





*Unlocking Your Potential*

RECOMMENDED READING

*Working with Anger*  
by Thubten Chodron

*An Open-Hearted Life: Transformative Methods for  
Compassionate Living from a Clinical Psychologist  
and a Buddhist Nun*  
by Russell Kolts and Thubten Chodron

# Unlocking Your Potential

*How to Get Out of Your Own Way*

Thubten Chodron  
and Calvin Malone



**Sravasti Abbey**

A Buddhist Monastery

*Creating Peace in a Chaotic World*

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

It is well known that Michelangelo Buonarroti transformed a block of marble into the statue of David. Actually what he did was remove all that was not David from the stone. By doing so, Michelangelo made it possible for us to see the David that was already there. He freed the statue that was imprisoned in the marble by changing the way we see it.

In many ways we are like that marble block. We want to transform ourselves into something better, more useful, and kinder. But sometimes we don't have all the skills necessary to do so. We need a skilled guide to get us going in the right direction. This booklet is designed to encourage you to examine yourself—your past, your perceptions, your thoughts, and your current conditions—and to help you decide what adjustments to make to initiate positive change and create the causes for happiness.

We are all engaged in the process of change, but what is it that we are trying to change into? Granted, the vast majority of us want to change for the better, yet we repeatedly get stuck along the way. We get caught up in our thoughts, emotions, and judgments and allow negative influences to prevail.

What all of us really want is to be happy and avoid suf-

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fering. Where we run into problems is the ways we go about accomplishing this. We have convinced ourselves that happiness can be found in more stuff, better food, new sports equipment, a lover, freedom, a bigger house, or more money. All those things are a temporary fix. Like the high from addictive drugs, that happiness soon wears off and we need more of whatever object, situation, or person we believe gives us that happiness to get the “happy high” again. In prison, the most common thing one hears is, “I’d be happy if only I could get out of prison.” The assumption here is that outside of the prison walls there is eternal bliss. If that were true, then why are so many people outside of prison so miserable?

In actuality, the real source of our happiness and suffering lies inside our mind. We create the causes of happiness or misery depending on the way we think and feel. For example, suppose we are going to a new place where we don’t know anyone. If we think, “I won’t fit in. All these people know each other and I’ll be left out,” chances are that’s what will happen. If we think, “There are people with so many different experiences and ideas. It’ll be fun getting to know them and hear their stories,” then we’ll have a good time. How we think and feel is up to us. We can choose to cultivate wholesome thoughts and positive emotions, or we can rely on our old habitual ways of thinking that got us where we are now. It’s up to us. There is a way to get on the path to happiness and following it entails some hard work. But in the end, it is well worth the effort.

The Buddha taught that we all have Buddha nature—the innate ability to attain awakening, a state in which all our mental afflictions have been forever abandoned and all our wonderful qualities and potential have increased limitlessly.

It's like growing a garden. The seeds are already in the soil; all we need to do is remove the rocks and nourish the seeds with water and fertilizer. This booklet utilizes Buddhist philosophy to help you examine the areas of your life that you want to change and learn the ways to do that. The aim is to have a more realistic and beneficial way to look at the world. When we have that, our behavior will naturally align with our values.

You do not need to be Buddhist to take advantage of the methods outlined in this booklet. All you need is a desire to change, to improve your life, to see the goodness inside you that is currently hidden but has the potential to grow. Like Michelangelo and his block of marble, we can carve out all that is not part of our Buddha nature and polish the beautiful Buddha nature that remains. By transforming our thoughts and emotions, we will free ourselves and will be able to be satisfied no matter what is going on in our lives.

#### HOW THIS BOOKLET CAME ABOUT

This booklet is a joint effort of Venerable Thubten Chodron, a Buddhist teacher and the founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey, a monastery in Washington State, and Mr. Calvin Malone, a civil detainee at the Special Commitment Center on McNeil Island in Washington State. Chodron and Calvin have been corresponding for many years, and Chodron has taught Dharma to the Buddhist groups in prisons where Calvin was residing. Chodron shared some of the discussion and meditation questions she used with Buddhist groups, and Calvin had the idea of incorporating them into a booklet, together with other material. This booklet could then be used by inmates to help bring more awareness to their mental states and behavior, and encourage mental and emotion-

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al transformation that would bring them and those around them more happiness and peace in their lives. Since all of us are imprisoned by our ignorance, anger, and craving, all of us—no matter which side of the razor-wire fence we're on—could benefit from learning about and improving our perspective on life.

Calvin wrote or collected the stories, designed some of the diagrams and charts, and explained them. Other diagrams and material were downloaded from the Internet.

We wish to thank Mr. Rickey Calhoun for his help in typing and editing the sets of questions, Mr. Stephen Taul for his help compiling the materials, and Ms. Traci Thrasher for doing the layout.

May all living beings have happiness and its causes and be free from suffering and its causes.

Venerable Thubten Chodron and Calvin Malone  
2018

## MOTIVATION

At the beginning of every activity, it's good to develop a clear motivation for what we are about to do since our intention dictates the outcome of our actions and how we feel afterwards. Since you are engaging in a beneficial endeavor by reading this booklet, take time now to reflect on your motivation.

1. What are your aspirations for yourself?
2. What are particular aspects of your thinking or behavior that you would like to understand and change in your life?
3. What are some of your good qualities that you want to increase and use to benefit others?

Close your eyes and take a few relaxing breaths. Then think: “My deepest wish is to have happiness and freedom from suffering. This is the deepest wish of each and every living being. We are the same in this respect. I’m going to study this booklet and think about its contents so I can let go of the thoughts and feelings that cause me unhappiness and that make me do actions that bring unhappiness to others. I’m also going to study and think about the topics in this booklet in order to strengthen my good qualities and talents—especially my compassion and kind heart—so I can bring peace in the lives of myself and others.”

Contemplate this motivation each time you read this booklet.

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### HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet can be used individually or in a study group. Likewise, the questions can be used as a self-reflection practice or in the context of a discussion group. It is your choice. When doing self-contemplation, try to find a quiet place or a place with little distraction. Set your motivation as described above. Read the explanations and stories and study the charts. Use the questions to prompt an investigation of your thinking and behaviors. Bring to mind specific examples from your life and try to come to a conclusion at the end of the set of questions. The questions are designed to help you get to know yourself better, and you may want to return and study them repeatedly.

### **The format for discussion groups**

Increasing our self-awareness and developing our good qualities is not a simple process of gaining information. It entails applying the teachings to our daily lives and looking at our thoughts, words, and deeds with mental clarity and compassion. Organized discussions among like-minded individuals enable us to do this and facilitates the integration of these beneficial teachings into our lives.

In a group, have a facilitator who is also a participant in the discussion. To facilitate a group session:

1. Remind participants of their motivation: that they are there to help each other gain insight into the path and to become better people.
2. Ask the participants to do breathing meditation for about five minutes to calm the mind.
3. Then, while everyone continues to meditate, lead them through the questions of a specific topic, leaving

one or two minutes to contemplate each question.

4. Ring the bell (or make a gentle sound or say “good”) and say the questions again slowly so that people can write them down if they wish. Explain that they will break into small groups of 5-6 people. People who are there with a close friend should go to different groups. Explain that after they are in the groups, each person will speak one at a time, for about three or four minutes, sharing their reflections on the questions, so that everyone speaks and no one dominates the group. No cross-talk or questions can occur until everyone has spoken.
5. Ask people to break into groups and begin discussing.
6. After 35-40 minutes, ask everyone to return to their original seats. The group can then either offer a closing aspiration or the facilitator can lead a debriefing discussion. A good question to open it with is, “What came up in your group during the discussion?” or “What were some of the interesting points for you?” Various people respond, and the facilitator may ask them to unpack a comment more or may add some comments him or herself.
7. After about 15 minutes, ask people to sit silently and review the highlights of the discussion so that they can continue to reflect on these points later. Then offer the closing aspiration:

*May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes. May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes. May all sentient beings not be separated from sorrowless bliss. May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment, and anger.*



## CHAPTER 2

# Understanding Your Internal Life

### **Acceptance**

As we come to recognize painful ways of thinking or harmful behaviors, it is important to do so with a mind of acceptance and understanding, not one of judgment.

1. Do you find it easy to wish yourself to be well and happy?
2. What kinds of self-judgments interfere with wishing yourself to be well and happy?
3. What ideas do you have for how to be kind to yourself—how to accept yourself as you are, to know that you are good enough and that you can grow and change in the future?

## **Resistance**

As we learn and begin to apply methods found in this booklet, we might experience resistance.

1. What takes you away from developing your good heart?
2. What is the content of your self-talk? Do you put yourself down?
3. Recognize that all those self-deprecating thoughts are the work of ego and let them go like a burning iron. Recognize that they are false.
4. What are some ideas that you could contemplate that are meaningful to you? Remember that the nature of your mind is fundamentally pure and encourage yourself to continue.

## FEELINGS AND NEEDS

Recognizing our feelings helps us to take responsibility for our emotions without blaming others for our unhappiness or thinking others are the source of our misery. The emotions in the survey on page 11 also manifest in our behavior. They describe what is alive for us at a particular moment.

Look at the two words on each line. Which one best describes how you feel in general? Put an X on the number that best describes how you feel about the word you picked. 5 indicates that you mostly feel this way and 1 that you usually don't feel this way. When you complete this survey, draw a line from each X starting with A down to I. This is for you to see what your current outlook is. If you would like to get an idea of what your positive and gloomy outlooks are, just turn the page so that the gloomy words are along the bottom. The shaded area represents the neutral zone. Above that is

a more positive outlook and below zero is a more gloomy perspective. The result is for your information, to do with as you please.

A	Angry	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Accepting
B	Unappreciative	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Grateful
C	Dissatisfied	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Content
D	Anxious	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Relaxed
E	Lonely	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Connected
F	Tired	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Energetic
G	Confused	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Focused
H	Restless	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Peaceful
I	Insecure	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	Confident

### **Predicting happiness**

How often do you accurately predict how you will feel? Do you understand what brings happiness and what brings unhappiness?

1. Write down three things that you predict will make you happy.
2. Imagine those situations happening.
3. Now ask yourself, “How happy did this thing or event make me? How long did this happiness last?”
4. How long does the happiness last? Why does it cease?
5. What have you learned from this reflection?

### **Predicting unhappiness**

1. Write down three things that you predict will make you unhappy.
2. Imagine those situations happening.
3. Now ask yourself, “Will I really be as unhappy as I thought, if this happens? What resources inside me can I call upon to help me make the best of the situation? Are there people I can ask for help?”

4. What have you learned from this?

**Met and unmet needs**

What needs, values or desires are connected to the feelings you have identified? Needs are universal, but the strategies we employ to meet them might change depending on various factors. When needs are met, we feel positive emotions; when they are not met, we feel gloomy emotions.

Look at each need listed in the chart. Put an X on the number that best describes how well that need is being met in you at present. 5 indicates that need is being met consistently, 1 means it is not met at all.

Connection	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Acceptance	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Autonomy	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Trust	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Purpose	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Clarity	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Play/Joy	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Honesty	1	2	3	4	5	Met
Peace	1	2	3	4	5	Met

**Non-negotiables and needs**

1. What are your non-negotiables, the things that you feel you need in your life to be happy and that you don't want to give up?
2. How do these differ from your needs?
3. What are you afraid will happen if you don't have your non-negotiables?
4. What resources do you have inside of yourself and in your environment to deal with not having your non-negotiables?



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Then examine: What needs are frequently or consistently met? What feelings arise when these needs are met? Mark the boxes that correspond to the fulfilled needs and the associated feelings. Use the same method for marking the boxes as above.

	Connection	Acceptance	Autonomy	Trust	Purpose	Clarity	Play / Joy	Honesty	Peace
Joyful									
Grateful									
Content									
Relaxed									
Friendly									
Energetic									
Focused									
Peaceful									
Confident									

Now, we'll investigate the unhappiness and suffering that we all experience, not to make us discouraged, but to clearly see the reality of our situation. We'll begin by looking at pain, illness, death, and problems in general.

### **Response to Unhappiness and Suffering**

1. How do you usually respond to your unhappiness or suffering?
2. What would it be like to respond without self-pity? Without anger? Without blame?
3. What ideas do you have of new ways to respond to feelings of unhappiness (this is the feelings, not the situation that they arose in)?

## **Pain**

1. Have you had more physical or emotional pain in your life?
2. How do you react to physical pain? Do you get angry at it, your body, or the causes of the pain? Do you shut down? Do you get overwhelmed by fear, anxiety, or worry?
3. How do you react to emotional pain? Do you seek distraction? Do you use or abuse substances to self-medicate the pain? Do you sit in self-pity? Do you vent it on others?
4. Pain is part of the situation of being in cyclic existence. How can you accept pain and deal with it skillfully?
5. How can you use pain to your cultivation of virtuous qualities?

## **Illness**

1. What is your experience of illness? How does physical sickness affect your mind and emotions? How does your mental state affect your health?
2. How do you feel about aging? Is it frightening? Consoling? Both? What benefits and disadvantages do you see with aging?
3. What aspects of aging give you the most difficulty? How does this relate to attachment?
4. Change, especially aging and death, can be difficult to deal with. How can we look at these events so that they help us on the path?

## **Death**

1. What experiences have you had with death? Have people close to you died? How did that affect you?
2. When you think about the people near and dear to you dying, how do you feel?
3. What are your feelings about your own death?
4. How can reflecting on death improve the quality of your life?

## **Problems (self-reflection)**

1. Keep a journal of daily problems.
2. Once you have a few, go back to the first day's problem.
3. Does this problem still affect you? If not, rejoice.
4. If you are still experiencing this problem, give yourself empathy.

## **Problems (group activity)**

1. Write down a problem you have on a card.
2. Form a group of 3 to 4 people.
3. Place the cards in the center of the group and take another person's problem.
4. Speak as if you owned the other person's problem.
5. Other members of the group then give you empathy regarding the problem.

## **OPINIONS**

Another aspect of our internal life is our thoughts and ideas about people, topics, and situations. We believe that our

opinions are accurate, but are they? Is having so many opinions useful or does it make us judgmental and critical of others? Let's explore.

1. What topics/people do you tend to have a lot of opinions about?
2. What conditioning—schools, family, friends, etc.—did we have that developed the tendency within us to have many opinions?
3. How do we tell the difference between an opinion and a useful idea?
4. What are the results in our life of holding many opinions?

### **It could be good or it could be bad**

We often assign a permanent label of good or bad to a current situation, place, feeling, person, political or religious view, and so on, when in fact we really don't know for certain if these things will always be good or bad. Nothing is set in stone as things change over time due to causes and conditions. One person may have had a perfect life until an accident or loss of fortune changes all that. Another person could have experienced a horrific upbringing, prison, or war but ended up successful and happy. In either case, the situation they were initially in was not guaranteed to exist throughout their life. In addition, good and bad are irrelevant in relation to what is actually going to happen in the next moment.

It is important to accept the fact that nothing is permanent and that our current condition is subject to change. How we view that flux is critical to our overall well-being. If we become attached to the things that we label as good, we set ourselves up for disappointment when the object of our attachment no longer exists. If we are attached to the idea that

everything in our life or everything about us is bad, we miss the frequent opportunities for contentment that are possible in each moment. The following is an old story that exemplifies the various shades of good and bad.

