see more clearly the possible worlds in which the unimaginable, the unthinkable, the ungodly, and the unpredictable actually come to pass. If we can feel our way around in them in our imaginations for a while, then we can prepare ourselves for whatever future does come to pass.”

Kleiner is referring to the downside risks, but it’s important to keep in mind that *scenario planning can also lead to the uncovering of opportunities*. For example, when
you map out what could occur, certain outcomes may actually present possibilities for providing a business or service to counter prospective negative issues.

Scenario planning works best when you have as much data as possible to feed into your estimation of future outcomes. Further, it allows you to bring uncertainties to the surface that may arise over time, challenging your assumptions of how you see the future unfolding. It likewise permits possible alternative scenarios to emerge.

With the accelerated pace of technological change and globalization, there’s almost no business, industry, or personal situation that isn’t undergoing rapid change. The challenge lies in the fact that although there are many game-changing variables to consider, you cannot afford to take too much time weighing them. The world won’t let you take a wait-and-see attitude.

Most companies do some level of scenario planning as part of their yearly planning and budgeting cycle; however, the emphasis is often on establishing the next year’s goals and objectives rather than mapping out potential long-term scenarios and building that information back into the near-term business goals.

Although corporate risk management teams exist in large businesses—and many are quite proficient at what they do—their assessments don’t always translate to the operational level of the business as they should. One only needs to look at the financial meltdown of 2008, along with recent events in that sector, to see some weighty examples.

While nobody wishes to focus on it, similar long-term threats exist for us all on a personal level. These may include:

- Changes in our health
- Changes in our career (which could affect our finances or need to relocate)
- Natural disasters (an unfortunate occurrence that’s increasing)
- Unexpected expenses, etc.

Taking these into account, we can employ the same type of risk management through scenario planning that companies do and apply them on a personal level. In fact, many families do this already on an informal basis, through the sharing of stories between family members. Grandparents and parents will often share how difficult situations befell them throughout their lives, hoping their children will benefit from their experience and avoid the same mistakes. They’re essentially saying:
Don’t think this can’t happen to you, because it can, and hopefully you can take the right steps now to avoid it.

If we therefore utilize scenario planning well, we can expect to reap the following benefits:

- Challenging our assumptions about the future and uncovering both risks and opportunities
- Discovering risks in a systematic way, and in the process, reduce our aversion to taking risks since we can be prepared for them in advance
- Thinking outside the box to remove limitations at both the professional and personal level
In the **Scenario Planning Process Map** above, I have outlined the steps you would take to create your own scenario plan for any topic. Start at the top by first identifying the desired future outcome you seek, and then move clockwise to each successive step. As an example to see how this works, say you are considering relocating to a new area. You start by identifying what is the desired situation you seek in the future (not necessarily how it exists today). So, if you’re just starting out as a family, perhaps your major concerns are: (1) Will there be a strong public high school for my children to attend ten years from now? (2) Will the long-term economic trends be positive so that I can have a viable job and afford to send my kids to college?

With that in mind, you move to step 2 and brainstorm all potential scenarios how your desired outcome may or not come true. Think deep about all the uncertainties that could arise and for which you need to do further research to determine their likelihood. Next, the 3rd step would be a simple 2x2 grid, where on the vertical axis you would place one factor—say low and high economic growth—while the horizontal axis would have strong and weak education systems. Once you research those two elements for each location you are interested in moving to, you would then place each location in the appropriate quadrant.
So, from the matrix, if a strong education system and vibrant economic growth were the most important items for your relocation decision, you would want to identify a place to live that you could place in quadrant II, high and to the right.

In short, identifying the trends is important, and the matrix allows you to see what appears to be the most likely scenario based on today’s known information. Where it gets challenging is uncovering information that isn’t readily known. That’s where the strength of your research and forecasting skills comes into play.

In step 4 we can take further step and map out the uncertainties we have identified and what are the associated probabilities of each of them occurring and their associated impacts. You can use the Potential Impact Map (above) which is a diagramming tool to consider the Likelihood of Occurrence vs. Potential Impact and allows you to graphically identify what future uncertainties are the most important to pay attention to. From the picture that emerges here, in step 5 we can summarize what are the most important uncertainties to pay attention to and be prepared for.

Lastly, in step 6 we would create an action plan that takes into account the potential risks and upsides we have identified. We can assess the possible consequences for each key concern of the relocation by asking the following questions:

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• If certain (negative) events did come to pass, what steps could we take to alleviate the situation?
• Could we live with the anticipated contingencies?
• What steps could we take in the near- and mid-term to help reduce the likelihood of those adverse events occurring, or at least for us to have built up the proper reserves to handle the consequences adequately?
• What signposts or milestones will we pay attention to that will indicate certain scenarios becoming more likely over time?
• Are we considering all potential risks in our scenario planning? What could happen though we currently think it has a low probability of occurring?

We would then integrate our plan into our overall goal setting system.

Done properly, scenario planning allows us to:

• Look into the future and envision possible scenarios
• Consider the consequences of their occurrence
• Examine our ability to handle them
• Ponder what steps we could take in the near and medium term to reduce our risk

Scenario planning isn’t always an exact science, but the more data you can acquire, the more you’ll identify the scenario most likely to occur, and hopefully also become aware of potential ones to be prepared for should they arise. Though it may seem daunting, it’s less about predicting the future and more about pinpointing a number of different possible eventualities. Understanding the consequences (both positive and negative) of those potential outcomes is what scenario planning is all about.

There’s a lot more to know about intelligent risk taking, including how to review and learn from your inevitable failures. See chapter seven in my book, Think Smarter in a Digitally Enabled World, for more details.

Jay Kshatri
www.ThinkSmarterWorld.com
See the Oneness in our Reality

By Jay Kshatri
How Science and Spirituality Converge to
Reveal the Oneness of Our Collective Reality

We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.

- The Buddha

In this five part series, we will explore the meaning of Oneness - the concept of one interconnected consciousness that gives rise to all beings and matter. There is no self and the other, they are one and the same. In my opinion, it is the understanding and experience of Oneness that is the key ingredient necessary for us to progress as individuals and for society to solve its biggest problems. Think about it, progress on any of the major issues we face - rising poverty, food and shortages, climate change, growing inequality, deteriorating education standards, immigration etc - are all stale-mated at the current time because we have become hyper-polarized as a society in terms of us versus them, what’s mine is not yours, and winning is everything. Yet, collectively, we have enormous technology and financial resources to solve or at least significantly mitigate almost any problem, if we would only cooperate. But if we think we are separate and different from “the other person or group”, that cooperation will be a long time in coming, if ever.

In this five-part series, I’ll take you on a tour of what the latest information form the world of Science, Spirituality, and Psychology is revealing about true reality. These things have been spoken about by ancient spiritual traditions for thousands of years, but our modern world took a detour around 400 years ago and is now finally catching up. Hopefully more will awaken to our underlying interconnected and shared reality and we can finally move forward to realize our true potential. -JK

Part One:

What if there were a tool that let us shape and choose our circumstances, that allowed us to in fact create the reality that we experience? If we had such a tool, it would radically alter our lives, would it not? We wouldn’t merely be hostages of our circumstances, but
rather the masters of them.

Ancient spiritual and mystical traditions—Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditions—have spoken about this tool for thousands of years and have all taught aspects of a great power we all possess to create our own individual realities through our thoughts—or rather, to literally be creators of our own circumstances.

Major thought leaders from every walk of life—literary (Ralph Waldo Emerson), scientific (physicist David Bohm), inventive (Thomas Edison), business (founder of US Steel Charles M. Schwab), and social pioneering (Mahatma Gandhi)—have spoken and written about their own use of these techniques in the creation of their greatest works. And now modern-day personalities, such as author Jack Canfield (Chicken Soup for the Soul), recount their personal stories of how harnessing this power has allowed them to achieve great success, both personally and professionally.

Like most of society, you may not yet truly understand and accept this power due to the perceived lack of hard proof. And it’s true—we don’t yet have 100% scientific proof for the existence of God, a Universal Consciousness, an Energy Matrix Field that interconnects all of us and all things, or the ability of our thoughts to alter reality and events.