Long ago, in a kingdom far, far away there lived a farmer and his son who were very poor. They lived on a small piece of land and earned enough money by cutting wood and selling vegetables.

One morning when they woke up they were surprised to find a beautiful stallion in their corral. The farmer and his son could not figure out where the majestic horse came from but took care of it as well as they could. Soon people in the surrounding countryside heard about the farmer's good fortune and came to see the stallion for themselves. They were all envious and said to the farmer, "You are so fortunate to have such a magnificent animal."

The farmer replied, "Maybe. It could be good or it could be bad."

A couple of days later when the farmer and his son went to check on the horse, it was gone. The neighbors came by and saw that the stallion had disappeared and said, "This is very unlucky for you, Farmer. Now you have nothing again."

The farmer responded, "It could be good or it could be bad."

The very next morning the farmer and his son heard a noise outside their cabin and rushed out to see that the stallion had returned along with three strong, healthy mares. It didn't take long for the neighbors to hear about this and they hurried over to the farmer's place to see for themselves. When they saw all four animals crowded in the farmer's small corral they all began telling the farmer how fortunate he was to be so rich.

In response the farmer simply said, “It could be good or it could be bad.”

A few days later the son decided to ride the stallion. The animal was skittish and bucked him off. The son landed hard on a rock and broke a leg and an arm. The neighbors heard about the accident and came over to console the farmer in his tragedy. Now the farmer didn’t have any help with all the chores.

The farmer shrugged and said, “It could be good or it could be bad.”

About that time a war had started in a distant land and the king needed to raise an army to go and fight in the war. He and his knights went around the countryside gathering up all the strong, healthy young men for his army. The farmer’s son was the only young man spared from having to fight in the war. When the king and his army had gone, the neighbors living around the farmer came by to express their sadness over the fact that their sons were mustered into the army. They said, “Our sons have gone to fight in a war and many will never come back. You are so fortunate that your son was hurt and couldn’t go.”

The farmer only looked at them and said, “It could be good or it could be bad.”

We never know where good fortune or suffering will eventually lead us. What is certain though is that change, good or bad, can be miraculous because it can take us out of our complacency and it forces us to look at life with fresh eyes. Like the story of the farmer and his son, view whatever you are going through right now as, “It could be good or it could be bad.” How you view things is entirely up to you. Be aware that your perspective on events influences your experience of them, whether you are happy or unhappy.



## Stinkin' Thinkin'

Thinking errors<sup>1</sup> are unreasonable patterns of thinking that can cause you to feel bad and sometimes act in self-defeating ways. Some of the most common ones are: black and white thinking, unfairly comparing yourself to others so that you come out less than, focusing on the unpleasant aspects of a situation, taking things personally that aren't meant that way, projecting negative motivations on others, exaggerating or underestimating the consequences of an action or words spoken to you, thinking that your feelings or thoughts about something are facts about it, and isolating someone by calling them a name. For each of these thinking errors, ask yourself:

1. How has this one manifested in my life? How has it caused me harm? Identify specific situations and specific ways of thinking.
2. How has it caused me to harm others?
3. What ideas do you have for counteracting it and learning to look at yourself, others, and situations

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<sup>1</sup> This explanation of thinking errors is based on *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. More information can be found at <http://us.reachout.com/facts/factsheet/common-thinking-errors>.

more realistically? Be specific.

An example of stinkin' thinkin' in a prison setting is how inmates view officers as the enemy and believe that none of the officers care about them. Because of their training, the dangers of this place, and friendliness toward prisoners being frowned upon, it may appear that the officers do not care about inmates. Some may genuinely not care; some may have a chip on their shoulder and see inmates as an easy target for their anger. But officers are also fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sons, and daughters. And just because someone mistreats inmates does not mean we have to reciprocate by having negative emotions toward them.

Sometimes we have stinkin' thinkin' toward other inmates when we view men who committed sex crimes as bottom feeders or the lowest of the low in prison. There is distorted thinking when we view murderers and drug dealers as being in the upper echelon. There is no real way to rank people and we shouldn't judge each other strictly by the crimes that we committed, how tough we are, or how big we may be.

Thinking errors are irrational patterns of thinking that can cause you to feel bad and sometimes act in self-defeating ways. If you feel increasingly upset whenever you think about a particular situation, you may want to consider the possibility of thinking in a different way.

### **The effect of challenging thinking errors**

What is the effect of challenging your thinking errors? It can make you feel better and encourage you to change some of your behavior.

Remember: When you're feeling down, try to examine your thoughts. If they're negative or critical, try challenging

them. Once you get into the habit of disputing your negative self-talk, you'll find it easier to handle difficult situations, and as a result, you'll feel less stressed and more confident and in control.

### **Write it down**

It can be useful to write down the changes that occur after you've challenged your thinking, as this helps you see the advantages of working on your thoughts, and motivates you to keep at it. While you're learning to identify and challenge your thinking patterns, it's a good idea to write it all down in a diary or notebook to help you to develop your skills. Initially it might feel like work, but the more often you do it, the easier it will become, and the better you will feel.

### **Try it out**

Now that you know a few common thinking errors and how to challenge them, why don't you try it out? It might not be easy at first, and it can take some time. But the rewards can be huge! People who choose the way they think about things, are at peace with the past, live in the present, and are optimistic about the future are generally happier.

Below are some common thinking errors and ways to challenge them.

## **(1) Black-and-White Thinking**

When you're thinking in black-and-white, you see everything in terms of being either good or bad with nothing in between. For example: Either you're great or you're a loser; if you don't look like a model, you must be ugly; if you do something wrong, then you are completely bad.

**The challenge: Look for shades of gray.**

It's important to avoid thinking about things in terms of extremes. Most things aren't black-and-white, but somewhere in-between. Just because something isn't completely perfect doesn't mean that it's a total disaster.

**Ask yourself:**

1. Is it really so bad, or am I seeing things in black-and-white?
2. How else can I think about the situation?
3. Am I taking an extreme view?

**Polar opposites**

A thinking error that nearly everyone engages in at one time or another is dualistic or polarized thinking. There are thousands of combinations such as black or white, good or bad, smart or stupid, hero or zero; you name it. This type of thinking seldom works in reality. For example, a person living all his life on the North Pole calls his friend on the South Pole who has lived her entire life there and says, "Hey Sue, you should come up here because the weather is beautiful, and you'll enjoy it far more than where you live now. In fact, it is the best place to live in the world." Sue laughs and suggests that he come down to the South Pole and see how good life can really be, "The weather is better, it is beautiful, and you'll enjoy it far more than where you live now. It is the best place to live in the world."

Both live on the same planet but on opposite poles. Who is right and who is wrong? Neither one. The truth to this puzzle lays in all the places and spaces in the middle. There is a whole world out there, and if either person traveled to other

places, they may both conclude that they prefer a region near the equator. Every opinion, every view, idea, or concept can be challenged to some degree by experience, knowledge, a willingness to listen, and a bit of wisdom.

Our polar friends may prefer to live in their respective locations, but it is doubtful that it actually is “the best place to live in the world.” Billions of other people living between the poles would disagree with them.

Our perspective is colored by numerous influences such as habits, culture, upbringing, religion, and so on. If we have no education, don't travel, and have never experienced anything outside our immediate vicinity, our opinions may be different than someone who has vast knowledge and experience. But that does not make one view automatically right compared to the other. The educated one may think that taking advantage of people for personal gain is acceptable, whereas the less experienced person may view that opinion as being totally unacceptable based on principle. We bring our knowledge and experience to any situation. Unless we are actively engaged in stretching our perspective to examine all sides of an issue before settling on an opinion, we will likely not see the various shades of gray that are always present. In the yin-yang symbol, there is a little white in the black and a little black in the white. Everything contains at least a small element of the opposite. There cannot be darkness without light, and there cannot be light without darkness. Nothing is absolute; there are many shades of gray and more often than not, we all function to some degree between brilliant black and brilliant white.

When we lose a job, or our partner dumps us, or some other tragedy hits home, at that moment it feels like the end of the world and like life is at its lowest point. We think noth-

ing good can possibly come out of something like that. But in the end, there is always a better job; a career could blossom from being forced out of our comfort zone and seeking something more rewarding. The chance that the person who dumped us was the most perfect person for us out of seven billion people on this earth is less likely than us winning the Mega Lottery three times in a row. When tragedy hits—and by the way, no one is immune—there is always something positive that could come out of it. The trick is to look beyond our pain to see it. It's there.

### **“Shoulding” and Aspiring**

1. Name three things that you tell yourself you should or shouldn't do—things that you can get pretty hard on yourself and self-critical about.
2. What is the effect of “shoulding” yourself? How does it feel inside? Does it change the behavior?
3. Say the same statements to yourself, but instead of “should,” say “I aspire to....” Sit with the new statement for a while.
4. How do you feel when you say, “I aspire to...”?

## **(2) Exaggerating and Minimalizing**

Exaggerating has many aspects: (1) Catastrophizing is when things go wrong, we exaggerate the consequences and imagine that the results will be disastrous. (2) Magnifying and minimalizing means we blow some aspects of a situation out of proportion or downplay significant factors in order to free ourselves of responsibility.

**The challenge: Put it in perspective.**

Ask yourself:

1. What's the worst that can happen?
2. What's the best that can happen?
3. What's most likely to happen?
4. Will this matter in five years?
5. Is there anything good about the situation?
6. Is there any way to fix the situation?

**Fear**

1. What things, people, situations, ideas, etc. are you afraid of?
2. How does that fear affect your life? How does it manifest in the decisions you make and what you do?
3. To what extent is each fear realistic? What are some other ways you could look at the things that make you afraid?

**Attachment**

Attachment is an excellent example of exaggerating and minimalizing. We exaggerate someone or something's good qualities or project good qualities that aren't there, and we also minimize their faults. Attachment then desires and clings to the object of our attention, which has become an idealized person or object fabricated by our mind. We see whoever or whatever we desire as permanent, pleasurable, pure, and existing in and of itself.

While attachment initially may bring us a giddy high when we get what we desire, it soon leads to suffering because we become separated from the object of attachment or disillusioned when we realize the person or object doesn't

have all the excellent qualities we projected on them. The stronger our attachment, the stronger our grief and anger when things don't work out the way we wanted.

Letting go of attachment doesn't mean becoming numb or detached. Rather, non-attachment is a balanced state of mind that can enjoy things and connect with people without craving or longing.

Releasing attachment can be challenging because our society encourages us to be attached to people and things. Advertisements, peer pressure, social pressure, lust, loneliness, and plain selfishness all contribute to our thinking attachment will bring us true happiness, when in fact it doesn't.

### **Disadvantages of attachment**

Here are some disadvantages to attachment that most of us can agree on if we look honestly at our own experience. Reflecting on the disadvantages of attachment helps us stop becoming attached to people or things that lack the ability to bring us lasting happiness.

1. Attachment breeds dissatisfaction and frustration because we continually want more and better. This prevents us from enjoying what we have.
2. Attachment causes us to go up or down emotionally according to whether we have what we're attached to or not.
3. Attachment motivates us to connive, manipulate, and plot to get what we want. We act hypocritically with ulterior motivations, damaging our relationship with others.
4. Attachment motivates us to act unethically to get what we are attached to, thus harming others and increasing our own sense of self-hatred and guilt.

5. Attachment causes us to waste our lives chasing after pleasures, none of which we can take with us when we die. Meanwhile, our potential to develop inner qualities such as love, compassion, generosity, fortitude, and wisdom goes untapped.
6. When we are strongly attached to something or someone, we become disappointed and angry if we don't get it or are separated from it.
7. Attachment causes us to fear not getting what we want or need. It also causes us to fear losing what we have.

### **Objects of Attachment**

1. What things, people, or category of things most trigger attachment in you, i.e. trigger the feelings of wanting and needing, the fear of loss, the fear of rejection or abandonment?
2. Pick a specific example and then examine, "When I'm wanting this person or thing, what is the feeling tone in my mind? What is happening in my body?"
3. What is the result you imagine will come from getting what you want? What has been your actual experience when you have gotten it?
4. What ideas do you have for counteracting attachment in this situation? What aspirations can you set for learning to do this?

(Note: This same meditation can be done substituting anger, resentment, jealousy, and other disturbing emotions in place of attachment.)

### **Disadvantages of clinging with attachment to another person**

When viewed by uninvolved observers, it would appear that a person with clinging attachment is an attentive and caring companion. This person makes the object of his attention the center of his universe. All his time, energy, and resources are directly or indirectly funneled in trying to anticipate the needs of the person he values so much. Some people would even envy the recipient, who seems to be fortunate to receive such a high level of dedication and care. But underneath it all there is a darker aspect to this type of relationship. The driving motivation in this overindulgence in another person's existence is fulfilling one's own personal needs. The recipient of this "caring attention" is just a conduit toward that aim.

The overly-attached friend may be someone who is lonely, insecure, and usually suffering from looking for guidance. Or it may be someone who seems to be lively and fun, but is attached to pleasure, be it physical or emotional. Initially, this relationship seems to work well because both parties are getting the attention they want, but eventually one person's desire for independence will run into the needs of the other person who fears abandonment, leading to conflict.

On the surface, we could think that this type of symbiotically mutual relationship would work. However, as time goes on, the recipient of this type of attention is robbed of the freedom to be themselves. Codependency and loyalty eventually prevent the recipient from establishing their own identity and feeling their own feelings. Instead, they live as an extension of the other person by mimicking that person's behavior and methods. Devoid of their own personality and feelings, the recipient become a "people pleaser" who both depends on and fears the wrath of the other person.

### **Examples of attachment**

Everyone wants to be happy. Unfortunately most people equate happiness with obtaining things, having sex, being somewhere else, or making money. All these things are like fairy dust; they only provide the illusion of happiness. None of it guarantees that happiness will be the outcome; none of it grants us lasting happiness. In fact all these things fill our minds with disturbing emotions in the long run. The following stories are examples of ways that attachment and craving for things, places, reputation, praise, or money can bring a host of negative consequences and cause us suffering.

#### **The Car**

Ever since Larry was 12, he wanted to own a 1968 Mercury Cougar XR7. His interest in the car became an obsession when he saw one at a car show that he and his father attended. It was cherry red and perfectly restored inside and out. Right then he made it his goal to buy one just like it when he was old enough. He adorned his room with posters of various models of the Cougar but conspicuously covering the door to his room was a poster of the cherry red 1968 Mercury Cougar XR7. He felt that getting this car would make him perfectly happy. As he grew older, he never tired of looking at that poster. Larry spent every weekend and every summer working at any odd job he could get and doing chores to earn money, which he faithfully put in the bank.

When he was 16, he got his driver's license and promptly began to search for the car of his dreams. After an exhaustive search, he chanced upon an online listing for a red, 1968 Mercury Cougar XR7 with a black vinyl top. The asking price was \$17,500, just about \$1500 more than he had so diligently worked to earn. Larry approached his father to ask

him for a loan, promising to pay it back. "I'd be the happiest kid in the world if could buy this car," he explained to his father, who knew that his son had saved for years to buy his first car. Not just any car but a 1968 Mercury Cougar XR7! He gave his son the money, and Larry bought the car. As he proudly drove it home, all his friends admired it. Larry was indeed very happy, and before he went to bed he looked out the window, gazing at his car in the driveway.

Exhausted by all the excitement, he went to bed with a big smile on his face and laid there staring into the dark. Just as he was starting to fall asleep, he suddenly sat up in bed and turned on his bedside lamp. His heart was pounding as he got up to look out the window at his car. "What if someone steals it?" he wondered anxiously. Now that he had his dream car, he worried about losing it to thieves. The more he thought about all the people who could steal the car, the more worried he became, until all the joy he experienced earlier that day had evaporated.

Soon he began thinking about other things that could happen. He could accidentally wreck the car or an uninsured driver could total it. Or it could be vandalized or the engine could blow, or any number of things could happen to the car. Larry was miserable worrying about the car. It got so bad that it negatively affected his health, his social interactions, and his schoolwork.

Finally, he decided to sell his Cougar to an eager buyer who was willing to purchase the car for \$800 more than he had bought it for. Larry was glad to come out ahead in the transaction and was relieved to be free of all the worry the car had brought him. A few weeks later he bought a used VW Golf that was just a few years old and ran very well. He even had money left over, which he put in his bank account.

The happiness he sought by owning the Cougar only lasted for a moment.

*Reflection:*

1. Have the things you've bought brought you sustained happiness?
2. What problems did these things bring?
3. In your experience, what is the difference between the thought of something and the reality of having it?

### **The Perfect Beach**

When Daniel was a young man, he went to Portugal in the winter with some friends for a month-long vacation. They didn't have a lot of money, so the plan was to stay at a campsite and use it as a base camp to explore the surrounding area. They flew to Lisbon and stayed there for a couple of nights to acclimate while enjoying the sights, food, and listening to Fado music late into the night. They headed south to the historic resort town of Lagos in the Algarve and found Camping Valverde just seven kilometers outside the town. There they rented a bungalow for the month. It was early February and the adjacent countryside teemed with the scent of geraniums, camellias, and oleander growing alongside fig, orange, and almond trees. The air was fresh with the Atlantic Ocean only a few minutes walking distance away and the temperature was comfortable both day and night. Everything was perfect.

Camping Valverde was pretty much self-contained. There was a large swimming pool with lounge chairs situated around the pool. The campground had a bar, restaurant, and cafe, a curio shop, and a disco. Although Camping Valverde could accommodate hundreds of tourists, fortu-

nately for them, it was not crowded during their visit. Most of the people staying there were young people from Britain, Australia, and Scandinavia, with a sprinkle of representatives from other European countries.

Daniel and his two friends, Ash and Ed, immediately got into the rhythm of the lifestyle in southern Portugal. They discovered that if you went to the market early in the morning, you could get the best vegetables and fruit and freshest seafood at astonishingly low prices. They also learned to buy their daily bread from local farmers who had their own wood-fired ovens, often charging the equivalent of a postage stamp for a large, crusty loaf. After putting their food purchases away, they would spend the entire day at the beaches sprinkled all around Lagos and west to Selema. The water at the edge of the shore was the color of crystal-clear emerald. Further out from shore, the color changed to shades of blue ranging from aquamarine to cobalt. The sand was soft and nearly golden. The tourists sunning on the beaches seemed to be as content and relaxed as Daniel and his friends were.

Every few days, instead of barbecuing or cooking at the camp grounds, they would go out to dinner and partake of traditional Portuguese dishes which usually led to being invited by locals to Fado music or wine tasting accompanied by music and dance. The three friends visited the 16th-century fortress at Sagres and the magnificent views from Cape St. Vincent where 200-foot cliffs plunge into the Atlantic. At night they often were invited to someone's campsite where people from various countries would gather to share stories and sing.

All too soon, the trip ended and the three friends went home. For Daniel, that trip left an indelible mark; he remembered it as the time he was most happy. As the years passed,

Daniel would often think about that time in Portugal, its fresh ocean air, the good food, the fun he had and the people he met.

\*\*Daniel promised himself to return one day, mainly because he wanted to feel that exquisite sense of happiness once more. Many years later, he decided that he was running out of time and if he did not go back to the Algarve soon, he never would. Having lost contact with his old friends, he went alone. Lisbon had lost some of its luster. Dinner by himself was a lonely affair, and the food was not as he remembered. He went to Lagos and found Camping Valverde, only this time it was run by another family, and it seemed a bit shabby compared to his memory of it. But he rented the same bungalow as before and was soon back on the beach of his memories. As he sat there looking out at the Atlantic and the ever-changing hues of blue and green, he felt extremely lonely and out-of-place. The happiness he sought to revive from years ago only existed in the moment it occurred. It was no longer.

*Reflection:*

1. Have you ever tried to recreate a pleasurable experience from the past? How did it turn out? Did it live up to your expectations?
2. When pleasant memories arise, try to rejoice at your previous happiness without clinging to it. Send that happiness out to people in the world who lack happiness and wish them well. Enjoy the pleasant feeling of imagining others to be happy.
3. Go to \*\* in Daniel's story and rewrite the ending by applying one of the antidotes to attachment. Rewrite it incorporating beneficial ways of thinking and a

more realistic perspective.

### **Lovers**

Monika's eyes were the kind of blue that made you take a second look. In the sunlight, they were reminiscent of tropical waters; at night, the color of her eyes was similar to the clear summer sky at dusk. But Monika's eyes were not the only striking thing about her. She and her younger brother had blond hair, and both were attractive by almost anyone's standard. Her parents had moved the family to America years earlier from Norway to take advantage of specialized job offers in the tech industry. Monika and her brother adjusted to American schools well and over the years lost any sign of their Norwegian accent. Both were popular and had many friends. When Monika went to college, she enrolled in theater where she met Marc, a self-effacing Afro-American who exuded an aura of confidence and resolve. From the beginning, Monika thought he was intriguing and extremely handsome, but there was something about him that didn't invite casual conversation. What Monika didn't know at the time was that Marc was totally captivated by her beauty and charm but felt that she would not have any reason to be interested in him. For an entire semester they avoided each other while clandestinely admiring everything that the other was saying or doing.

During winter break between Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, the theater troupe went on a ski trip designed to help bring the group together and build some esprit de corps. Men and women were housed in separate cabins but shared meals at the cafeteria. During their first morning on the slopes while everyone else was skiing, Marc found a sunny spot on the deck of the massive ski lodge, and plunked down

on a lounge chair to read and occasionally watch skiers and snowboarders whiz by.

An hour later a shadow blocked the sun, forcing Marc out of his comfortable slumber to look up to see Monika standing in front of him. She was looking exceptionally attractive in the cold sunny air with rosy cheeks and red lips. Her golden hair flowed out from underneath a black ski cap patterned with snowflakes. Moments earlier Monika had been buying some hot chocolate from the vendor on the deck when she spotted Marc stretched out in a lounge chair with a book open on his chest. With his eyes hidden by wrap-around shades, she couldn't tell if he was awake or not. For a couple of minutes she studied him from where she stood. His features were fine and relaxed. Something stirred within her as she approached Marc's chair. She stood next to him when he suddenly moved and looked up in her direction. He smiled, which prompted Monika to say, "Hey Marc, want some hot chocolate?" Marc laughed and said, "No thanks, I really don't care for hot chocolate." He invited Monika to sit down next to him. Both of them felt a rush of warmth and strong sexual desire at the same time.

\*\*At that moment, Marc thought that he would be happy if he could make love to Monika just once. Monika thought that Marc would make a nice lover. That fleeting thought made her feel happy. They began to date, and two months later, they slept together, feeling very happy when their desire was fulfilled.

Soon afterwards, something changed for both of them. The excitement that they had felt about each other seemed to have faded. The happiness that they felt initially had faded too. In fact, they both felt emotions that were the opposite of happiness, but could not explain what was causing it. Marc

felt guilt and shame for being so shallow and craving to have sex with Monika. Monika felt shame and guilt for being so shallow for wanting to have sex with Marc. The happiness they sought through physical contact only lasted as long as that moment.

*Reflection:*

1. Thinking back on past romantic relationships, what is the difference between physical sexual desire and a deeper emotional connection?
2. When you have been drawn to someone only because of their looks, how did it turn out?
3. Go to \*\* in the story and rewrite the ending by describing an outcome that would result if an antidote to attachment were applied to the situation.

**Antidotes to attachment**

Fortunately, there are antidotes to attachment that bring calm to our minds. These antidotes involve changing our perspective about either the situation or the object of our attachment. The attitude we want to cultivate as an antidote to attachment is a balanced, realistic state of mind, a mental state that can appreciate the present moment without craving to prolong or recreate it. By eliminating the exaggerations and projections we put on a person or object, we can relate to them in a more balanced way. Free of grasping and obsession, we can care for and love others in a healthy way, and we can use possessions without possessiveness, arrogance, or worry of losing them.

The points below are for repeated reflection. An intellectual understanding of them alone will not yield the force necessary to stop destructive patterns. We must reflect on

these points again and again by making examples of them in our own lives.

It is important to distinguish between attachment and love. Love wishes someone to have happiness and its causes. There are no strings attached in genuine love. This is not easy to cultivate, but it's beneficial to go in this direction. Attachment is attracted to the other person because they do something for us. As long as they please us, we love them; but when they don't, we become angry and may harm the person we "love."

### **Attachment to people**

1. Attachment and love are different emotions, although our feelings for a particular person may be a mixture of both.
2. What is the difference between loving someone and being attached to him or her? Imagine how each one would feel.
3. How does your attachment and the expectations it creates in you interfere with you loving another person—be it your parent, child, friend, or romantic partner?
4. Do you see the person you're attached to realistically? What are that person's bad habits? What are their limitations?
5. Is it realistic to think that your relationship with this person will last forever? Will this person live forever?
6. Imagine loving that person just for who they are, not because they make you feel good or help you.

The antidote to attachment is deceptively simple: Wish yourself to be well and happy, not in a selfish way, but because you respect and care for yourself as one of many beings on this earth. Gradually spread this wish to family, loved ones, and friends; then to strangers, difficult people, and to those who have harmed you. This is the true expression of love without attachment. If this becomes your daily practice, the chances of falling into the attachment traps will be vastly reduced.

### **Attachment to money and possessions**

Another common attachment is attachment to money. How we use our money says much about our priorities in life. Let's investigate.

1. What kinds of things do you spend money on?
2. How much is spent on things that you later realized you didn't want or need?
3. Consider a recent purchase you made for more than \$200:
  - a. Besides the object itself, what else were you hoping to get from the purchase (reputation, pleasure, comfort, happiness, status, fulfillment, etc.)?
  - b. How did you feel at the moment you bought it? A month later? Now?
  - c. Were your hopes and expectations regarding the purchase met?
4. Imagine seeing money for what it is: pieces of paper that we can trade for useful objects.

### **Priorities and money**

1. List the ten most significant things you've done or acquired in the past three years.
2. Rank them according to their importance to you and the difference they've made in your life, with 1 the lowest value or importance in your life and 10 the highest.
3. Rank them again, this time in terms of how much they cost, with 1 the lowest, and 10 the highest.
4. Compare how these things rank. If an item ranks higher in importance than it does in cost, then it was money well spent. However, if an item ranks higher in cost than it does in importance, then it is worth considering if you would want to make a similar purchase in the future.

### **(3) Over-generalizing**

When we over-generalize, we come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happens once, we expect it to happen over and over again. We exaggerate the frequency of negative things in our lives, like mistakes, disapproval and failures. We might think that we always make mistakes or that people never give us a fair chance. Mulling over these thoughts, we fall into depression and self-pity.

**The challenge: Be specific.**

Ask yourself:

- Am I over-generalizing?
- What are the facts? What are my interpretations?

### **Bad moods**

1. We all get in bad moods. What type of situation or what way of thinking often precedes a bad mood?
2. What patterns of interpretation—what ways of thinking—get activated in those situations? What emotional patterns are sparked?
3. How do you act when you're in a bad mood? Do you take it out on others? Do you self-medicate through alcohol, drugs, shopping, TV, gambling, or other activities?
4. How do your actions affect your family, colleagues, friends, and others around you?
5. What ideas do you have for how to work with your bad moods, by mitigating the harmful behavior, lessening the bad mood, or letting go of the mood itself?

### **Self-pity**

1. What is self-pity? How does it function in your life? How do you feel and act?
2. What types of things lead you to feel sorry for yourself?
3. What is the result of self-pity? How does it affect the rest of your life?
4. What are some ways you can work with self-pity? How else could you see the situation? What else could you do?

## **(4) Can't Stand-it-itis**

Some people become irritated when they have to do things they don't enjoy. They tell themselves that they "can't stand" certain things instead of acknowledging that they don't enjoy them. As a result, they easily become frustrated and angry.

**The challenge: Accept that frustration is a normal part of life.**

### **Reflect:**

- I don't enjoy it, but I can stand it.
- This is a hassle, and that's OK! Life is full of hassles.

### **Judgments**

1. Think of a situation in which you were upset.
2. Listen to how you describe the situation.
3. Now separate the observable facts from the story you told to explain them.
4. What did you learn about your evaluations and judgments?

### **Anger**

1. What kind of situations do you get angry in?
2. How do you behave when you're angry?
3. What ideas do you have for how to work with your anger?

## **(5) Fact versus feeling**

Perception is influenced by our thoughts. It is fairly easy to confuse thoughts and feelings with reality, which can result in embarrassment at the very least or put us in precarious situations. Our thoughts, opinions, and mental formations about whatever we encounter during the day can be momentary and easily discarded, or they can be monumental and cause apprehension, fear, or worse. They can also make us feel happy or cause us to misjudge people or situations.

Reality is in direct relation to the facts. We tend to apply feelings (likes and dislikes) first and then our thoughts (rationalizing) to almost everything we encounter. This leads to forming opinions, which are not always correct. For this reason, it is important when making critical decisions to investigate every aspect of the subject before coming to a conclusion. Even then we should keep the mind open for other viewpoints because we may not have had all the facts in the first place.

Sometimes we confuse our thoughts or feelings with reality. We assume that our perceptions are correct. We believe that what we feel must automatically be true. If we feel stupid and boring, then we must be stupid and boring.

**The challenge: Stick to the facts.**

Ask yourself:

- Am I confusing my feelings with the facts? Just because I'm feeling this way, does that mean my perceptions are correct?
- Am I thinking this way just because I'm feeling bad right now?

### **The Train Ride**

A young executive was trying to move up in his company by working late and during the weekends. Every day he got up early to catch the train to get to the office in New York City where he worked as a legal intern. Many nights, he caught the last train back to his home miles from the city. Weekends were more difficult because there weren't as many trains, and the few passengers always looked like he felt—sad and worn out.

One Saturday, he decided to leave work earlier than usual and caught the 5:45 out of the city. He settled in his seat for the long ride home with a copy of *The New York Times* to keep him company. Outside, rain pounded the dirty window, forming horizontal streaks as the train sped north away from the wet city. At every stop, passengers got off but no one got on until he was over halfway to his destination. By that time he was the only one left in his car. This was his favorite part of the train ride. Alone and quiet, with only the rhythmic sound of wheels clacking on the rails, he closed his eyes and felt sleep closing in on him.