But science (quantum physics in particular) and a number of other observational results have been pointing to the existence of such phenomenon for many years now. I use the word “pointing” specifically to indicate and acknowledge that no, we do not yet have the repeatable proof that supports the definition of scientific validation; however, many experiments have been conducted (and subsequently verified) that do show the existence of non-local communication (one person being able to transmit thoughts to another person located in another area), energy healing, remote viewing (a person being able to mentally see a faraway place and describe its details), and other related abilities.

I’ve been exploring these topics for a decade now and had many personal experiences that have helped me to validate in my own mind the existence of these phenomena. My journey to this point started in 2003, when I first read the book The Field by investigative journalist Lynne McTaggart. The “Field” in this case is referring to the energy matrix that’s connecting all of us—all beings and all matter—to each other at the subatomic level.

In the book, which is expertly researched by Lynne via discussions with leading scientists working on the frontiers of quantum physics, McTaggart writes:

Quantum physicists had discovered a strange property in the subatomic world called non-locality. This refers to the ability of a quantum entity such as an individual electron to influence another quantum particle instantaneously over any distance despite there being no exchange of force or energy. It suggested that quantum particles once in contact retain a connection even when separated, so that the actions
of one will always influence the other, no matter how far they get separated. Albert Einstein disparaged this “spooky action at a distance,” and it was one of the major reasons he so distrusted quantum mechanics, but it has been decisively verified by a number of physicists since 1982.

The concept of non-locality is a game changer. It says that we are all connected at the subatomic level. We, and everything on this planet, are one big energy field. McTaggart goes on to say:

Non-locality shattered the very foundations of physics. Matter could no longer be considered separate. Einstein’s most fundamental axiom wasn’t correct: at a certain level of matter, things could travel faster than the speed of light. Subatomic particles had no meaning in isolation, but could only be understood in their relationships. The world, at its most basic, existed as a complex web of interdependent relationships, forever indivisible.

The Field is written from a scientific perspective, which made me sit up and listen. It also resonated with my own personal experience of connection to a universal life force I had felt all my life. All throughout my childhood and into my adult years, I sensed the presence of a guardian angel, a guiding spirit I could feel giving me direction through my emotions. When I wanted to get insight on what direction to go in my life or how to make a certain decision, I would sit quietly and wait for a signal. It would usually come in the form of an energy surge through my head, neck, and shoulders and down to my belly. When that occurred, I knew I was on the right track. The signal worked so consistently that I trusted it completely, but I was never 100% certain about what or from where the signal was coming.

With my technological mindset, the scientific research presented in The Field was welcome confirmation of what I had experienced for decades. But it also went a lot further than I had ever contemplated, challenging and expanding the perspective I had built up until that point.

Essentially it said science was pointing us to the reality that we are all interconnected as part of one big energy field, that what we do, how we think, and how we feel have an effect on others because everything about us—including our thoughts—are energy. And since we’re all connected, we are affecting others as well as ourselves through our thoughts. Moreover, since thoughts are energy (per E=MC²) and energy converts to matter, thoughts by definition are creating our physical reality as well.

Religions have been teaching us this concept for thousands of years, and now science is saying that it may have proof of this inter-connected reality we’ve previously taken as “faith.”

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The Field is a great place to begin to understand the scientific basis of Oneness. But there is much more to learn. Scientists in physics, biology, and other areas, along with modern spiritual thinkers, are telling us something quite profound about our existence and the implications for how to live our lives.

There are other data points as well:

- Renowned psychologists are unearthing the past lives of their patients.
- People are recounting startling details of their near-death experiences.
- Authors are channeling communication by spiritual beings and capturing wisdom and teachings of our lives beyond the physical realm.

I believe if we can comprehend and synthesize all of these messages the universe is sending us, we will be able to radically transform our lives and our society for the better.

Will we ever have full, repeatable proof of a Universal Consciousness as we do with our measurements of physical phenomena? Perhaps, but maybe not. Science attempts to measure and create mathematical constructs, but the spiritual realities we investigate may not lend themselves to those methodologies, and our current mathematical abilities may not be far enough along to capture what we’re seeing.

In addition, our technology to measure and record what we see may not be advanced enough to consistently measure these energy forces and field effects. Or—and this is the biggie—per the tenets of the Observer Effect in quantum physics, as we are observing an event (and simultaneously thinking about it), we are actually affecting or changing its outcome. It’s difficult to get a repeatable, consistent result when the person conducting the test is affecting its outcome!

What’s more, while we all have an ability to manipulate our environment at a subatomic level or to tap into the Universal Consciousness, we may need to develop and hone that skill just as we do with more physical pursuits of the body.

As an example, most everyone has the ability to play the game of golf. However, if you want to play well, you need to develop your skills over time to improve your capability. Certainly some people will have specific inherent physical features that allow them to excel in that sport over others, but for the most part, with focused effort, most everyone can learn to play at least to some level.
The same logic would apply to developing the capability of our minds to tune into our connection to the Universal Consciousness. Some of our fellow citizens already possess this ability and may in fact have had it from a very young age. Others have awakened to their capability at a point in their lives and developed it over time.

In some ways, an apt analogy would be tuning into a radio station that’s broadcasting 24/7/365—it’s always on and ready for us to listen. What we need to do is turn on our radios (our minds) and tune into that particular station; otherwise, it’s no surprise that we don’t receive the information.

In fact, philosopher Ken Wilber in his book Quantum Questions points out—through his research of the public letters and speeches of the major pioneering quantum physicists from the first half of the 20th century—that though they were not convinced science and math could prove the existence of God, many were in fact mystics (people who seek unity with the Deity or Absolute through contemplation) and very involved and knowledgeable about metaphysics. Although science—their science—at that stage in our history couldn’t prove the existence of the divine, they instinctively and intuitively knew it.

Below I will give you various examples that illustrate the existence of a world beyond classical physics—one based on metaphysics (“meta” meaning above or beyond)—a reality that exists beyond the physical one we can readily touch and see. These examples come from a wide range of sources and disciplines, and it is for that reason—the cross validation from many different sources—that I believe we should seriously strive to understand the metaphysical world.

If you remember, this is the construct we used in the beginning of the book to understand what information is worth paying attention to when we’re investigating a topic. Here’s a recap of what we call Information Triangulation:

Essentially you take the idea or source you’re interested in, and then through additional searching, you determine the overlap where multiple trusted sources agree on this certain topic or course of action. Ideally, the best validation is when the sources in agreement on that topic come from different backgrounds and viewpoints.

In the case of the existence of God, a Universal Consciousness, or The Unified Energy Field, we now have a number of unrelated data points from different sources that are all intersecting and point to the validation of these phenomena. They broadly consist of:
Quantum Physics and other scientific disciplines’ revelations of reality beyond physical matter

Teachings of various spiritual traditions—Buddhism, Christian Mysticism, Hinduism, and Taoism

Past Life Regression results by leading psychologists, meticulously recorded under controlled hypnosis conditions

Near-Death Experiences of many individuals showing remarkable similarities in their accounts

“Channeled” communication coming from the Source (God) to individuals ready to receive it

In Part Two, we’ll take a look at each of these overlapping areas separately and see what they are saying.

Part Two

SCIENCE

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The origins of quantum mechanics theory date back to between 1924 and 1941. Some of the major quantum effects that were discovered are summarized by a leading quantum physicist, Amit Goswami, in his book *The Self-Aware Universe, How Consciousness Creates the Material World*:

- A quantum object (an electron, for example) can be in more than one place at the same time (the wave property).
- A quantum object cannot be said to manifest in ordinary space-time reality until we observe it as a particle (collapse of the wave).
- A quantum object ceases to exist here and simultaneously appears in existence over there; we cannot say it went through the intervening space (the quantum jump).
- A manifestation of one quantum object, caused by our observation, simultaneously influences its correlated twin object, no matter how far apart they are (quantum action at a distance).

These quantum effects of course contradict the Scientific Materialism view that we’ve lived with since the days of Newton—that essentially everything is composed of discrete particles of matter and nothing else. Furthermore, they are at odds with the associated physical laws of how that matter interacts with and affects other matter—the Laws of Motion, Gravity, and the Speed of Light—known as Classical Mechanics (the physics of dealing with motion of matter).

These laws make it possible to predict the exact position, momentum, energy, velocity, and other properties of an entity at any point in time once its initial state and the forces acting upon it are known. In classical mechanics or Newtonian physics, if objects are separate physically, then they can assume to have no effect on each other and are in no way connected.

Quantum physics, however, shows us that this is not true. Specifically, at the subatomic level, electrons are sometimes particles and other times waves of energy, not merely discrete particles of matter. Electrons in fact change state into particles (matter) from waves (energy) once we observe them (the Observer Effect). This is what Einstein pointed out in his E=MC² formula: energy equals matter multiplied by the speed of light squared. Energy converts to matter and vice versa.

This naturally poses a dilemma for the modern scientist. The idea that our reality is unlike what Newtonian physics stated for over 400 years—that the world is not in fact discrete matter but rather energy potential that comes into our being through consciousness
—is of course a difficult paradigm shift to absorb. In fact, as Lynn McTaggart wrote in *The Field*, the implication for our lives is breathtaking:

This astounding observation (the observer effect) also had shattering implications about the nature of reality. *It suggested that the consciousness of the observer brought the observed object into being.* Nothing in the universe existed as actual “thing” independently of our perception of it. Every minute of every day we were creating our world.

To be fair, we know that in most cases, we can comfortably use Newtonian mechanics to understand our material world. But in certain instances, those laws don’t seem to hold. McTaggart adds:

Today we know that Newtonian model is valid only for objects consisting of large numbers of atoms, and only for velocities which are small compared to the speed of light. When the first condition is not given, classical mechanics has to be replaced by quantum theory; when the second condition is not satisfied, relativity theory has to be applied.

So Newtonian Physics is not wrong; rather, quantum physics is more accurate in its description of our true reality. The question is: Are we ready on a broad scale to accept that message and change the way we approach our lives?

Major scientific minds have been trying to tell us these truths for some time. In fact, Max Planck, the physicist who upon winning the Nobel Prize for his work on the atom, said:

As a man who devoted his whole life to the most clear-headed science, to the study of matter, I can tell you as the result of my research about atoms this much: There is no matter as such! All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particles of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together ... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter.

The time for us to listen has come. We are connected. We’re not unrelated bits of matter rolling around like billiard balls on a giant pool table.

But it’s not only physics that is challenging our existing frameworks of how the world works. The biological sciences are also starting to challenge the existing beliefs that our genetic code solely controls our health. Certain biologists, such as Dr. Bruce Lipton, are providing proof of a mind-body connection, that *our thoughts in fact affect the functioning of our bodies* and that *our environment is also playing a major role in the functioning of*
our bodies. Lipton and others show us that we can even turn certain genes on or off through environmental factors (diet, stress levels, thoughts).

In his *The Biology of Belief*, Professor Lipton points to a ground-breaking paper published in 1990 by H.F. Nijhout titled “Metaphors and the Role of Genes and Development.”

Nijhout presents evidence that the notion that genes control biology has been so frequently repeated for such a long period of time that scientists have forgotten it is a hypothesis, not a truth. In reality, the idea that genes control biology is a supposition, which has never been proven, and in fact, has been undermined by the latest scientific research ... Nijhout summarizes the truth: “When a gene product is needed, a signal from the environment, not an emergent property of the gene itself, activates expression of that gene.”

Beyond physical influencers in our environment, scientists have started to recognize that if quantum physics is right that we and our world are constructed of energy, then other energy sources would naturally have an effect on us, good and bad. In *The Biology of Belief*, Lipton further tells us:

Hundreds upon hundreds of other scientific studies over the last fifty years have consistently revealed that “invisible forces” of the electromagnetic spectrum profoundly impact every facet of biological regulation. These energies include microwaves, radio frequencies, the visible light spectrum, extremely low frequencies, acoustic frequen-cies, and even a newly recognized form of force known as scalar energy. Specific frequencies and patterns of electromagnetic radiation regulate DNA, RNA, and protein syntheses; alter protein shape and function; and control gene regulation, cell division, cell differen-tiation, morphogenesis (the process by which cells assemble into organs and tissues), hormone secretion, and nerve growth and function.

Each one of these cellular activities is a fundamental behavior that contributes to the unfolding of life. Though these research studies have been published in some of the most respected mainstream biomedical journals, their revolutionary findings have not been incorporated into the medical school curriculum. (Liboff 2004; Goodman and Blank 2002; Sivitz 2000; Jin, et al, 2000; Blackman, et al, 1993; Rosen 1992, Blank 1992; Tsong 1989; Yen-Patton, et al, 1988)

It’s no coincidence that our societal rates of cancer and other diseases have gone up steadily and in tandem with the increase in electrical and electromagnetic energy
surrounding us day and night—cellular signals, Wi-Fi signals, microwaves, bluetooth signals, and other transmissions from the cornucopia of appliances in our modern lifestyles.

Most of you are likely aware of the concern/controversy about cell phones causing brain tumors. Initially, most research scientists dismissed the concerns and stated that there was no evidence supporting the link between cellular radio frequency transmissions and brain tumors or other cancer. Well, fast forward and the picture has changed. Now the recommendation is to use a wired headset and keep the phone away from your person as much as possible. Of course, if the cell signal (any form of RF—radio frequency) is a problem, what about other RF or high-energy signals like Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, etc?

What’s more, stress—a form of internally generated “fear” and “harmful energy”—has escalated to great heights. Many of us are in constant fight-or-flight modes for long periods of our waking hours. Is it just a coincidence that our cells and overall health are being affected by increases in destructive energy from internal and external sources? Not according to the leading edge of scientific research, taken from Emotional Balance by Dr. Roy Martina:

Every Thought Is Translated into Biochemical Language: Research done by neurobiologist Candace Pert shows that emotionally-charged thoughts and memories cause the body to manufacture different neuropeptides (small protein-like molecules used by neurons to communicate with each other). Researchers at the Institute of Heart Math (Boulder, Colorado) found that positive emotions raise the body’s levels of DHEA (a hormone that rejuvenates and fights stress) and IgA (an immune-protein), while negative emotions lower both.

The neuropeptides have an effect not only on the brain but on all organs, glands, cells and tissues. Every thought we think and every emotion we feel is communicated to every cell in our bodies. Furthermore, the organs can store emotional information, too. This is becoming ever more evident now that organ transplants are more and more common ... Paul Pearsall’s book The Heart’s Code describes 73 cases of “memory transplants” coinciding with heart transplants. In one case a murder was solved as a result of a transplanted memory. One elderly woman started to crave the same foods her donor had; another started speaking words from a language that had been the donor’s native tongue. The list suggests that cells communicate electromagnetically, and that memory can be stored in every cell.

Using Mind-Body techniques to change the health of our cells and heal disease (and to proactively stay healthy) is a topic not generally embraced by the medical establishment at large. There are certainly some physicians (like Dr. Martina) who have championed it, but it is catching on very slowly. The doctors who are starting to use mind-body healing
techniques (meditation, positive visualization, stress management through yoga and breathing exercises, etc.) do so in conjunction with traditional medical/pharmaceutical approaches. It certainly makes sense to use the best of both worlds, but if we can use fewer toxic approaches to our health (just look at all the possible side effects of your typical pharmaceutical drug), would that not be to our advantage?

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine Emeritus and founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School sums up this new approach to overall health in a conversation with Stephen Rechtschaffen, cofounder of the Omega Institute, in an excerpt from Mindfulness Magazine:

Too much of the education system orients students toward becoming better thinkers, but there is almost no focus on our capacity to pay attention and cultivate awareness. We can learn to bring together the body’s various systems to fine-tune the body and mind, so we can navigate life’s ups and downs in a way that minimizes stress and maximizes well being.