At the next stop, a nicely dressed man and three small children entered the car. The young man peered resentfully at the intruders and noticed that the kids were dressed as if they had been in church. The man, who was obviously their father, found a seat at the far end of the car and immediately stared out the window as the train left the small station. The children sat with him for a few minutes but soon became bored and began jumping from seat to seat and running up and down the aisle screaming loudly in the kind of high pitch vocals that only the young seem to manage.

The young man looked down the car at the father who continued to stare out of the window at the gray, wet day. He

seemed not to notice that his kids were running amuck, and the piercing noise they made didn't faze him a bit. "How rude," the young man thought, "That man can't control his kids and doesn't even care! Those children are horrible!"

Then one of the children stopped at his seat and looked at him. The other two kids came over to see what this stranger had to offer.

"What's your name?" the first child asked, "Where do you live? How old are you? Do you have a dog? What's his name?" The questions of these three irritating children pounded him.

"Go away and leave me alone!" he shouted, waving his arms and causing the newspaper to flutter in disarray around him. His response caused the opposite reaction. The kids all ran away squealing louder than before. They quickly returned, looking for another response. One child even had the nerve to try and climb on his lap! That was it, the young man had enough. He quickly got up and walked down the aisle to the father who was still looking out of the window.

"Excuse me, sir," the young man said.

The father jerked a bit as if he had been asleep and turned his head to look at the man staring angrily down at him.

"Yes," he said hoarsely.

"Are these your kids?" pointing to the other end of the car where the three children were hopping over the seats and still screaming.

The father stared their way for a moment and with a sad look on his face said, "Yes, they are."

"Well, would you do something to control them? They're behaving terribly," the young man snapped.

"I'm sorry," the father apologized, shaking his head, "We just buried their mother, my wife." A sob escaped him

but he immediately recovered and said, “The kids behaved so well all day long, I don’t think they fully understand what all this means. What will we do now? How are we going to go on?” He turned his head and continued staring out the window.

The young man murmured, “Sorry,” and returned to his seat. One by one he gathered up the three children and introduced a new game similar to hide-n-seek to them. The kids squealed in delight and ran from seat to seat unabashedly jumping from his seat to the next for most of the trip. When they grew tired of the game he brought out pencils, pens, and paper, and they drew funny pictures the rest of the way. When they got off at the stop just before his, the children all waved goodbye and the smallest one even gave him a hug. The father smiled in his direction and they disappeared as the train moved on.

“What delightful children,” the young man thought. “I hope they’ll be okay.”

*Reflection:*

What happened? The young man was just as tired as he always was after working long hours. The children behaved the same way throughout the trip. The father was grieving when he boarded the train and when he got off. The only thing that changed in this scenario was the young man’s perspective. With knowledge of the family’s situation, his thinking changed. Had he not known about the funeral, he would have continued to rely on unrealistic thoughts and judgmental feelings that colored his perspective. But with the facts, he was able to help temporarily ease some of the suffering that the unfortunate family had to endure.

## **(6) Labeling**

When we label people or events, we often call ourselves or other people names. Instead of being specific—for example, saying “I am disappointed,”—we make negative generalizations about ourselves or other people by saying things like “I’m ugly,” or “she’s an idiot.” Labeling others can lead to complaining about their behavior or arrogance on our part, thinking that we are better than those jerks.

**The challenge: Evaluate the situation; don’t judge the person.**

Ask yourself:

- What are the facts and what are my interpretations?
- Just because there is something that I’m not happy with, does that mean that it’s no good? Does that mean it is wrong?

## **Complaining**

1. What do you habitually complain about? Is there a particular type of complaint (e.g. about work, government, health, relatives, etc.) that predominates?
2. What does it feel like in your mind when you complain to yourself?
3. How do other people respond when you complain out loud?
4. What constructive ways can you use to work with the complaining mind to satisfy what you really want or need?

## **Arrogance**

Arrogance is an inflated sense of self, thinking we are either more important or more capable than we are. It could also manifest as thinking we are completely worthless or the most incapable.

1. In what areas of your life does arrogance surface? What qualities do you become arrogant about having? Look for patterns in your life.
2. What is behind the arrogance? What are you really looking for? Is there a relationship between arrogance and lack of confidence?
3. Is there a relationship between your arrogance and your judgmental, critical mind?
4. One type of arrogance focuses on being the worst, not the best. When does this arise in your life? What is feeding it?

## **Pride**

1. For you, what is the relationship between pride and attachment to reputation?
2. For you, what is the relationship between pride and anger?
3. Remember times when someone gave you advice and you refused to listen. Was your pride at work then?
4. What are some ways you can reduce your pride and have a more balanced, self-accepting, and self-confident view of yourself?

## **(7) Filtering**

Filtering occurs when we ignore or dismiss positive aspects and magnify the negative details of a situation. Negative filtering takes a tough circumstance and makes it unnecessarily worse. By looking at a situation through the distorted lens of pessimism, we fail to see the opportunities that are always there.

**The challenge: Consider the whole picture.**

Ask yourself:

- Am I looking at the negative aspects, while ignoring the positive ones?
- What is a more balanced way to look at this situation?

### **Two Cities**

Twin twelve-year-old brothers lived in New York City. Their parents accepted new jobs in San Francisco, so the family moved there. After they had settled into their new home, one of the boys decided to explore the neighborhood and set out to walk a few miles and see the sights. Eventually he came upon a beautiful Japanese park with lush vegetation, a small lake with a tiny island that had a pagoda in the center, and a narrow footbridge connecting the island with the rest of the park. It was a beautiful place and the boy could not help but notice the tranquil path lined with weeping willow trees meandering through and around the rest of the foliage.

As he walked along the pathway, he noticed an old Asian man sitting on one of the many benches sprinkled around the park, looking out at the little lake and island. The boy approached the old man and said, “Excuse me sir, may I ask

you a question?" The old man smiled and replied, "Yes, of course." "Well sir, I just moved here from New York City and I don't know much about San Francisco, and I was wondering what the people are like here," the boy said as he looked around.

"Well," the old man chuckled, "what were the people like in New York City?" A frown creased the boy's face as he thought about it for a moment. He responded, "They were mean, kinda short tempered, and never had anything nice to say about anyone! They were awful and I don't miss them at all."

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this young man, but the people here are pretty much the same," and with that, the old man sat back on the bench and resumed his gaze out over the lake. After a moment of hesitation the boy walked south out of the park.

No more than ten minutes later, his twin brother entered the same park from the north and was amazed at the oasis he found in the middle of a bustling city. Unlike Central Park in New York City, this was more like a lush garden with a Japanese theme throughout. He continued on the path around the lake until he spied the old man sitting on a bench in a corner arbor. The boy quietly approached the man who seemed to be asleep, but when he got near he saw that the man was looking at the lake through half-lidded eyes. The boy walked up when he saw the old man look in his direction. As he approached, the old man said, "Oh, you've come back."

"No sir, that must have been my brother, we're twins," he explained. "Our parents want us home and I am looking for him. Do you know which way he went?"

"Yes, he went that way," pointing south down the path.

"Thank you," the boy replied as he turned to leave. Sud-

denly he stopped and said, “My family just moved here from New York City. I don’t know much about the West Coast except what I’ve read or seen on TV. But I was wondering what the people here are like.”

“Well,” the old man chuckled, “what were the people like in New York City?”

A huge smile broke out across the boy’s face as he excitedly said, “They were real nice, kinda easy going, and always had nice things to say! They were great and I miss that spirit very much.”

“I’m delighted to tell you that the people here are pretty much the same,” and with that, he smiled and resumed his gaze out over the lake.

“Thank you, sir!” the boy exclaimed as he turned and jogged down the path to find his brother.

Reflect: We are in charge of our outlook. The way we filter our experiences influences what happens in the future. The proverbial saying that the glass is either half full or half empty does not detract from the fact that there is water in the glass. It’s all about perspective, and that’s what dictates how full or how empty the glass is.

### **Judgmental, critical mind**

1. In which situations do you find yourself being judgmental and critical of others?
2. What is feeding this? What is your mind trying to prove or get out of thinking in this way?
3. How do you feel when your judgmental, critical mind takes over?
4. What affect does it have on your relationships with others?

5. What do you need to contemplate in order to reduce this tendency or habit?

### **Loneliness and being alone**

1. What is the difference between being alone and feeling lonely?
2. Do you sometimes feel lonely when you are with other people? What is going on inside you then?
3. What thoughts go through your mind when you are lonely? What is the storyline behind loneliness?
4. What ideas do you have for becoming your own friend and enjoying your own company so that you enjoy being alone?

## **(8) Unreal Ideal**

Having unreal ideals manifests in two ways: (1) We make unfair comparisons between certain individuals and ourselves. When we do this, we compare ourselves with people who have a specific advantage in some area. Making unfair comparisons can leave us feeling inadequate. (2) We have a list of ironclad rules about how we and other people should act. People who break the rules anger us, and we feel guilty if we violate the rules.

### **The challenge: Stop making unfair comparisons.**

Ask yourself:

- Why do I compare myself with others? What am I trying to prove?
- Are these comparisons fair? Are they accurate? Do

they really matter?

### **Apples and oranges**

Our self-esteem often depends on how we compare to others. Let's face it, we'll never live up to comparisons. There will always be someone who is smarter, faster, better, stronger, and more talented than us. If we involve ourselves in this type of thinking pattern, we'll never have time to actually be good at very much. The energy we expend on the pointless pursuit of worrying about how we measure up will consume our ability to do anything of worth and rob us of the motivation to try.

Social media has influenced impressionable minds so that people believe that if they are better than others, they will have a healthier, happier, and more fulfilling life. To move up the social ladder, we are forced to compare ourselves to others. But no one ever reaches the top because there isn't one. Nevertheless, the drive to establish a pecking order by making comparisons is addictive. We compare ourselves with others again and again as the search goes on for acceptance that, of course, is not forthcoming.

We are all different people, with our own array of talents and good qualities. Comparisons are pointless. It's like comparing apples to oranges. Both are fruit and both need a combination of care, soil, sun, fertilizer, and water. Some people prefer one fruit over another; some people like all fruit equally, while others don't care for fruit at all. But these opinions do not change the fruit one bit. They are apples and oranges, and we are who we are. It's as simple as that.

The reality is some people will like us and some people won't. This has less to do with us and more to do with their perspective and how they view the world.

This does not absolve us of responsibility for our behavior. We are responsible for our words, behavior, and the way we live our lives. We will experience the results of our own thoughts, words, and deeds. But in the process of filtering the meaning and value of our actions through their views, others may distort them. In other words, don't believe everything others think.

Similarly, we may evaluate ourselves in a distorted way. In short, don't believe everything you think.

When we are faced with the realization that our perspective, idea, or view is not correct or is not conducive to the benefit of all, that is when we need to accept our imperfections, learn from the situation, and begin to change.

### **The Cookie Thief**

A good example of the distortion that can occur can be found in the humorous poem by Valerie Cox:

A woman was waiting at an airport one night,  
With several long hours before her flight.  
She hunted for a book in the airport shops,  
Bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop.

She was engrossed in her book, but happened to see  
that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be,  
Grabbed a cookie or two from the bag in between,  
Which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene.

So she munched the cookies and watched the clock,  
As the brazen cookie thief diminished her stock.  
She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by,  
Thinking, "If I wasn't so nice I would blacken his eye."

With each cookie she took, he took one too.  
When only one was left, she wondered what he'd do.  
With a smile on his face and a nervous laugh,  
He took the last cookie and broke it in half.

He offered her half as he ate the other.  
She snatched it from him and thought, "Oh brother!  
This guy has some nerve and he's also rude.  
Why, he didn't even show any gratitude!"

She had never known when she had been so galled,  
And sighed with relief when her flight was called.  
She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate,  
Refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate.

She boarded the plane and sank in her seat,  
And she sought her book which was almost complete.  
As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise,  
There was her bag of cookies in front of her eyes!

"If mine are here," she moaned in despair,  
"the others were his, and he tried to share!"  
Too late to apologize, she realized with grief,  
That she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief.

### **Overcoming self-centeredness**

Although we may think that being self-centered enhances our happiness because it motivates us to get what we want, if we look more closely, we'll see that self-centeredness is actually the source of our problems. Brazenly seeking what is best for us doesn't bring us long-term happiness, but feeling guilty about being selfish doesn't help us either. The solution

is to understand the faults of self-preoccupation and then, because we want to be happy, apply the antidotes to abandon it.

1. What are some of the things you were taught—in kindergarten, Sunday school, or at the family table—about being selfish or people who are selfish?
2. When you think of a selfish person, how does that person appear to you? How would you describe the characteristics of that person?
3. What is your opinion of yourself when you are controlled by your self-centered thought?
4. What ideas do you have for clearing out conditioning from the past so you can understand the teaching on self-centeredness correctly?

Reflecting on the disadvantages of the self-centered thought is a powerful antidote that inspires us not to follow our selfish thoughts. Try it. Then contemplate the benefits of cherishing others. See the meditation outlines on these topics later in this booklet.

### **Comparing ourselves to others**

1. In what areas of your life do you compare yourself to others? To whom do you compare yourself?
2. What happens to your mind when you compare yourself to others? What emotions and attitudes does it produce in you?
3. How do you speak and act towards others as a result of comparing yourself to them?
4. What are some ways you can break this process and develop more self-acceptance and self-confidence?

## **(9) Blaming Others and Being Right**

Blaming others is holding other people responsible for our pain. We feel resentful because we think we know what's fair, but others don't agree with us. They unfairly shift what is their responsibility to us. Anger, resentment, grudge holding, and vengeance fill our mind.

The wish to win an argument and be right is related to blaming others in that anger is involved and we are unable and unwilling to hear others' side of the story. Our ego is offended, and we are determined to be victorious in the argument or fight, come hell or high water. Being wrong is unthinkable and we will go to any length to demonstrate that we are indeed right. In doing so, we trample others' feelings and break the trust that is so important for good relationships.

Anger is an emotion that is based on exaggerating the negative qualities of someone or something or projecting negative qualities that aren't there and then wants to harm what we perceive to be the cause of our suffering. Here are some reflections to help you understand and get a hold of your anger.

**The challenge: Be responsible for your own actions and accept their consequences.**

Ask yourself: What do I get out of seeing myself as a victim and blaming others for my situation? How can I train myself to see things along a spectrum of beneficial and unbeneficial and let go of seeing things in a fixed way as right and wrong, good and bad, success and failure?

### **Is anger destructive?**

1. Am I happy when I'm angry?
2. Do I communicate effectively with others when I'm angry?
3. How do I act when I'm angry? What is the effect of my actions on others?
4. Later, when I'm calm, do I feel good about what I said and did when I was angry? Or is there a sense of shame and remorse?
5. How do I appear in others' eyes when I am angry? Does anger promote mutual respect, harmony, and friendship?