Taking a pill is easy, but as we’ve learned through our Systems Thinking chapter, a complex system can have many different outputs depending upon its inputs. The human body is the most complex system known and there are variations from person to person (that’s why personalized medicine is such an important topic). When we input a potent drug into the body to address a specific issue, we may end up altering other elements of the system and producing unwanted effects.

Our scientists and doctors try hard to understand these possible reactions and outcomes and manage them, but we of course never know for sure what changes we may be introducing into the system. That’s why there is such a long list of disclaimers for each pharmaceutical drug. Please understand I’m not advocating here that you stop taking a prescribed medication cold turkey; however, I do encourage you to consider investigating a more holistic approach to your health and well-being and to discuss with your physician how you can implement that plan together.

Though I’ve presented several powerful concepts in this section thus far, the key conclusions from physics and biology are that our thoughts have an effect on everything in our environment, including our bodies. Case in point: Think carefully.

There has been an enormous amount of scientific investigation into quantum effects over the last eighty years. Some of the main postulates weren’t able to be proven until our scientific equipment and capability advanced enough to carry out the experiments. More is yet to come, but to get us started, I’ve compiled a table of the various scientific experiments (this

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is a small sample) that have validated the existence of non-local communication and other quantum effects that point to a Universal Consciousness:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Discovery / Experiment / Paper</th>
<th>Scientist(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1687</td>
<td>Principia Mathematica. Establishes Classical Physics, which accurately describes our material world.</td>
<td>Isaac Newton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Discovery of Electromagnetism. The existence of an energy field that up until that time was not known by Newtonian Physicists.</td>
<td>James Clerk Maxwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Paper on Quantum Theory. Planck stated that energy, which appears to be emitted in wavelengths, is actually discharged in small packets (quanta).</td>
<td>Max Planck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Theory of Relativity. Whereas Newtonian Physics considers certain measurements such as mass and width to be constants, the only constant in relativity is the speed of light. Width, time, and mass all depend on the velocity of one observer relative to another. Therefore, anything moving relative to anything else will actually be in a different time frame (when approaching the speed...</td>
<td>Albert Einstein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>String Theory. Postulates that subatomic particles are tiny vibrating bits of energy, called strings. These strings are said to “vibrate” at different rates. These “notes” or vibrational frequencies are what give rise to the different properties of quarks and atoms. Vibrations are similar to the notes...</td>
<td>Werner Heisenberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Experiment executed at The University of Paris proved Bells Theorem—that two complementary particles that split and travel at the speed of light in opposite directions, no matter how far apart, are always “in communication” with each other, thereby proving the non-local communication theory of quantum physics, or Entanglement as it is...</td>
<td>Alain Aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Paper entitled Metaphors and the Role of Genes and Development published showing that environment controls gene expression, undermining the belief that genes solely control our health and that our environment, including our thoughts,</td>
<td>H. F. Nijhout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Study by US Army reported in the Journal <em>Advances</em> on how DNA sample taken from a person and then moved to a remote location maintains “contact” with the host DNA and is affected by emotions from the host. In other words, you can leave a “part of yourself”—your DNA—somewhere (shake hands with someone for example) and it will stay connected to you through the Field. <em>See Gregg Braden’s book, The Divine Matrix.</em></td>
<td>Dr. Cleve Backster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Paper published In <em>Physical Review</em>, 1994, that posits Inertia is actually resistance when moving through the zero point field. Mass is an illusion—energy in the zero point field is causing the resistance to the subatomic particles giving the illusion of mass. There is no mass—all things in our world are energy.</td>
<td>Haisch, Rueda, Puthoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Chapter published in <em>Clinical Applications of Bioelectromagnetic Medicine</em> showing electromagnetic fields are generated by the heart and that this energy is not only transmitted internally to the brain but is also detectable by others within its range of communication. It’s a form of bioelectro-magnetic communication within and between people.</td>
<td>Dr. Rollin McCraty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition: Part 1. (published in the <em>Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine</em>) “The Surprising Role of the Heart.” This study showed that the body can respond to an emotionally arousing stimulus seconds before it is actually experienced. It appears that the heart is involved in the processing and decoding of intuitive information. The study presented compelling evidence that the body’s perceptual apparatus is continuously</td>
<td>Rollin McCraty, Ph.D, Mike Atkinson, and Raymond Trevor Bradley, Ph.D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>The Higgs Boson particle verified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part Three

SPIRITUALITY, MYSTICISM, AND PHILOSOPHY

The Hindus 5,000 years ago taught in their religious texts that the world was an illusion, a dream spun by Brahman, God, or the universal consciousness. The Hindus call the one consciousness Atman and Christians call it the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is said to connect all humankind to each other and to God. Sounds like The Field doesn’t it?

Author Gregg Braden, in The Divine Matrix, describes how the Rig Veda—a 7,000-year-old Hindu text—speaks of a power or field that underlies all creation:

In what's perhaps the best-known text, the Rig Veda, there’s a description of a force that underlies creation from which all things are formed—the force that was there before the “beginning.” The power, named Brahman, is identified as the “unborn” ... in whom all existing things abide. Further in the text it becomes clear that all things exist because “the One manifests as the many, formless putting on forms.”

What this passage points to is how the ancient Indians saw that Universal Consciousness—The One or God—was one unifying essence that resided in all beings and things (the many). Quantum physics is showing the same connection—a field of possibilities and inter-connections.

In a similar vein, Chinese master Lao Tzu around 600 BCE wrote in the Tao Te Ching: “The Tao is called the Great Mother: empty yet inexhaustible, it gives birth to infinite worlds. It is always present within you. You can use it any way you want.”

The mystical traditions point out the oneness that connects all things. Fritjof Capra in his groundbreaking book The Tao of Physics put it beautifully:

In contrast to the mechanistic Western view, the Eastern view of the world is “organic.” For the Eastern mystic, all things and events perceived by the senses are interrelated, connected, and are but different aspects or manifestations of the same ultimate reality. Our tendency to divide the perceived world into individual and separate things and to experience ourselves as isolated egos in this world is seen as an illusion which comes from our measuring and categorizing mentality. It is called avidya, or ignorance, in Buddhist philosophy and is seen as the state of a disturbed mind which has to be overcome.

The Buddha summarized his philosophy on why our minds get disturbed—or in his words, why we suffer—in The Four Noble Truths:
1. **The Existence of Suffering**
   The ever-present human condition, due to the mind’s constant processing of sensory data

2. **The Origin of Suffering**
   The pain we feel when we experience change (changes in our physical or emotional state, or anything that our senses pick up and which leads to thoughts that reflect a change in circumstances)

3. **The Cessation of Suffering**
   Our ability to accept (to control our thoughts) that all change is constant and dynamic and that once we release ourselves from attachment to what is changing, we achieve liberation

4. **The Path to Cessation of Suffering**
   The *Noble Eightfold Path*, which begins with understanding and internalizing the first three Noble Truths and then progressing through a series of ways of being in our lives that ultimately leads to Enlightenment. The Noble Eightfold path is:

   1. Right Understanding
   2. Right Thought
   3. Right Speech
   4. Right Action
   5. Right Livelihood
   6. Right Effort
   7. Right Mindfulness
   8. Right Concentration

   Of course the Buddha said much more about how to live our lives. One example in particular shows that he alerted us to what is now (2,500 years later) being witnessed by quantum physicists. The Buddha in the original Pali Canon spoke about the concept of **Interdependent Origination** (from Samyutta Nikaya):

   When there is this, there is that.
   When there is not this, there is not that.
   From the arising of this, that arises.
   From the ceasing of this, that ceases.

   The Buddha was essentially saying that nothing is permanent or absolute. Specifically, no beings or phenomena exist independently of other beings and phenomena and all beings and phenomena are caused to exist by other beings and phenomena. Moreover, beings and phenomena perpetually arise
and perpetually cease because other things and beings perpetually arise and perpetually cease. Nothing Is Permanent.