### **Looking at the situation from the other's viewpoint**

1. Usually we look at a situation from the viewpoint of our own needs and interests and believe that how the situation appears to us is how it objectively exists. Now, put yourself in the other's shoes and ask, "What are my (i.e., the other's) needs and interests?" See how the situation appears in the other's eyes.
2. Look at how your "old" self appears in the eyes of others. We can sometimes understand why others react to us the way they do and how we unwittingly increase the conflict.
3. Remember that the other person is unhappy. Her wish to be happy is what motivates her to do whatever it is that's disturbing us. We know what it's like to be unhappy, so try to develop compassion for this person who is unhappy, but who is exactly like us in wanting happiness and avoiding pain.

### **Transforming criticism**

1. Examine whether what the other says is true or not. How he says it isn't important; it's the content.
2. If what he says is true, why get angry? I say I want to improve myself. This person is telling me how and thus is kind for helping me in this way.
3. If what he says is true, why get angry? It's as if he were simply pointing out something that is obvious, like saying, "You have a nose on your face." Why should I become angry at what is there for everyone to see?
4. If what he says isn't true, why become angry? It's like he is saying, "You have horns on your head." I know I don't, so why become angry at what is clearly another's misapprehension?

### **Our buttons**

When we are angry, it's usually because someone pushed our buttons. They said or did something that touched our sensitive points.

1. The other person can push our buttons because we have them. Our buttons are our own responsibility.
2. Examine what your buttons are and think about how to free yourself from them.
3. Examine how your attachment to a person, thing, relationship, or situation is related to the anger you experience when that thing is harmed, denied, or ends. Apply antidotes to that attachment in order to protect yourself from pain and anger.
4. Examine what actions you did recently that directly or indirectly led to the conflict. This can help us un-

derstand why the other person is upset and how the situation evolved. It also may reveal your own hidden motives or careless behavior.

### **Can we do something about it?**

Ask yourself, “Can I do something about this unpleasant situation?”

1. If so, then anger is out of place because you can improve the situation.
2. If not, then anger is useless because nothing can be done.

To paraphrase St. Francis: Please guide me to change what can be changed, to accept what can't, and to be able to distinguish between the two.

### **The person who harms us benefits us**

This may seem counterintuitive, but we can reap benefit from those who challenge or harm us:

1. They point out our mistakes so that we can correct them and improve our character.
2. They give us the opportunity to practice patience and fortitude, necessary qualities in our spiritual development. To develop patience and fortitude, we need someone who harms us. We can't practice patience with those who are nice to us. Therefore, those who harm us are kind because they provide an essential condition for our spiritual development.

### **Is it their nature?**

Think of the person who harmed you and ask, “Is it this person’s nature to act like this?”

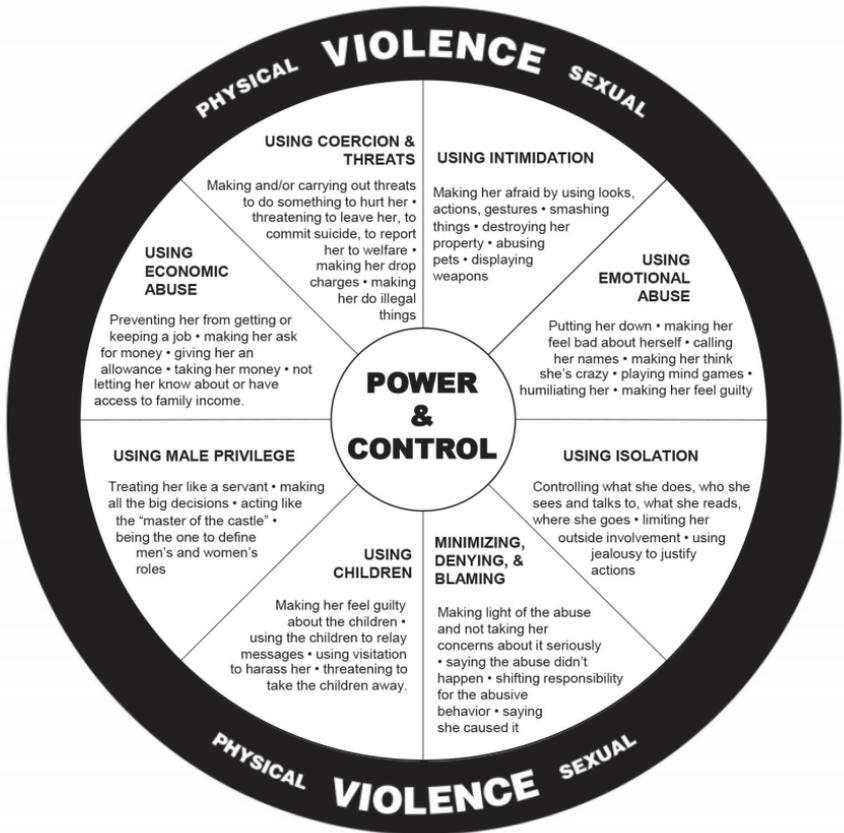
1. If it is, then there is no reason to be angry, for it would be like being annoyed at a fire for burning.
2. If it isn’t, again, anger is unrealistic, for it would be like getting angry at the sky for having clouds in it.

### **(10) Control issues**

Control issues may take several forms: (1) We think that we should be able to control others. We expect that other people will change to do or be what we want if we just pressure, cajole, or bully them enough. We get angry when they resist or protest. (2) We feel controlled by others and see ourselves as helpless victims. We feel sorry for ourselves and resentful.

**The challenge: Feel self-confident and respect others.**

# POWER & CONTROL



Based on the [Wheels](#) developed by DAIP:



domestic abuse  
intervention programs  
Home of The Duluth Model

Available from [NCDSV](#) on the [Wheels](#) Page



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### **Types of power**

1. What is power?
2. What are the different types of power, e.g., power due to social class, to wealth, to education, to gender, to physical strength, to intelligence, to internal development through Dharma practice, etc.?
3. Which types of power do you feel you have? Which do you feel you don't have much of?

### **Power and powerlessness**

1. How do you feel and act when you think you have power in a situation? When have you used the power kindly and respectfully?
2. Have there been times when you've misused it? How can you subdue this tendency?
3. How do you feel and act when you feel powerless? Have your actions been kind and beneficial? Manipulative or resentful?
4. What types of power would you like to develop? How can you do this?

### **Authority**

Western culture values individualism and equality. As a result, we often have difficulties with people in certain positions of authority.

1. Give some examples of authority figures or societal institutions (family, school, etc.) in which there were authority figures in your life when you were growing up.
2. How did they influence your behavior and your sense of who you were? Recall words and phrases that you

heard that impressed strong ideas about who you were “supposed to be.”

3. As a result of these experiences, what responses or reactions have you cultivated in relation to authority and institutions? Are these reactions harmful or helpful to you? Give specific examples.
4. How can you have a more realistic and healthy relationship regarding positions of authority and the people who fill these roles?
5. Remember that we choose some of the authority figures in our lives because we respect and want to learn from them. How have these people influenced you in a positive way, encouraging you to develop your talents and abilities?

### **Taking Responsibility**

1. Admit to yourself your role in past behaviors that were harmful to others and to yourself.
2. How does it feel to be honest about your past?
3. Are you able and willing to apologize to those whom you harmed if it would be appropriate to do so?

### **(11) Personalizing**

With personalizing, we think that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to us. We blame ourselves for anything that goes wrong, even when it's not our fault or responsibility.

**The challenge: Find all the causes.**

Ask yourself:

- Am I really to blame? Is this all about me?
- What other explanations might there be for this situation?

### **It's all about me**

It's one thing to blame everyone else for all the things that go wrong in our life, but it's entirely another to accept all blame for everything. Blaming ourselves for everything that goes wrong even when we are not responsible for it is an inverted type of pride. We're making ourselves super important: "I'm so powerful that I can make everything go wrong." That is clearly not the case; multiple causes and conditions are involved.

Self-blame or personalizing is all about one thing—Me! Imagine the credits rolling down the screen of a feature film. The greatest film on earth! Feature title "Me!" Produced and directed by Me! Color, sound, and costume by Me! Starring Me! Co-starring and supporting cast, Me! It's all about Me!

But is it? The reality is that there are many co-stars and thousands of people have influenced the causes and conditions for every situation we're involved in. Many people influence us in subtle and obvious ways.

If we honestly and realistically examine situations and take responsibility for what we do, good or bad, we will be able to handle many daily challenges with more ease and a calmness that helps support solutions.

Furthermore, no one was born with an innate ability to tie shoes, cook, drive, read, or do the millions of things that we take for granted. Along the way, we all have been exposed to tens of thousands of teachers in the form of family, friends, and strangers—all who taught us what we know

today. We cannot take credit for what we have learned from others. We can, however, take responsibility for how we apply what we've learned.

The same can be said about personalizing everything that happens in our lives. Every situation we encounter was influenced by numerous variables that had nothing to do with us. In many instances we just managed to be in the way of the flow and unknowingly got caught up in events.

This does not absolve us of our responsibility for what we intentionally or knowingly did. If our actions or behaviors are harmful and we get punished for it or things don't work out for us as a result of that behavior, well that is on us. If we do positive things and experience a good result, that is the result of our good intention and we should graciously accept what comes our way. Personalizing everything is just another way of distracting attention from the truth and avoiding the reality of now.

### **Guilt/regret**

1. What is guilt? What is the guilty attitude saying? What is its story?
2. Is guilt helpful or harmful to your spiritual progress and psychological well-being?
3. In guilt, we often take responsibility for things that are not our responsibility. How can you release that type of guilt?
4. How can you see things more clearly so that you release guilt but still regret mistaken actions?

## **Shame**

1. What is shame? What are its characteristics?
2. What situations does your shame arise in?
3. Is what shame tells you true or not true?

## **The Canteen Line**

Ben was standing in the canteen line waiting to buy some soup, nutty bars, and a cold soda. There were ten people in front of him and he was trying to get back to class on time.

Then, all of a sudden a guy who wasn't in line came from out of nowhere, talked to one of his friends in front of Ben, and now this new guy is in line.

Ben began to personalize the event. This person disrespected him. These other guys might put up with it, but not Ben. A fight was brewing inside him. If he didn't call this other guy out, everyone would think he was weak. On the other hand, did he really want to go to the Hole for a few weeks over who has what place in line?

One of Ben's core beliefs is that once you're in line, you stay in line. And a person should respect the people in line. But honestly, does everyone have our same views? And do we always live according to our views? If we have a chance to get ahead in line, don't we take it?

With mindfulness, Ben had an alternative thought, "What if this guy was in line before I got here? Maybe he just needs to buy some phone time. Maybe he is really not in line but just talking to his friend." And finally Ben thought, "Do I really have to be in line? I am here by choice. Similarly, I have the choice to become angry or be calm."

Ben decided that being angry and confronting the person would not serve him in the short-term or in the long-term. He nodded at the guy who cut in line—not with fear or

aggression—but with a look that said, “Sure, get what you need at the canteen. It’s no sweat off my back.”

We cannot control other people’s actions but we can control our own thoughts, speech, and actions.

## **(12) Mind-reading**

Mind-reading occurs when, without their telling you, you think you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, you are able to divine how people are thinking and/or feeling about you. You assume that others are focused on your faults and weaknesses when they’re actually thinking about something else. Remember: your worst critic is probably yourself.

Attachment to approval factors in here. We want everyone to think well of us. To get approval we do what we think other people think we should do. It’s crazy-making, isn’t it? Just because someone thinks we’re great and praises us, doesn’t mean we are. Likewise when someone thinks we’re stupid, it doesn’t mean we are. We need to learn to evaluate ourselves clearly, because we’re the only one who know what our motivations are and whether they are benevolent or rotten.

**The challenge: Don’t assume you know what others are thinking.**

Ask yourself:

- What is the evidence? How do I know what other people are thinking?
- Just because I assume something, does that mean I’m right?

### **Attachment to approval**

1. Whose approval are you most attached to?
2. What do you do to try to win that person's approval? Do you act with a manipulative or deceptive intention? Do you act contrary to your ethical values? How does doing this affect you?
3. What are you really looking for when seeking others' approval?
4. How do you feel and act when you don't get others' approval? What is the relationship between attachment to approval and anger?
5. What is the difference between seeking feedback and seeking approval?
6. What are some ways you can build a sense of self-confidence without depending on others' validation?
7. What would it feel like to be able to accurately evaluate your own actions and motivations? What can you do to work toward this?

### **Anxiety**

1. What is anxiety?
2. What makes you anxious?
3. Are the stories behind your anxiety accurate or not?
4. How does anxiety affect your life?
5. What is the difference between anxiety and realistic caution? How does each one of them feel inside you?
6. What ideas do you have for reducing your anxiety?

**Imputing motivations on other people**

1. In what situations do you tend to impute motivations on other people?
2. What is the purpose of imagining their intention?
3. Does this way of thinking serve to increase your anger, suspicion, and fear?
4. Are you correct in your assumption?



# The Slippery Slope

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HARMING OTHERS

Every destructive action begins with a thought. Thinking errors follow and lead to harmful actions. Each of us at one time or another have operated under cognitive distortions or the thinking errors mentioned in the previous chapter. These thoughts are erroneous because they are untrue. When we believe them to be true, there is a greater chance of basing our decisions on these false assumptions. This often leads us to act in harmful ways, and we all know the mess—in our own and others' lives—that results from that.

Entitlement and minimization figure into our thinking errors. Entitlement is thinking that we deserve this or that; minimization is trying to convince ourselves that our harmful actions are not that bad. These thoughts are powerful, and when they turn into action, the result comes in the form of harm to others and ourselves.

Feelings of entitlement are like poison. We believe that we have the right to do what we do or plan to do. We may justify this by thinking others harmed us first or that we have permission to avoid responsibility for our actions. Once that

barrier of personal responsibility for our thoughts and actions is overcome, we come up with many “reasons” to justify our actions: They deserve it. That will teach them not to act that way. I didn’t mean to hurt him/her. I didn’t hurt him/her too much. I only did this or that. I only did that once.

Being vague and justifying our behavior go together. Not calling an offense by its true name, intentionally avoiding the topic, or hiding under the cloak of deception all contribute to facilitating the offensive behavior.

The trick is to recognize when certain thoughts arise and to have the necessary counterforces in place to abandon potentially destructive actions or transform our way of thinking so it doesn’t lead to harmful actions. The following questions are designed so that you can give various themes serious thought and the mindful consideration necessary to conduct a personal inventory. Truthful contemplation of the questions together with an attitude of self-compassion will give you a foundation on which to build a better and more peaceful life.

## HARMFUL CORE BELIEFS

Core beliefs are beliefs we have about ourselves and the world. They are rigid conclusions that limit our ability to see the big picture and to treat others with the respect and kindness they deserve. Someone once said, “Belief is only a thought that you keep thinking.” It is not necessarily true and can be changed.

Core beliefs are often established when we were young. We may have heard others vocalizing these core beliefs and took them as our own beliefs just because others held them. We may have seen parents or other adults acting according to such beliefs. Or, on the basis of one or two situations, we

may have generalized our perceptions—be they correct or incorrect—to a wide variety of other situations.