In quantum physics, it is believed that at the subatomic level, matter does not exist as a firm, permanent, unchanging structure. Rather, as Fritjof Capra explained in *The Tao of Physics*, it has a “tendency to exist” based on probabilities:

At the subatomic level, matter does not exist with certainty at definite places, but rather shows “tendencies to exist,” and atomic events do not occur with certainty at definite times and in definite ways but rather show “tendencies to occur.” ... At the subatomic level, the solid material objects of classical physics dissolve into wave-like patterns of probabilities, and these patterns ultimately do not represent probabilities of things but rather probabilities of interconnections ... As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated “basic building blocks” but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole. These relations always include the observer in an essential way. The human observer constitutes the final link in the chain of observational processes, and the properties of any atomic object can only be understood in terms of the object’s interaction with the observer.

Sounds like a 21st century scientific description of Interdependent Origination does it not? Our world is highly interconnected; it’s not static, but rather it’s energy flowing and we (the observer) manifest (the way we affect probabilities) things into being by our thoughts and emotions. Welcome to the future.

**PAST LIFE REGRESSION**

Past Life Regression is essentially about the concept of Reincarnation. Through hypnosis, a trained psychologist is able to lead some people (not all can be successfully hypnotized) back in time through their memories to remember details of lives they have lived in the past.

Now, if you’ve been raised in a tradition that believes there’s something inherently sacrilegious about this belief, you likely don’t know that a number of Christian Church Fathers believed in and wrote about reincarnation (I discuss this further beginning on page 232). There’s actually a great deal of evidence to prove that there’s nothing unholy or irreverent about this phenomenon; in fact, quite the opposite is true.

The various psychiatrists who have conducted thousands of regressions in controlled settings with all details recorded—and in some cases videotaped—can attest that reincarnation exists. Dr. Brian Weiss, the former chairman of the Psychiatry department at Mt. Sinai Medical Center and a former Columbia University and Yale Medical School graduate, is the most prominent of the psychiatrists working in this field. Weiss regressed his first patient in 1980 and says he has regressed over 4,000 patients since then.
To illustrate a profound example, Dr. Weiss tried helping his first patient, Catherine, overcome traumas in her life with conventional psychiatric treatment. When those failed, he decided to use hypnosis. He has explained that hypnosis is just a way to bring someone into a hyper-focused state of mind. The person’s body relaxes, and their concentration level is enhanced. This allows them to remember traumas that have occurred in their lives previously.

When he first set out, Dr. Weiss was just expecting to hear about distress that had occurred in Catherine’s childhood (in her present life). However, once into the session, she started to recount details about herself, people, and places that had taken place hundreds of years ago. Catherine described her former names, details of where she lived, how she lived and died, and more. Weiss later verified that the details she related were historically accurate and Catherine herself confirmed that she did not know of these details in her present life, nor had she been to any of the locations.

This first session was very dramatic for Dr. Weiss, but he was still a bit uncertain about what he was witnessing. That is until Catherine spoke of something under hypnosis that eliminated all doubt of the existence of an afterlife for him. He says that during their session, his office suddenly became icy cold. She said, “There are two people here to see you: your father and your son.”

Dr. Weiss recounts that this was surprising as she did not know any background details about his life—he didn’t even have diplomas hanging in his office. In addition, this occurred at a time before the Internet when it was not easy to look up details about an individual. Catherine proceeded to tell him facts she couldn’t have known:

Your father is here, and your son, who is a small child. Your father says you will know him because his name is Avrom, and your daughter is named after him. Also, his death was due to his heart. Your son’s heart was also important, for it was backward, like a chicken’s. He made a great sacrifice for you out of his love. His soul is very advanced ... His death satisfied his parent’s debts. Also he wanted to show you that medicine could only go so far, that its scope is very limited.

All this stunned Dr. Weiss deeply. There was no way Catherine could know any of this information. His newborn son, Adam, had in fact died of an extremely rare congenital heart defect merely a couple of weeks after his birth. Only a few people close to the family knew of Adam’s condition and death.

It also turns out, at around the time of Adam’s death, Weiss was deciding whether to stay on his chosen path of psychiatry or accept a residency in internal medicine. Adam’s death frustrated Weiss by highlighting for him the limits of modern medicine; hence he firmed up his decision to stay focused on psychiatry. Thus what Catherine told him was all the proof he needed of life after death.

The sessions with Catherine also unearthed an additional revelation. Catherine started to channel the thoughts and messages of beings called “Masters”—highly evolved souls who are currently not incarnated into human form (in fact Catherine told him that it was the Masters who told him the details about Weiss’ life). Through his dialogues with Catherine and many other patients, Weiss has been able to ask further questions of the Masters about many different aspects concerning, life, death, reincarnation, how lives are chosen, the purpose of our lives on earth, how our
progress as souls is judged, what it’s like in the spirit world, the existence of other civilizations, and much more.

Insightful Indian journalist Subhamoy Das has done an excellent job of summarizing in a book review some of the communication from the Masters showcased in Dr. Weiss’ first book, *Many Lives, Many Masters*:

1. “Our task is to learn, to become God-like through knowledge … By knowledge we approach God, and then we can rest. Then we come back to teach and help others.”

2. “There are many gods, for God is in each of us.”

3. We have to be on “different planes at different times. Each one is a level of higher consciousness. What plane we go to depends upon how far we’ve progressed …”

4. “We must share our knowledge with other people. We all have abilities far beyond what we use … you should check your vices … if you do not, you carry them over with you to another life … when you decide you are strong enough to master the external problems, then you will no longer have them in your next life.”

5. “Everybody’s path is basically the same. We all must learn certain attitudes while we’re in physical state … charity, hope, faith, love … we must all know these things and know them well.”

6. “Everything is energy … Humans can only see the outside, but you can go much deeper … To be in physical state is abnormal. When you are in spiritual state, that is natural to you. When we are sent back, it’s like being sent back to something we do not know. In the spirit world you have to wait, and then you are renewed. It’s a dimension like the other dimensions …”

7. “The fear of death … that no amount of money or power can neutralize” … remains within us. “But if people knew that life is endless, so we never die, we were never really born, this fear would dissolve.” We have “lived countless times before and would live countless times again … and spirits are around us to help while in physical state and after death, in spiritual state.” We and our deceased loved ones would join these guardian angels.

8. “Acts of violence and injustices against people do not go un-noted, but is repaid in kind in another lifetime.”

9. “Everything comes when it must come. A life cannot be rushed … we must accept what comes to us at a given time … life is endless … we just pass through different phases. There is no end. Time is not as we see time, but rather in lessons that are learned.”

10. After death “we get to the spiritual plane, we keep growing there, too. When we arrive, we’re burned out. We have to go through a renewal stage, a learning stage, and a stage of decision.”
We decide when we want to return, where, and for what reasons … Our body is just a vehicle for us while we’re here. It is our soul and our spirit that last forever …”

There are many other psychiatrists working in the past life regression field, but if you haven’t looked into this area for yourself, start with Dr. Weiss’ *Many Lives, Many Masters*. Trust me, it will alter your outlook on life.

The main takeaway on past life regression is that the detailed accounts of past lives that people provide are very compelling. They are able to provide vivid details of events, places, and people they could not possibly know about in their current lives. In some cases people have even started to speak in ancient languages—perfectly. What are they tapping into?

Clearly, if our universe and existence were based purely on classical physics, these phenomena could not exist. For people to connect to these memories, they are either tapping into their soul and those memories are residing within them, or they are tapping into The Field at large—or Universal Consciousness—and bringing back details from there. Either way, it is consistent with the energy matrix that we’ve spoken about earlier in this chapter and demonstrates that there’s a connected web we’re part of and that our minds are the key drivers of our existence.

The messages from the Masters also show us that what various spiritual traditions have spoken about for centuries is consistent—that we are spiritual beings having a physical experience. And that ultimately, we are here to experience and learn Oneness, that we are all one and the same and connected to each other and the Universal Consciousness, or God. We express that understanding through compassion, forgiveness, and love for our fellow beings, and when we attain that understanding, we achieve Nirvana and the release of having to be reborn. This takes hundreds of lifetimes to achieve.