What follows is a list of some harmful core beliefs. You may have others to add to this list.

- No one can control me.
- Life should be fair and it isn't.
- I am a victim of others' harm and abuse.
- I am a victim of my substance abuse.
- It isn't wrong if you don't get caught.
- You can't trust anyone.
- I am above the law / The law doesn't apply to me.
- Everyone else does it or it's ok for me to do it too.
- A conventional life is boring.
- Violence solves problems.
- An eye for an eye.
- I'm not hurting anyone; I'm preventing them from taking advantage of me.
- I am entitled to do whatever I want.
- Only suckers work a normal job.
- Breaking the law is cool.
- The police are the bad guys.
- It's me versus them.
- Other people have no worth or rights.
- I can do it on my own; only jerks ask for help.
- It's okay to steal from strangers.
- I am my image.
- I have a right to get it fast and easy.

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- Others need my protection.
- My wants/needs are more important than other's wants/needs.
- Others fearing me means that they respect me.
- Anger/aggression gets me what I want.
- Money means power and control.
- I need/deserve to feel good now.
- I'm useless/worthless.
- Crime gets me what I want.
- I'm unlovable.
- I have to be right.
- I can't do it.
- I don't deserve happiness.
- I'm a bad person.
- Life is hard.
- Marriage is a trap.
- The world owes me.
- Women/men want only one thing.
- I'm not important.
- I need someone.
- Women/men can't be trusted.
- I'm entitled to the best.
- I'm unwanted.
- I'm defective/imperfect/bad.
- I'm powerless.
- I'm incompetent and hopeless.
- The world is against me.

### **Investigating core beliefs**

Now, read each core belief again. Pause after each one and ask yourself:

1. Do I hold that belief? If you do, investigate how you came to hold it.
2. What effect has holding this belief had on your life? Has it helped you or has it gotten you into messy or violent situations?
3. With your adult wisdom ask, “Is this core belief accurate? Is it a generalization and therefore limited?”
4. Try to see the situation from a different perspective. For example, instead of thinking, “I am a victim of substance abuse that I can’t control,” try thinking, “Every situation has causes and conditions. I can change the conditions in my life and in my way of thinking and gradually reduce and eventually eliminate my dependency on intoxicants.”
5. Envision yourself as someone without these negative core beliefs.

### **Hindrances**

While we all want to develop our good hearts, we are often distracted. For whatever reason, we don’t do what we know deep down is important and worthwhile to do. Hindrances stand in our way.

1. What are your biggest hindrances to cultivating your good qualities? Not understanding how or what to do? Laziness? Not enough time? Physical pain? Fear of what others will think? What else?
2. Which thoughts, actions, spiritual practices, readings, and conversations encourage you to develop your

mind and heart? What helps you to think more clearly and be calmer? The presence of a role model? Being with supportive friends? Wanting to remedy your confusion and unhappiness? Receiving positive feedback from others about the change they've noticed in you? What else?

3. What ideas do you have for overcoming hindrances?
4. How can you re-enforce and increase the inspiring and encouraging factors in your life?

### **Barriers to offending**

1. What barriers did you have to overcome in order to offend?
2. How much did motivation play a role in your behavior? What motivations were present in your mind? Note: You may have only realized later on what motivations were present.
3. What types of resistance did you have to ignore or overcome to facilitate your offense?
4. What can you do now to strengthen your barriers to offending and to weaken the distorted thinking that allows you to offend?

### **Entitlement and minimalizing**

1. What role did your negative core beliefs have in your offense?
2. Did feelings of entitlement influence your behaviors? Did minimalizing play a role in your offense?
3. Did the need for power contribute to your offense?
4. How did you justify your actions when you did them

or just after you did them?

5. How do you think about your actions and what motivated them now?

### **Relationship with the media**

1. What kind of relationship do you have with each of the following mass media: radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, Internet, etc.?
2. Which type of mass media are you most attracted to and spend the most time with?
3. How does this medium influence you? What values do you receive from it? Are these helpful or harmful?
4. How did the media with its images of perfect people help create your self-image when you were young? How does it influence your self-image now?
5. Do you sometimes become addicted to the media? What's going on inside you that makes this happen? What are you looking for?
6. How can you relate to the media in a healthier way?



# Understanding Your Mistakes

Forgiving ourselves is an important part of changing. To forgive ourselves, we must understand our mistaken actions and how they occurred. The sets of questions below will help us do that.

## **Taking things out on others**

1. What emotions do you tend to take out on others, especially family members?
2. What do you do or say? What is your behavior when you take things out on them?
3. What are you hoping to achieve by this? What is your mind seeking?
4. Do you feel better afterwards? How do the other people react?
5. Does this behavior accomplish what you're seeking?
6. What are some other ways to deal with those emotions?

### **Communication**

1. Think of a situation you've experienced where communication with another person or group went very well. What were the causes in terms of people's attitudes and how they spoke?
2. Think of a situation in which communication did not go very well. What were the causes in terms of people's attitudes and how they spoke?
3. What mental attitudes and mental states, e.g. self-centered thinking, compassion, concern for others, etc., contributed to your experience in these two situations?
4. How might you use this understanding in the future?

### **Harmful speech**

1. Which of the four destructive actions of speech—lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk—do you have the most trouble with?
2. In which situations in the past have you lied, created disharmony, or hurt others' feelings? What was behind that type of speech? What motivated you?
3. In which situations have you spoken truthfully, wisely, kindly, and at appropriate times?
4. How can you increase your attentiveness and conscientiousness in order to improve the quality of your speech?

## **Lying**

1. Do you find it easy to lie? What factors in yourself or in the situation make it easy for you to lie?
2. As you look back upon the lies you've told in your life, do you see patterns in your lying, e.g., lying to certain people, telling certain types of lies, being in certain situations that make it easy for you to lie?
3. What are your typical motivations for lying?
4. Does lying achieve the desired results you're seeking? What have been the results of lying in these situations?
5. What ideas do you have for how to be more truthful with your speech in order to have better relationships with others, especially the people you care about the most and the people you respect?

## **Disharmonious speech**

Disharmonious speech is speaking in a way that causes discord among people who are harmonious or prevents people who aren't getting along from reconciling. It often involves talking behind someone's back, scapegoating someone, or dividing a group into opposing factions.

1. Think of a time when you spoke badly of another person behind their back.
2. What motivated you to speak like that? What did you think you would get out of it?
3. How did you feel about yourself after saying things with the motivation of producing friction between people?
4. How would you react if someone said something similar about you behind your back?

5. What ideas do you have for how to deal with the jealousy or frustration that makes you create disharmony among people?

### **Harsh speech**

Harsh speech is speech intended to hurt someone's feelings. It may be true or false, spoken with a hostile tone or a sweet voice. It includes telling someone off, insulting them, ridiculing or teasing someone, etc.

1. In what situations do you use harsh words?
2. What kinds of harsh speech do you use: yelling or raising your voice, criticizing others, swearing or using foul language?
3. What are you hoping to accomplish by speaking like this?
4. What effect does this type of speech have on others? Does it bring connection, harmony, or goodwill?

### **DRAMA TRIANGLE<sup>2</sup>**

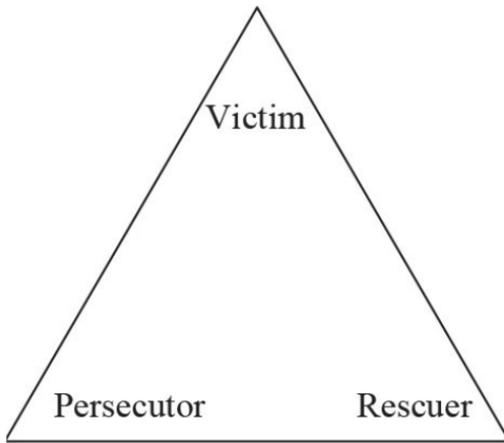
The Drama Triangle describes the unhealthy roles we may take in response to difficulties that occur in our own or others' lives. Our perspectives and actions create drama, stress, and conflict. If you wish to release the pain of unhealthy drama in your life, examine the thoughts that got you involved in the Drama Triangle and then change your perspective of the situation and your role in it.

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<sup>2</sup> From *Path of Freedom: Integral Peacemaker Training* by Kate Crisp. Available from Prison Dharma Network, P.O. Box 4623, Boulder CO 80306-4623.

**The three roles on the Drama Triangle are:**

1. Persecutor
2. Victim
3. Rescuer



When you get on the Drama Triangle, most likely you will take on the role that you think suits you best—one you feel comfortable with and have perfected. Once on the Triangle, you act out your role of choice with whomever is in your world—friends, family, colleagues, etc.

When you become stuck in one of these habitual reaction styles (Victim, Persecutor, or Rescuer), this role tends to take over your life. Your role becomes an identity, and it may even seem as if being in your role gives you some power. Although each role may appear to have power, in truth they are all powerless and dependent on drama to keep them going. In order to find one's true power, we need to move off the Drama Triangle.

## **Who are the players?**

### *The Persecutor*

- Says things like, “See what you did, Stupid!”
- Looks for and finds victims in any situation.
- Criticizes and judges others.
- Adopts an angry “attack mode”.
- Often thinks they are the boss and can control others.

The Persecutor’s role is often seen by others as the “Bad Guy,” “Tough Guy,” or villain. The Persecutor may be the one to inspire others to jump on the Drama Triangle as either a Victim or a Rescuer. Thus the Persecutor is often the one who appears to instigate the Drama Triangle. But it takes more than just the Persecutor to keep the Drama Triangle rolling. Thus we have:

### *The Victim*

- Takes the “poor me” position.
- Feels helpless, hopeless, powerless, ashamed.
- Looks for a rescuer, someone who can save or help them.
- Feels at the mercy of the persecutor.
- Says things like, “Look what you did to me,” to the Persecutor and blames the Persecutor for their own suffering.

The Victim position is a key point in the Triangle. It is the role around which the other two revolve. When you are a Victim, you don’t have to take responsibility for your actions or feelings, since everyone in the world is “doing it to

you...” as in “Hey! I’m the VICTIM here!!”

Victims look for someone or something to blame when things don’t work in their lives. They might blame the government, their parents, friends, boss, siblings, spouse, boy- or girlfriend, and so on.

A Victim is always looking for a Rescuer to take care of them, protect and save them. They want the Rescuer to take responsibility and fix whatever happened. Victims gain control by using blame and guilt. They find someone to blame for all their woes—the Persecutor—and then they find a Rescuer to agree with them.

Sometimes the Persecutor turns and becomes the Victim when they feel everyone is blaming them. Or they might accept the blame, feel guilty, and then try to make the situation better by attempting to become the Rescuer and fixing the situation. When the Persecutor shifts to the Rescuer or the Victim position, he or she avoids the guilt of being the “Bad Guy.”

### *The Rescuer*

- Is a fixer who says, “Let me help you.”
- Rescues others even when they don’t want to be rescued.
- Feels guilty if they don’t help, fix, or rescue.
- Feels needed because they think the Victim can’t make it without them.
- Contributes to keeping victims in the Victim role.

The Rescuer is the “Good Guy.” The Rescuer may choose this role out of guilt or a need to be effective and strong. When the Victim approaches the Rescuer with their story of

woe, the Rescuer jumps on the Triangle ready to “Save the Day!”

Rescuers believe they should take care of other people’s problems, and if they don’t, they are bad people. The Rescuer feels obligated to help and doesn’t want to ever look like a “Bad Guy.”

Rescuers need a Victim—someone to take care of and control. This allows a Rescuer to feel righteous and powerful. Rescuers need to be needed; they need to be in control and be right, no matter the cost. But in effect, because they always take care of others, they don’t take care of themselves and jeopardize their own well-being. Then they end up being a Victim.

When this happens, the Rescuer then moves to blaming the Victim. When the Rescuer becomes the Victim, they might say things like, “Look at all I’ve done for you. You owe me,” or “You’re so ungrateful.”

### **Role switching**

As you can see, the Drama Triangle can become a vicious cycle, with each person jumping from one role to another, flipping around the Drama Triangle almost endlessly. One minute you are the Victim and the next you are the Persecutor, criticizing or tormenting others who don’t help you. If anyone in the Triangle changes roles, the other two roles change as well. Generally, we don’t stick to just one role. However, a lot of us have a fairly common entry point.

Here is an example: Joe has a problem. He drinks too much—he’s an alcoholic. He’s a Victim because the world doesn’t give him a fair break.

His girlfriend, Julie, yells at him to stop drinking so much and puts him down, calling him a “loser addict.” Although

Julie thinks her comments are helpful and will motivate Joe to change, she is the Persecutor.

Julie yells so much at Joe that he uses that as an excuse to drink more—she is stressing him out. Joe is so stressed and sick of Julie’s yelling that he shouts, “Shut up!” and hits her. Joe has now become the Persecutor and Julie the Victim.

The day after the fight, Julie feels bad and thinks she should help Joe because he really has a problem. She loves him and does not want to fight with him anymore. So she puts up with his drinking and starts reading books on how to cure him and save him from his addiction. She has moved into the Rescuer role, and he has become the pitiful Victim.

Now when Joe starts drinking, she attempts to talk him out of it and even suggests he goes to Alcoholics Anonymous. Night after night, she does this, and in the morning she cleans up all the bottles and calls Joe’s boss, lying and saying he’s sick. She makes endless excuses to protect him and as a result he feels no responsibility for his alcoholism or behavior.

By trying to fix Joe and cover up his actions, Julie is not helping Joe. Instead, she is enabling him to remain the Victim. In this relationship Joe and Julie play out all the positions on the Triangle. How can they get off this dysfunctional cycle?

Sometimes three people are on the Triangle at the same time. For example, in the above situation Joe is drinking heavily and being the Victim, Julie is trying to rescue him, and Joe’s mother is the Persecutor who screams at him for being a lazy bum and accuses Julie of being mean to him and making him drink.

**What each person gets out of their role:**

- The Rescuer feels needed, important, and worthwhile.
- The Persecutor feels powerful.
- The Victim avoids taking responsibility for their life.

*Remember:*

- The Rescuer gets hooked by guilt.
- The Persecutor gets hooked by anger or feeling threatened.
- The Victim gets hooked by feeling helpless or powerless.

When you notice these signals, use them as a message to make a different choice rather than jumping on the Drama Triangle.

**Victim self-test**

Answer yes or no to each question. Be as truthful as possible.

1. Were you ever surprised when someone was mad or upset with you when you thought you were doing your best?
2. Have you ever pointed fingers or blamed others when things didn't go the way you wanted them to?
3. Have you ever spent time covering your tail just in case things go badly?
4. Have you ever said, "It's not my problem," and expected someone else to deal with it?
5. Have you ever felt totally powerless, like you have no control over what's happening in your life?

6. Do you repeat stories about how someone else did you wrong or harmed you?
7. Did you ever suspect something would be a problem for someone but did nothing about it?
8. Have you ever found yourself waiting to see if a miracle would solve a problem or if the problem would just vanish by itself?
9. Have you ever thought you would do things differently if only someone else would give you a chance?
10. Have you ever responded, “Yes, but...” when you ask someone for advice and they give you suggestions?

Give one point for each “yes” and zero points for each “no.”  
If your total score is:

- **1 point:** You know you can be a victim, and you probably fall into the role more often than you’re willing to admit.
- **2-4 points:** You are human; everyone falls into the victim role sometimes.
- **5-7 points:** You realize you easily fall into the victim role.
- **8-10 points:** You are very honest and aware about who you are and how you respond.

Your actual score matters less than the realization that you are only human and it is natural to fall into roles from time to time. Being aware of your patterns gives you more power to make better choices in the future when you are up against things.

### **Why would we want off the Drama Triangle?**

- Being on the Drama Triangle results in chaos, craziness, sadness, grief, confusion, and anger.
- All positions on the Triangle cause pain and more pain. The Triangle is an endless loop that goes nowhere but back to pain.
- Everyone caught in the Triangle operates out of powerlessness. They go through the motions of their role like a puppet being led by a puppet master.
- When you are locked into any of the roles, there is little room for your own personal choice.
- Being on the Drama Triangle is a life of pain and lack of love. It prevents genuine relationships with others.

### **How do we get off the Triangle?**

This is a question that you might have already asked yourself by this point. It is possible to change your mind so you don't get hooked on the Triangle. To get off the Triangle, remember these steps:

- Watch for and be aware of the roles. Now that you know the basic traits of the roles, you will be able to recognize them when you or others start playing them, or when you see someone else caught in a role.
- Know your favorite position on the Triangle. If you are aware of the role that you act out more than the others, and you see yourself in that role, STOP!
- Notice how you get hooked. By paying attention, you will eventually be able to avoid getting hooked. Common hooks are blame, guilt, or anger.
- Tell yourself the truth. Own your feelings.

- Take a breath and count to ten. Take a walk, get some space. Do some exercise or meditate. In other words, do whatever it takes to slow your reactions and shift your mind away from immediately getting caught up in the Drama Triangle.

Don't beat yourself up if you find yourself back on the Drama Triangle. Once you see yourself on it, STOP! Do the above steps and use the other tools below. The more you practice with this awareness, the easier it will get to get off the Triangle.

#### ACTIONS THAT HARM AND FACTORS THAT INSTIGATE THEM

##### **Physically harming others**

1. Think of a situation when you deliberately harmed another person. What was your motivation?
2. Did harming them bring you satisfaction?
3. Did they retaliate? If so, what happened then?
4. Thinking back on the situation, how do you feel about yourself? Do you wish you had acted differently?
5. Think of how else you could have seen the situation so that you didn't have the wish to harm someone. Think of how you could have extricated yourself from that situation before violence occurred.

##### **Taking what is not freely given**

1. What do you consider stealing?
2. Do you take things that are not freely given or forget to return borrowed items?
3. Do you make excuses about why it's okay to take

something that belongs to others?

4. How does this behavior destroy your self-respect and cause others not to trust you?

### **Unwise or unkind sexual behavior**

1. Think about a time when you cheated on a romantic partner.
2. What factors led to this behavior?
3. What were you telling yourself about what you were doing?
4. What other ways have you harmed others through your sexuality, for example by using them for your own physical gratification or having unprotected sex?

### **NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR CYCLE<sup>3</sup>**

Destructive ways of thinking lead to destructive behavior. We'll begin by investigating our own behavior and the effect that has had on our life:

1. How would you describe your general behavior?
2. Does your behavior create problems in your life?
3. Does it cause problems for others?

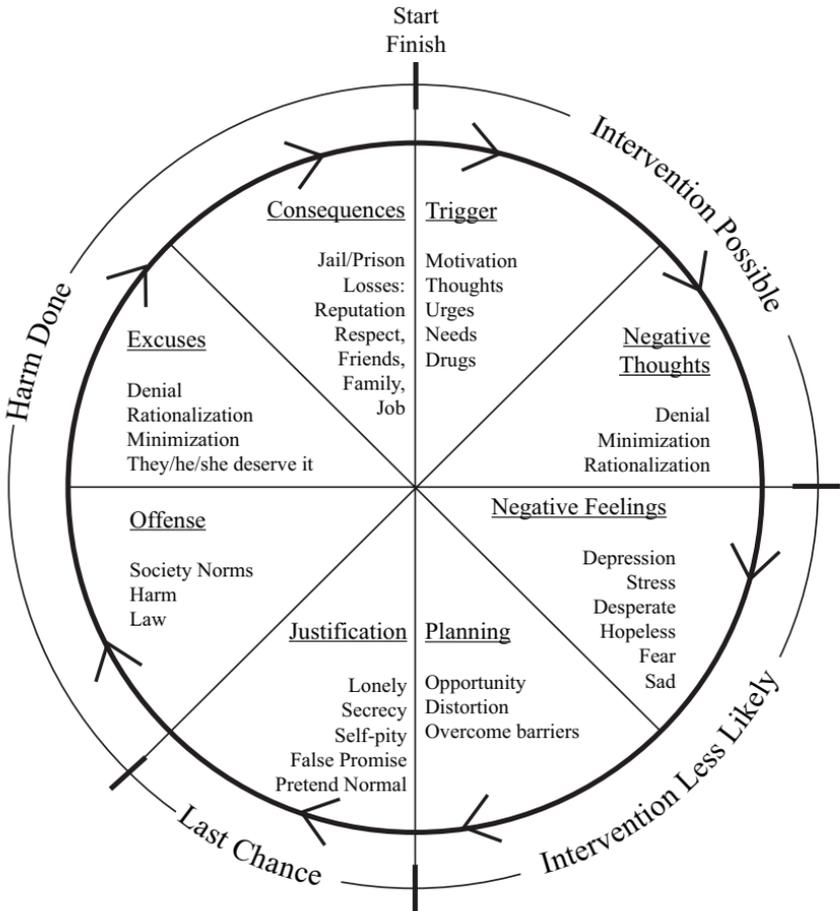
When repeated, patterns of behavior form cycles. A triggering situation leads to certain thoughts and feelings that lead to behaviors that produce new triggering situations. This is how the cycle continues. This shows that our behavior does not come out of nowhere but is the result of how we feel and what we think.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the *Stages of Accomplishment Workbook III Understanding Dysfunctional Behavior* by Phil Rich (Chapter 1, "Dysfunctional Behavioral Cycles").

The Negative Behavior Cycle includes:

1. **The Trigger** - This event sets off a chain reaction that leads to the rest of the cycle.
2. **Negative Thoughts** - Thinking in unrealistic ways that are the cause of negative emotions.
3. **Negative Feelings** - This is the emotional response stimulated by the trigger and then caused by the negative thoughts.
4. **Planning** - This involves imagining future actions and how you will carry them out.
5. **Justification** - Thinking these thoughts convinces you that what you plan to do is reasonable.
6. **Offense** - This is the actual action that you do.
7. **Excuses** - These thoughts revolve around convincing yourself that what you did was acceptable.
8. **Consequences** - These are the results of your behavior that can then become the next trigger.



- Does it make sense to you to visualize behavioral problems going around in cycles?
- Describe why problems seem to repeat.

It is possible to break the cycle at any point. By interrupting the causal relationship between the stages, you can stop the cycle. Here are some ways to break the cycle:

**Stage in the cycle: Ways to counteract:**

- The Trigger..... Recognize and deal with problems.
- Negative Thought... Understand and deal with thoughts safely and without acting out.
- Negative Feeling .... Recognize and work through emotions.
- Planning ..... Think of the undesirable results of acting out those plans.
- Justification ..... Bring forth your sense of personal integrity and be honest with yourself.
- Offense ..... Recognize and change self-defeating or antisocial behavior.
- Excuses ..... Tell yourself to stop the BS, be courageous, and accept responsibility for your thoughts and actions.
- Consequence ..... Accept and learn from consequences.

**Pete's Story**

In order to better understand how an individual can get caught up in a negative behavior cycle and how we can use interventions to avoid problems, let's apply the Negative Behavior Cycle diagram to the following story about unwise sexual behavior.

Pete was just 23 years old when he was convicted of a sexual offense against a minor. He was sentenced to seven years in prison, provided that he complete a sex offender treatment program. Pete managed to navigate through prison without incident by using his wit and charm, thereby avoiding the aggression and animosity that most sex offenders experience in a prison setting. He sailed through the sex offender treatment by saying the right things and completing

all of his assignments early.

After his release from prison, he ran into numerous challenges. As a sex offender, he had to register and was required to be under the supervision of a Community Corrections Officer (CCO) for three years. He was restricted from certain places such as schools, parks, libraries, swimming pools, and any other locations where minors congregate. He was required to find employment or enroll in school, attend post-prison sex offender treatment, and had to wear a GPS monitoring device for the first three months after his release. He was not allowed to have an intimate relationship unless his CCO interviewed that individual and Pete's treatment provider approved.

The first month out of prison went fairly well for Pete. He was busy getting his affairs in order and fulfilling his obligations mandated by the court such as reporting to his CCO, staying drug free, and staying away from his victim and the victim's family. He enrolled in school and got a driver's license. He applied for and received permission from his CCO to have Internet service in order to participate in his college assignments, and he found a part-time job at a garden nursery. In all, Pete felt that he had a very productive month and was getting his life in order.

Adjusting to life away from steel bars and prison routines also took some getting used to. He spent much of his spare time in his small apartment looking out the window, reading, or watching TV. By the time his CCO removed his GPS ankle bracelet, Pete was bored to tears, but more than that, he felt lonely. In prison he was constantly surrounded by hundreds of people. He shared a cell with a cellmate for most of his incarceration and he was not used to being alone. In fact, being alone and feeling lonely were two of sever-

al contributing factors that led to his offending in the first place. As a small child and as an adolescence he was a loner, didn't socialized very much with peers, and identified with younger kids because he felt that they were not judgmental and accepted him.

When he was 20 years old, Pete had volunteered as an assistant coach for the local junior soccer team and was a popular coach. Somewhere along the line he became attracted to a youth on the soccer team and lavished all his attention on the young athlete. Pete invited the young soccer player over to his place where they smoked pot and played video games. After several months of grooming both the youth and his parents, Pete was able to have the young soccer player spend the night. That was when Pete sexually abused the teenager. A few weeks after that episode, he was charged with several counts of sexual abuse of a minor and pleaded guilty to a lesser charge.

Now the same feeling of loneliness returned as he sat by his window looking out at the world going by. Here it was Friday night, and he was stuck staring out the window. Eventually he got up and heated a couple of pepperoni pizza pockets, grabbed a soda from the refrigerator, and sat down in front of his laptop with the intention of doing some homework.

**\*\*Pete began to eat and scrolled through various social media sites when he remembered someone in prison telling him about all the porn sites that exist nowadays. At first, out of curiosity Pete looked at various types of adult pornography but nothing really appealed to him. As he continued his search for something exciting, he purposely looked for younger models and chanced upon a site that showed nude teens. He downloaded some of the images that caught his**

attention and spent most of the night online looking at them. He repeated this activity throughout Saturday and most of Sunday until about nine o'clock that night, when he heard a knock on his door. His CCO was doing a home visit.

Pete felt ill as he watched his Community Corrections Officer look through his apartment and his personal items. He kept glancing at his laptop that was sitting conspicuously on his kitchen table. Just when Pete thought that the CCO was done asking questions and searching, he looked at the laptop and asked Pete to show him what he had been doing. It only took the CCO a minute to discover the downloads containing the snippets of nude teens. He arrested Pete on the spot for violation of his parole and for having illicit images of underage youth. A month later, Pete pleaded guilty to several charges and returned to prison.

1. Run through the Negative Behavior Cycle for the above situation, identifying each aspect: Trigger, negative thoughts, negative feelings, planning, justification, offense, excuses, and consequence.
2. Write an alternative ending to the story beginning at \*\*.

### **The Role of Intoxicants**

If you check around, you may discover that most people who are incarcerated were intoxicated at the time they did the actions that resulted in their arrest. Since taking intoxicants is a strong contributing cause to offending, let's look at it more closely

1. Give a brief history of your use of intoxicants: What intoxicants have you used and in what combination? This may include alcohol and drugs, but also think about your relationship to shopping, sex, porn, food, work, TV, magazines, coffee, etc.

2. What effect does each of these have on your mind?
3. What did you do when you were loaded or stoned? What role did intoxicants play in eliminating barriers to offending?
4. How does taking intoxicants affect your work, studies, and relationships over time?
5. How can you fulfill what you're really seeking without using intoxicants?
6. To what extent are you addicted to each of these?
7. What do you want your relationship with intoxicants to be like moving forward?

### **Kathy's Story**

Let's use the Negative Behavior Cycle diagram again in conjunction with the following story.

Kathy is 44 years old and an alcoholic. She has struggled with alcoholism since she was a teenager, and it has nearly ruined her career, health, and relationship with her family. For just over a year though, Kathy has been sober. In that time, she managed to hold down a job with potential for promotion, and she began the process of regaining the trust of her family. She couldn't remember the last time she felt this good. One day as Kathy was about to leave her job at Box in Box Creations to try and navigate the snarl of evening traffic, her boss stopped her and said, "Kathy! I'm glad I caught you before you left. I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the work you are doing."

Kathy felt her face go red with pleasure at the compliment and smiled at her boss. Compliments were hard for her to accept because she seldom felt that she was worthy of accolades.

“I’ve been talking with the other owners,” he said, “and we’ve decided that we would like to send you to our management training program and afterwards promote you to oversee the artistic operations for the company. Your designs and input have proven to be invaluable and extremely creative and we want to thank you with this promotion. Of course, with that responsibility comes a substantial increase in salary. Would that be something you would be interested in?” He smiled at her.

Kathy was stunned by this unexpected development and could only say, “I would be honored and privileged to accept this opportunity.”

“Good!” exclaimed her boss, “I will get the paperwork going tomorrow so we don’t waste any time. We need you onboard as soon as possible. I’ll see you in the morning. Goodnight and good luck!”

With that, he turned and left Kathy’s work station before she could say more. For several minutes, Kathy just sat at her desk thinking about all the ramifications associated with this opportunity. As she mused over the possibilities, the desire for a drink suddenly emerged out of nowhere.

More specifically, she wanted a large cold glass of white wine. The thought made her stomach lurch and little beads of sweat formed on her brow. She remembered years ago while traveling in France near the tiny seaport of Cassis where she was introduced to a distinctive white wine produced by Clos Sainte-Magdeleine. The experience was enhanced by the atmosphere and the near perfect Mediterranean weather. The food was wonderful, the people around her were a delight, and she was genuinely happy. That trip was the best memory of her life. She tried to replicate the feeling of that experience several times throughout her life but just couldn’t get there

even when she drank several bottles of her favorite wine. The only thing she was able to replicate were headaches and the continued loss of self-respect as alcoholism took its toll.

\*\*As she gathered her things to leave her workplace, the idea of a celebratory drink kept gnawing at her mind all the way out to her car and into the predicted traffic jam of rush hour.

“Just one drink,” she said to herself, “I deserve that after all this hard work and success.” While inching along in the downtown traffic, Kathy was surprised to see that she had taken the one route that went right by her old watering hole, a bar-cafe called Le Cesar Blanc. “This traffic is going to be like this all the way home,” she thought. “I might as well stop in and say ‘hi’ to all my old friends who frequent that establishment.”