When we don’t achieve that understanding, we suffer karmic consequences (either short term or long term in this life, or carried into successive lives). What we inflict on others is reflected back to us so that we may gain insight in order to change our thoughts, actions, and emotions. We are free to choose how we act and think at all times, and as such—just as quantum physics shows—we create our reality through those thoughts. If we keep our minds focused on love, compassion, and forgiveness, we attract those things back into our lives. E=MC²—thoughts are converted into our physical reality.

**NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES**

There are thousands of cases of near-death experiences that have been recorded over the years. You no doubt have read or heard about at least one, which is often an out-of-body experience where the person is floating above the operating room table where their body is lying. They’re able to describe minute details of transpiring events that they should not have
been able to do since they were clinically dead. Other accounts report how the person travels through a “chute of light” and arrives into a peaceful spiritual environment. In some of these cases, the person describes being reunited with previously deceased family members, and perhaps other major figures from their life.

For some people, these accounts are enough to convince them of the fact of our spiritual existence. But for others, especially doctors and neuroscientists, there’s a belief that these experiences are just hallucinations of the brain during traumatic events. So taken alone, NDEs have not been able to provide “conclusive” proof of the existence of God, or Universal Consciousness, or the non-physical reality of the Universe.

But in 2012, we were presented with the near-death experience of Dr. Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon who has practiced at Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Alexander has conducted extensive neuro-research and worked in the areas of stereotactic radiosurgery (laser-guided radiation to specific parts of the brain). He has also helped in developing MRI procedures targeting neurosurgical procedures. In addition, he has co-authored over 150 papers and peer reviewed chapters for medical journals.

It’s important here to note that before his near-death experience, like many of his neuroscientist peers, he did not believe in the validity of NDEs and their implication of a spiritual afterlife. In Proof of Heaven, he writes:

I’d heard many stories over the years of people who had strange experiences, usually after suffering cardiac arrest: stories of traveling to mysterious, wonderful landscapes; of talking to dead relatives—even of meeting God Himself. Wonderful stuff, no question. But all of it, in my opinion, was pure fantasy. What caused the otherworldly types of experience that such people so often report? I didn’t claim to know, but I did know that they were brain-based. All of consciousness is. If you don’t have a working brain, you can’t be conscious ... Or, so I would have told you before my own brain crashed.

Eben Alexander’s fateful day occurred on November 10, 2008 (at age 54). He developed a severe case of bacterial meningitis in the brain, was in a coma for seven days, and his entire neocortex (outer part of the brain), was nonfunctional. Dr. Alexander comments in his book that in certain cases, such as cardiac arrest, the person’s neocortex is deactivated temporarily but is not fully shut down or overly damaged. The person may still be getting enough blood flow after being revived in time.

But in Eben’s case, his neocortex was completely shut down, so it becomes difficult to explain how he could have consciously known what was going on or what he was experiencing through his brain—because it wasn’t functional, he simply could not have had that awareness accordingly to physiology. His fellow neurosurgeons who were working on him on the operating table confirmed it. Dr. Alexander’s NDE experience and what happened to him was therefore not a brain-based hallucination, but something else. His consciousness was not tied to his body or brain; it was separate. This is a classic case of Soul as Spirit.
During Dr. Alexander’s NDE experience, he recounts how he traveled into a place of extreme beauty and vivid colors. He was met by a beautiful girl he didn’t know, and she traveled with him and told him that he would learn many things during his time in the spirit world, but that he would not stay—he would return to his physical existence. Later, Eben didn’t understand why someone from his family wasn’t there to meet him and act as his guide. The young woman was very nice to him, and radiated a tremendous soothing influence on him, but he had no idea who she was.

It turned out that Dr. Alexander, who was adopted at birth, had three siblings from his biological family, all of whom he had never met. There were two sisters and a brother, and he ended up meeting the family only a few months before he fell into the coma. While the reunion was joyful, one of the sisters wasn’t present—she had died ten years earlier.

Once he was out of the coma and had fully recounted and recorded his NDE, the fact that he hadn’t been greeted by a relative introduced a bit of doubt in himself about his NDE. A few months after his brush with death, his biological family sent him a picture of his deceased sister. As Dr. Alexander studied the photo, everything fell into place. The woman in the photo was the same woman who escorted him through the spirit world. He in fact had been met by a family member—he just didn’t know it at the time.

As part of his journey, Dr. Alexander says he was taken to meet with God, the Source itself. He describes entering “an immense void, completely dark, infinite in size, yet also infinitely comforting.” All the messages were transmitted to him telepathically, via thoughts. He describes learning and absorbing knowledge deeper and more quickly than anything we humans are capable of. The physical nature of our brains slows down our ability to process information, but in a spiritual state, we operate at the speed of thought, which is much faster.

Eben says it will take him a long time to fully comprehend what he was taught, but it seemed to boil down to one thing—Love.

Love is without a doubt, the basis of everything. Not some abstract, hard-to-fathom kind of love, but the day-to-day kind that everyone knows—the kind of love we feel when we look at our spouse and our children, or even our animals. In its purest and most powerful form, this love is not jealous or selfish, but unconditional. This is the reality of realities, the incomprehensible glorious truth of truths that lives and breathes at the core of everything that exists or that ever will exist, and no remotely accurate understanding of who and what we are can be achieved by anyone who does not know it, and embody it in all of their actions.

Dr. Alexander goes on to acknowledge how difficult it is for us in our human form to live out this eternal truth. To love everyone on a daily basis as if they were our own family, that they were in fact us.

The brain—in particular its left-side linguistic/logical part, that which generates our sense of rationality and the feeling of being a sharply defined ego or self—is a barrier to our higher knowledge and experience. It is my belief that we are now facing a crucial time in our existence. We need to recover more of that larger knowledge while living here on earth, while our brains (including its left-
side analytical parts) are fully functioning. Science—the science to which I’ve devoted so much of my life—doesn’t contradict what I learned up there ... The unconditional love and acceptance that I experienced on my journey is the single most important discovery I have ever made, or will ever make ... I also know in my heart that sharing this very basic message—one so simple that most children readily accept it—is the most important task that I have.

Yes, we can choose to doubt even Dr. Alexander’s near-death experience as credible “Proof of Heaven.” He in fact, prior to his NDE, was a rational scientist—dedicated to the materialist worldview—who did not acknowledge the existence of a non-materialist spiritual realm. Looking at it as an isolated case, we can chalk it up to mistaken remembrances of what actually happened, or that his neocortex really wasn’t completely shut down, or that the medication he was on affected him in some way. But looking at it in the context of yet another slice of information pointing to the existence of a soul, of reincarnation, of an energy matrix along with the other things we have already discussed, how can we not at least give pause?

It appears quite compelling how the common intersection from all these phenomena—which come from completely different areas of our existence and from various people—point to the same revelation of our reality as spiritual beings having a physical existence. And as spiritual beings, our goal in life is to see past the ego’s mistaken insistence of a separation between all of us and all things. When we accept this view, we cannot look at the world the same way again, and we must alter our thinking to be in line with our true reality.

Part Four

“CHANNELED” COMMUNICATION COMING FROM THE UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS OR SOURCE

Up until now, we’ve seen examples of a life beyond the physical from science, historic spiritual teachings, and recorded instances of past life regressions and near-death experiences. If we can communicate via our thoughts in this world and our souls are reborn and live forever, it would not be a stretch of the imagination for people to receive communication from the spirit world as well, would it? As we’ve mentioned earlier, the Universal Consciousness is broadcasting 24/7/365—and the reality is, some people choose to tune in and listen.

Artists, musicians, and other creative people over the years have spoken of “divine inspiration” guiding their work. Others have spoken about “guardian angels” guiding them at key moments in their lives. We also now have examples where someone has received sustained communication or dialogue from the Source, or God. Neale Donald Walsch’s Conversations with God series is a well-known example.

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Neale himself likes to quote the old axiom: “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” In his first text, which appeared in 1995, Neale began a conversation with God. As in so many cases, upon reaching rock bottom, Neale was now ready to listen and started to ask questions of the Source. God provided answers through Neale to some of the key questions we all have regarding our existence. Over the next ten years, he published three volumes of these dialogues. A text is available that contains all three books—you won’t want to put it down once you start reading.

Another profound example can be seen in Rasha, a singer residing in the South East living a common suburban lifestyle and experiencing all of life’s ups and downs. In 1987 she started to receive a sustained stream of messages from the Source about the nature of existence and the problem of not seeing clearly the unified nature of our reality with our fellow beings. She had her first active dialogue in 1998 and describes that first communication in the introduction to her book, Oneness:

“What is Oneness?” I asked silently. “Are you God?” “As the drop of water is to the ocean—that is what Oneness is. The essence of the drop is every bit the essence of the totality. As you would understand God to be—yes, we are God.”

Rasha goes on to describe some of the early teachings she received:

...the teachings of Oneness began to lay the foundations for seeing everything in our present-day world from the timeless perspective of energy. Oneness explained that the vibrational momentum driving all Creation toward unity is the same momentum that people everywhere are experiencing in their daily lives ... I came to understand the dynamics of how we manifest our reality, vibrationally, and how our emotional response mechanism sets up the parameters for drawing our life experiences to us.

Sound familiar? You have to hand it to the Source—he (or she) is quite consistent!

But perhaps the most intriguing channeled communication has come to us from Jesus himself. A Course in Miracles is a text that was transcribed by Helen Schucman, a Professor of Medical Psychology at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons, first published in 1976. Helen describes herself in the introduction:

Psychologist, educator, conservative in theory and atheistic in belief, I was working in a prestigious and highly academic setting ... Three startling months preceded the actual writing, during which time Bill [her co-author and academic peer], suggested that I write down the highly symbolic dreams and descriptions of the strange images that were coming to me. Although I had grown more accustomed to the unexpected by that time, I was still very surprised when I wrote, “This is a course in miracles.” That was my introduction to the Voice. It made no sound, but seemed to be giving me a kind of rapid, inner dictation which I took down in a shorthand notebook. The course states that “universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary.” Although Christian in statement, the Course deals with universal spiritual themes. It emphasizes that it is but one version of the universal curriculum. There are many others, this one differing from them only in form. They all lead to God in the end.
So what we have is Jesus choosing an academic atheist to be his vessel to clarify and amplify his thoughts on human existence that he believes we haven’t quite grasped yet. It’s a brilliant choice—an atheist (disallowing us to easily say this is a true believer trying to get the message out) and an academic psychologist, well versed in the ways of the mind and how to communicate thoughts effectively.

When you read *A Course in Miracles*, you will be struck by the similarity to the topics we’ve discussed in this section. Let’s take a look at some of the teachings to illustrate the point:

*The world we see merely reflects our own internal frame of reference—the dominant ideas, wishes, and emotions in our minds.*

*Perception is a function of the body, and therefore represents a limit on awareness. Perception sees through the body’s eyes and hears through the body’s ears. It evokes the limited responses that the body makes. The body appears to be largely self-motivated and independent, yet it actually responds only to the intentions of the mind. If the mind wants to use it for attack (against fellow beings), it becomes prey to sickness, age, and decay.*

*The opposite of seeing through the body’s eyes is the vision of Christ, which reflects strength rather than weakness, unity rather than separation, and love rather than fear. The opposite of hearing through the body’s ears is communication through the Voice for God, the Holy Spirit (The Field), which abides in each of us. His voice seems distant and difficult to hear because the ego, which speaks for the little, separated self, seems to be much louder.*

*(Duality between the Self and the Universal Consciousness)*

*Sin is defined as “lack of love.” Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished.*

*Miracles are thoughts. Thoughts can represent the lower or bodily level of experience, or the higher or spiritual level of experience. One makes the physical, and the other creates the spiritual.* *(Our thoughts create the world.)*

If you’ve ever had some reservations about traditional Christian theology as it relates to what your life experience has been or are more attracted to recent teachings of the historical Jesus, give *A Course in Miracles* a try. Throughout the text, Jesus as channeled through Helen Schucman, attempts to clarify and correct aspects of Biblical teachings that may have been misunderstood—and to unveil teachings that were his original intent. (As an example, the belief in reincarnation was originally part of Christian doctrine. Roman Emperor Justinian had it removed from church doctrine in 553 A.D. in order to better control his subjects.)

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Walter Semkiw, author of *Born Again*, has catalogued some of the beliefs that existed prior to that removal:

A number of Christian Church Fathers believed in and wrote about reincarnation:

- St. Justin Martyr (100–165 A.D.) expressly stated that the soul inhabits more than one human body.
- Origen (185–254 A.D.), who was considered by St. Jerome as “the greatest teacher of the Church after the Apostles,” defended the idea that the soul exists before the body, fundamental to the concept of reincarnation.
- Another Church Father, St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (257–332 A.D.), wrote: “It is absolutely necessary that the soul should be healed and purified, and if this does not take place during its life on earth, it must be accomplished in future lives … The soul … is immaterial and invisible in nature, it at one time puts off one body … and exchanges it for a second.”
- St. Gregory also wrote: “Every soul comes into this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defeats of its previous life.”
- St. Augustine (354–430 A.D.), one of the greatest theologians of the Christian church, speculated that philosopher Plotinus was the reincarnation of Plato.
- St. Augustine wrote: “The message of Plato … now shines forth mainly in Plotinus, a Platonist so like his master that one would think … that Plato is born again in Plotinus.”

Walter summarizes his research by saying:

In sum, reincarnation has appeared in Christian church doctrine, but reincarnation has been suppressed in the contemporary Church’s philosophy. One reason is that if reincarnation is acknowledged and research demonstrates that souls can change religion from one incarnation to another, a religion’s claim to exclusive truth is negated. Still, evidence of reincarnation can help fulfill one of Christianity’s greatest doctrines, that we are indeed brothers and sisters, and that we should love one another as such.

You may also want to take a look at Marianne Williamson’s book, *A Return to Love, Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles*. Marianne has become a well-known teacher of *A Course in Miracles*, and her book is a great user-friendly introduction to the principles in the text.

Part Five

NIRVANA, NON-DUALITY AND THE TAMING OF THE EGO
If everything and everyone is part of a single energy plane, then you and I are the same, and connected. Non-Duality means that there is no Self or Other; rather, it is all One. Yes, we have different physical forms, but underneath, at a sub-atomic and spiritual level, we are identical. If then I am mean to you, I’m essentially mean to myself. Therefore, the ultimate goal—the meaning of nirvana—is to experience this non-duality, this utter lack of separateness between all of us.

The way to achieve that is to act with love toward all people. Love is when you see the other as yourself. When we say we would be willing to give our life for another person, it’s because we see them as ourselves and we would certainly want to help ourselves. Unconditional love is true love, full of acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness.

Living in the Moment without the Ego

When we come to the conclusion that we (people, all living things, and all material form as well) are all connected through a universal life energy force, this of course has huge implications for how we live our lives moment to moment and day by day. Much of what we’re taught growing up is how we are different from others, and a separation arises in our minds between “us and them.” We’re judged in terms of our grades in school, our athletic achievements, our “artistic gifts,” and our successes in our jobs and professions. Literally from birth, we are rated, sorted, measured, and classified. It can be no wonder then that we naturally develop a tendency toward conflict, the need to win, and the need to be right.

But if what metaphysics and science are pointing to is a universal connection among all of us, then when we engage in conflict, aren’t we just hurting ourselves? Think about it: we are from the same Source, connected to each other in an electrical field. The field, like an electrical circuit, has feedback loops—when I give energy, it comes back to me; when I take energy, it is taken from me as well. In this way, it is synonymous with the Christian teaching of “those who give will receive.” Or from Asian traditions, the concept of Karma’s cause and effect. It is also said that the very things we push against or resist keep appearing in our lives until we learn the concepts of acceptance, forgiveness, and love.

When we absorb this concept, it is hard to look at people and situations the same again. If we are the same, if we are connected, then a good way to view others is that we are co-creators in this life we’re sharing. In any situation you encounter, if you believe the others participating with you in that moment are co-creators who have come together and have the ability to collaborate and raise (or lower) the energy level of a situation, it can dramatically alter your approach to life.

So the natural question of course is:
What if the other person doesn’t see the world in the same way? What if they are still in the mindset of conflict, competition, or aggression?

Well, if we go back to the concept of being connected at a subatomic level in the field, then our approach and our positive energy can have an effect on the person(s) we are interacting with. If our approach is based on acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, and love, it will have an affect on the other person, lower their resistance, and the positive vibration will come back to us.

In any given situation, we can choose to take the view that conflicts are due to people’s having their own challenges and that how they deal or interact with us is not personal. We can give them the benefit of the doubt and know that they are on a journey of self-learning through this life just as we are, and though we may not be synchronized today, we come from the same place. We can choose to be of assistance to them through our understanding and acceptance and view them as co-creators with whom we can collaborate toward win-win outcomes.

In this way, you in fact have an enormous amount of power in any situation. You control your own reaction, and by eliminating the separation between you and someone else, you provide them with that power, achieving a much better outcome for all involved. And although you may not experience the result you want right away, a positive gift of acceptance and forgiveness is always returned.

To more deeply understand the harmful effects of the ego and the remedy for them, turn to modern-day spiritual master Eckhart Tolle’s *A New Earth, Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*. You can in fact watch a free online course on the book that Oprah did with Eckhart back in 2008—there’s one video segment for each of the ten chapters:


A related outcome of this mode of thinking is that we reduce or lose our need “to be right.” Our view or position doesn’t have to be accepted immediately by the other person. We start realizing that we are all in it together and though we should certainly put forth our ideas, thoughts, and constructive feelings, the fact that they aren’t accepted right away is ok. People need time—we are all seeing the world through a different set of experiences and filters. The more patience we have with each other, the more we move toward common understanding and shared experiences.

Sometimes we can actually see people becoming more aware and realizing the Oneness among us in real time. Recently you may have seen some politicians change their stance on certain social issues—gay marriage for example—because someone in their family revealed themselves as gay. Now, after decades of being against gay marriage, they announce they are for it. What happened is that what they previously saw as “other,” they now see as themselves. They love their children, and since their children are not “other” but the same as they are, then they must love others as well because they, too, are one and the same.

As love was the answer in allowing those in the above instance to erase the separation, so too does love have influence in other situations. When someone who strongly opposes climate change
policies, for example, personally experiences a major climate event causing great loss of life, property, and large financial impact, climate change is suddenly not some abstract concept happening to someone else. There is no other—there is us—and since these people care deeply about their own, they now recognize that we are in it together. In both instances, experiencing love and caring firsthand were necessary to erase the need of the human mind (ego) to create separation and highlight differences between people.

In sum, we of course hope that not every politician or business leader must experience profound personal trauma in order to make decisions that are in the best interest of all people. I’m not sure our country or the planet could afford that! We simply need them (and ourselves) to understand that we are all the same, all part of one energy stream of consciousness, and that when we help others, we help ourselves; when we hurt others, we hurt ourselves. Love is the only real fuel for our lives; everything else is merely fumes.

Mastering Our Thoughts, Mastering Our World

We have learned that the leading edge of science, the Eastern spiritual traditions, Christian mysticism, revelations from past life regressions, near-death experiences, and channeled communication from the Source all suggest the following:

- We are all spiritually interconnected in a vast Energy Matrix that is connected to the Universal Consciousness.
- Our thoughts are high-frequency energy, and thoughts turn into physical manifestations in our world.
- We are thinking all day long (and night through our dreams).

This implies that we are creating nonstop! If that’s true, then it would be a safe next step to say that we need to be on guard regarding our thinking all the time, right?

That’s exactly what successful business entrepreneur Trevor Blake has learned over the years and explains so beautifully in his 2012 book Three Simple Steps. It is one of the most unique takes on the Law of Attraction, and Trevor goes to great lengths to show you how he implements his three steps in his daily life. I highly recommend you read his book. Not only is the information important in transforming our lives, but Trevor’s life story of rising from childhood poverty in England to entrepreneurial success is a moving and motivating one.

Trevor calls his process of minding his thoughts “guarding his mentality.” He has learned to be ever-vigilant in not letting negative thoughts infiltrate his psyche. He discovered this key insight
during his difficult childhood. When everyone around him was negative, Trevor discovered that when he changed his focus away from what they were saying, spending time in nature and at the library, he was able to create uplifting thoughts, and he started to attract positive change into all areas of his life. What was once thought impossible for a poor child living in rural England became possible through his removing the negative and believing strongly that he would achieve whatever he wanted. He did not let doubt enter into the equation.

The key takeaway from his experience is that in our modern-day world, we are constantly faced with a barrage of negative information—from the sensationalist news programs on TV, to irritated colleagues at work, and even angry parents at an eight-year-old’s soccer game on the weekend. When that stimuli enters our minds, our brain goes to work and creates mental images of that negative information. Apart from causing us emotional distress at the time, our mind also acts like a giant search engine looking to turn thoughts (energy) into reality (matter). Unwittingly, we start attracting similar negativity to our lives. Our mind doesn’t know if a thought is good or bad, or if we want it or not. It just converts without discrimination.

Even simply watching the nightly news after work can lead to unintended consequences. Even though there are numerous things that actually go right in a given day, they manage to cram ninety minutes of the worst of humanity into a thoroughly depressing program. Are we better off by knowing every single horrific event that has happened that day? To some extent, there are current event topics that a well-rounded and aware person may want to know about. But many media outlets don’t present thoughtful and carefully balanced information. And what do we do with the information once we know it—does it change what we actually do on a day-to-day basis?

Typically no, but our mind does something. The negative stimuli are turned to mental images, which then lower our energy levels and attract other low-energy events to our lives. If, after watching the news, you have images of death, economic collapse, and political gridlock now burrowing through your subconscious, then your mind’s search engine will try to manifest other unhappy things into your life as well. On the flip side, it is no accident that “positive investor sentiment,” “unbridled confidence,” “enthusiastic optimism,” and “a glass-half-full attitude” seem to have a multiplier effect on our lives.

When we shift our minds from what we don’t want to what we do want in our lives, magic happens. This is the same concept we covered in the Above and Beyond segment on the Law of Attraction at the end of Chapter Six. We must focus on the affirmative and think I am healthy and happy not I don’t want to be sick and lonely anymore.

The mind’s search engine says in the first case: Oh, you’re happy and healthy and therefore your circumstances need to match this. In the second statement, the mind’s search engine says: Oh, you’re sick and lonely and therefore your circumstances need to match this. In both cases, you get what you think about.

The challenges are how to control the negative stimuli coming to us in the first place and then how to control our reaction to it. The first part is done by adopting the shift from a reactive to proactive mindset that we discussed in Chapter Two. We need to be very particular about what
sources of information and entertainment we consume and the people with whom we choose to interact. That said, we aren’t able to choose our environmental circumstances all the time—that co-worker or boss isn’t going away anytime soon. And your child will be very sad if you tell her she has to quit the soccer team because some of the other parents feel winning is life and death, calling forth every bit of anger in their cheering to help defeat the other team. What to do?

The answer is that it is our reaction to the annoying stimulus (not the stimulus itself) that allows us to remain free of its bad effects. Going back to the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, we suffer when we become attached to arising thoughts. If we release those thoughts—let them slip by us like passing cars on the highway—then we simply observe and stay calm. Trevor Blake quotes his mom Audrey, a truly enlightened soul, on how she taught him to control his thoughts: “When I was growing up, she was always telling me to pause before I spoke, ‘to give your reaction time to sort itself out.’”

The best way I know to develop our ability to control thoughts, and our reaction to them, is meditation. A daily meditation practice strengthens our brain’s ability to stay centered and calm and be clear of unwanted thoughts. Meditation is usually associated in the West with stress reduction, and that is one of its greatest benefits. But as we have just discussed, it also can help you master your thoughts, and thoughts are essential to creating the reality we truly desire.