She planned to have a coffee while waiting for the traffic to subside. Upon entering the airy room, Kathy saw that the place was full of patrons that looked like they were also in there for a reprieve from the heavy traffic. The atmosphere was jovial with a very familiar scent of fresh bread and wine. None of her old acquaintances were in sight, so she found a little table in the corner. As she sat down, a waitress approached for her order.

Looking around, she responded without thinking. “I’ll have a glass of white wine.” It was after the third glass that Kathy realized that she was drunk. It had been so long since she had any kind of alcohol that the effect of the wine was more noticeable than the times when she was drinking several bottles a day. She finished another glass and looked at her watch. It was nearly 7 p.m. She felt a flood of panic; she was supposed to pick up her two kids for pizza and a movie, and she was going to be late! Kathy paid for the wine and hors

d'oeuvres that she barely touched and ran out to her car. As she pulled out into the street she felt a rush of relief to see that the traffic was light and she drove faster as she headed home. Just five blocks from her apartment, Kathy glanced down at the speedometer and saw that in her haste she was going nearly 20 miles beyond the speed limit. The second that she looked up, her car shot through an intersection and slammed into the side of a white church van. Ironically, the words "JESUS SAVES" blazed on the side of the van registered in her mind a split second before the accident. It was the last thing she remembered until she regained consciousness at the local hospital.

A police officer saw that she was awake and called someone out in the hall. Another officer came in and asked her what her name was. When she told them, they read her the Miranda rights and charged her with two counts of vehicular homicide, three counts of assault with a vehicle, and several counts of driving while intoxicated. Her only comment at that moment was that she didn't see the van.

1. Run through the Negative Behavior Cycle for the above situation, identifying each aspect: Trigger, negative thoughts, negative feelings, planning, justification, offense, excuses, and consequence.
2. Where along the Negative Behavior Cycle was it possible for Kathy to intervene and change course?
3. What is the most opportune time to intervene before a negative behavior reaches a point of no return?
4. When would it be too late for intervention?
5. Write an alternative ending to the story beginning at \*\*.

# Living with Open Eyes and an Open Heart

We've spent ample time looking at factors that derail our wish for happiness and freedom from suffering. These include distorted thoughts, the Drama Triangle, and Negative Behavior Cycles. Now we'll look at factors conducive to happiness and mental peace.

## **Happiness**

1. What does happiness mean to you?
2. Are there different types of happiness, for example, happiness that comes from external situations and sense objects, and happiness that comes from spiritual practice?
3. What is the difference between these types of happiness? Which are more stable?
4. Do you sometimes get distracted from seeking spiritual happiness by chasing after lower grade happiness? Do you want to continue doing that?
5. What ideas do you have for how to change?

### **Important values and principles in life**

1. What values and principles matter to you in life?
2. What would a life lived according to these values look like?
3. Over the last week/month, how did you spend your time?
4. Does the way you spend your time match what is important to you in life?

### **Important activities**

1. How important is family to you? Is it a priority to have good relationships with family members? How can you build these relationships?
2. Is having a stable income from legal activities important to you? What kind of job and career would you like?
3. Do you want to make a positive contribution to society? How can you do this?

### **Feeling good about ourselves**

1. What qualities do you like in yourself?
2. What actions have you done that you feel good about doing?
3. What are some specific skills you have that you could offer to others or use to benefit others?
4. Do you feel undeserving or embarrassed when you talk about your good qualities and actions? Where does that come from?
5. How can you accept the praise that others give you in a humble manner and use that to encourage you to

become the kind of person you want to be?

6. Imagine spending time each day reminding yourself of these qualities and your aspiration to cultivate them. How would that impact your life each day? How would it influence your entire life?
7. What is the path to having a true and balanced sense of self-esteem?

### **Cultivating good qualities**

1. Think of qualities that you admire or respect. Why do you hold these in high regard?
2. Do you have these qualities to some extent? If so, how do you enact them in your daily life?
3. What ideas do you have for how to enhance your good qualities and use them to benefit others?
4. What ideas do you have for intentionally cultivating these qualities?

### **Expressing positive feelings**

1. Think about the good qualities you appreciate about people in your life. First think about family members or partners, then friends and coworkers, and finally those you admire who you may know or not know.
2. How does thinking about others' good qualities make you feel?
3. Write down the good qualities you appreciate about each person.
4. Imagine telling these people what you appreciate and admire in them. How would you feel? How do you think they would feel?

### **Self-compassion**

Self-acceptance is necessary for self-compassion. We can accept ourselves as we are presently and at the same time aspire to improve in the future. Self-acceptance doesn't mean we have to be perfect; it is based on knowing our strong points and also our weaknesses.

1. Having compassion for ourselves is very important. What does this really mean?
2. What is the difference between self-indulgence and self-compassion?
3. What ideas do you have for releasing the self-critical mind and cultivating acceptance and compassion for yourself?

### **Awake**

I woke up this morning in prison  
serving two life sentences,  
Because of my actions  
in all likelihood I will die in prison.

I thought about my father  
and about the day he is gone,  
and how I'll probably no longer  
have any family support whatsoever.

I became depressed  
and formulated how fitting  
it would be with no more family  
to consider if it would be time to end my own life.

But then I felt something;  
it was a sprouting from a seed -  
the turning of the Dharma (my spiritual practice)  
allowed me to see the grand picture.

How can I help liberate others  
from the wheel of suffering  
if I'm already running away  
from facing the prison of this life?

Because of practice, there is compassion for myself,  
Because of practice, there is compassion for others.  
I smile because I understand that I will not kill myself.  
The Buddha shares a smile; I shall smile another day.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### **Friendship**

1. What qualities do you look for in people that would make you want to be friends with them?
2. What is the relationship between the ten destructive actions and the qualities you look for in friends? (The ten destructive actions are killing, stealing, unwise/unkind sexual behavior, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk, coveting, maliciousness and distorted views.)
3. What kind of a friend are you to others?
4. What qualities do you want to cultivate to make yourself a better friend to others?
5. How can you cultivate friendships with people who will be a positive influence?

### **Caring and Affection**

1. What does it mean to care about someone?
2. How do you show care physically and verbally to your family, friends, or colleagues?
3. Do you let yourself feel affection for your parents, siblings, other family members, and friends? Or do you frequently take your affection for them and their affection for you for granted?
4. How do you express affection?
5. Can affection be expressed by helping around the house? Giving someone a hand? Encouraging them when they feel down?
6. Are there times when you express affection but others misunderstand it or don't receive it because it's not their way of expressing affection?
7. Do you have some ideas for ways you could express affection so that those people could receive it according to their own temperament?

### **Saying Goodbye**

1. At death, some people regret not having told the people they loved that they cared about them. Who do you have positive feelings for but haven't expressed them?
2. What prevents you from expressing your affection and letting others know you are fond of them? Is it clinging to previous hurt? Resentment? Pride? Fear? Taking them for granted? What else?
3. What would you like to say to those people? Imagine yourself expressing your feelings and thanking them.

## **Trust**

1. What does it mean to trust someone?
2. Who do you trust? What makes you trust them?
3. Are there different kinds of trust? Different degrees of trust? For example, we trust a pilot with our lives even if they are a stranger. We trust adults, but not children, with matches.
4. How is trust built?
5. In your various relationships, what constitutes a breach of trust for you?
6. How can you heal when trust has been broken?
7. How can you make yourself trustworthy?

## **Commitments**

1. What does it mean to make a commitment? Does that word have a good or bad connotation to you?
2. What do you need to know or investigate before making a commitment?
3. Review the commitments you've made in your life. Which ones have you been able to fulfill and which ones not? Which ones have turned out well? Why? Which ones haven't turned out so well and why?
4. What are advantages and disadvantages of making commitments?
5. How do you know when you're ready to make a commitment?

### **Loyalty**

1. What is loyalty? What is the relationship of loyalty and commitment?
2. Who or what are you loyal to? What are the criteria or conditions that earn your loyalty?
3. How do you maintain wise loyalty, neither staying longer than what is beneficial for yourself and others, nor leaving too soon without trying to work things out?

### **Taking Things for Granted**

1. What does it mean to take someone or something for granted?
2. What do you see as “permanent” in your life and take for granted?
3. What ideas do you have about how to increase your gratitude and appreciation?
4. What difference will it make in your life to have more gratitude and appreciation?

### **Gratitude**

1. What are you grateful for in your life?
2. How do you feel when gratitude arises inside you?
3. How can you increase your gratitude?

### **Forgiving**

1. What does it mean to forgive someone?
2. Who do you need to forgive?
3. What are the benefits of forgiving?
4. Does forgiving someone mean that you must say what

they did was all right?

5. Do you need to forgive yourself for some things? What?
6. What prevents you from forgiving?
7. What are some things you could do to overcome those impediments?

### **Apologizing**

1. What does it mean to apologize to someone?
2. Who do you need to apologize to?
3. What are the benefits of apologizing?
4. What prevents you from apologizing?
5. What can you do to overcome those obstacles?

### **POSITIVE CORE BELIEFS**

Negative core beliefs are ideas that we may have adopted due to our family or cultural background or experiences we had as children. So too, positive core beliefs are often influenced by the adults we grew up around, especially family, church or temple, groups we belonged to, and teachers. Just as we can change our negative core beliefs by realizing their faults and training ourselves in more constructive values, we can enrich positive core beliefs by contemplating the reasoning behind them and examples we see of them in our lives.

1. What are some of your positive core beliefs?
2. How do they manifest in your life?
3. How you think your early life experiences caused you to have these positive core beliefs?
4. How have these positive core beliefs affected your life?

5. Are they accurate? What ideas do you have for enhancing and stabilizing them?

## POSITIVE EMOTIONAL STATES

The following are contemplations done by Buddhist meditators to increase positive emotions, but they are applicable to people of all religions and of no religion. If you do them regularly, you will definitely see the change in your outlook on life.

### **Equanimity**

1. Visualize a friend, someone you have difficulty with, and a stranger. Ask yourself, “Why do I feel attachment for the friend, aversion toward the difficult person, and apathy for the stranger?”
2. Listen to the answers your mind gives and explore whether your views of others are biased or realistic. On what basis does your mind consider someone good, bad, or neutral; friend, stranger, or enemy? Is this realistic? Is that how the people exist from their side?
3. The relationships of friend, enemy, and stranger change constantly. One person can be all three within a short period of time. If someone hit you yesterday and praises you today and another person praised you yesterday and hits you today, which one is your friend? Which one is your enemy?
4. If someone shows their good qualities to you, you think they’re a friend. If they show their good qualities to your enemy, you think they’re an enemy too. If someone is mean to you, you consider them an en-

emy, but if they are mean to someone you don't like, you think they're wonderful. Is this reasonable?

5. Acknowledge that your attitudes create the seeming solid relationships of friend, enemy, and stranger. Let go of the attachment, anger, and apathy toward them. Let yourself feel an open-hearted concern for all.

### **The Kindness of Others**

To develop our sense of being interconnected with all others and being the recipient of much kindness from them, contemplate:

1. The help we've received from friends: the support and encouragement we've received from them, etc. Do not think of these acts in a way that increases attachment; rather, recognize them as acts of human kindness.
2. The benefit we've received from parents, relatives and teachers: the care they gave us when we were young, the protection from danger, our education. The fact that we can speak comes from the efforts of those who cared for us when we were young, our teachers, etc. All talents, abilities, and skills we have now are due to the people who taught and trained us. Even when we didn't want to learn and were unruly, they continued trying to help us learn.
3. The help received from strangers: the buildings we use, clothes we wear, food we eat, roads we drive on were all made by people we don't know. Without their efforts in society, we wouldn't be able to survive.
4. The benefit received from people we don't get along with and from people who have harmed us: they

show us what we need to work on and point out our weaknesses so that we can improve. They give us the chance to develop patience, tolerance, and compassion, qualities which are essential for progressing along the path.

5. Recognize that you've received incalculable benefit and help from others throughout your lifetime. Let yourself have a sense of gratitude and generate the wish to be kind in return.

### **The Disadvantages of Self-Centeredness**

We are not our self-centered attitude. Self-preoccupation is an attitude that clouds the pure nature of our minds. We and our selfishness are not one and the same. By reflecting on experiences in our life, we can see how our self-centered attitude has caused us harm and generate the wish to give it up.

1. Self-centeredness makes us act in ways that harm others.
2. It causes us to act in ways we later regret. It's the root of self-hatred.
3. It makes us overly sensitive and easily offended.
4. It's the basis for all fear.
5. It breeds dissatisfaction. It's impossible to satisfy the bottomless pit of our desires.
6. Self-centeredness underlies all conflict between individuals or nations.
7. Under its influence, we act in unskillful and harmful ways, bringing undesirable situations upon ourselves in the future.
8. Our current problems are results of our past selfish actions.

9. Self-centeredness impedes our spiritual progress.

Conclusion: See self-centeredness as our real enemy and determine to let go of it.

### **The Advantages of Cherishing Others**

So many benefits accrue to ourselves and others when we cherish other living beings.

1. They are happy.
2. Our lives become meaningful.
3. We are free from the self-centered ways that make us so miserable.
4. We can be happy anywhere, anytime, and with anyone.
5. Our relationships go better, and harmony in society increases.
6. We are free of guilt and regret.
7. It's the root of all happiness of self and others, now and in the future.

Conclusion: Resolve to care for others with genuine affection. Sincerely caring for others is very different from caring for them out of guilt, obligation, fear, or codependency.

### **Immeasurable Equanimity**

The four immeasurables—equanimity, love, compassion, and joy—are so called because we cultivate them toward an immeasurable number of living beings. We also cultivate them to an immeasurable extent, so that they become our natural way of relating to others. This takes time and effort, but it is worthwhile and brings us peace and satisfaction.

1. Wish yourself to be free from the bias, attachment, anger, and prejudice that makes you feel close to some beings and distant from others.
2. One by one, wish the same for friends, relatives, strangers, and people you don't like.
3. Wish all beings to be free from the turbulence of clinging attachment, anger, and ignorance.
4. Wish all beings to have wisdom, compassion, goodwill toward others, and a peaceful mind and heart.

### **Immeasurable Love**

Love is the wish for living beings to have happiness and its causes. For each group of people, think of specific individuals and generate love. Then generalize the love to the entire group. You may begin with yourself, wishing yourself to be well and happy, free from pain, fear, and confusion. Or first meditate like this for others and then do so for yourself at the end.

1. Begin by wishing yourself to be well and happy, not in a selfish way, but because you respect and care for yourself as one of many sentient beings. Gradually spread this to friends, strangers, difficult people, and all beings.
2. Think, feel, imagine, "May my friends and all those who have been kind to me have happiness and its causes. May they be free of suffering, confusion, and fear. May they have calm, peaceful, and fulfilled hearts.
3. Generate the same feelings towards those who are strangers.
4. Spread the feeling to those who have harmed you or

whom you don't get along with. Recognize that they do what you find objectionable because they are experiencing pain or confusion. How wonderful it would be if they were free of those.

### **Immeasurable Compassion**

Compassion is the wish for living beings to be free of unsatisfactory conditions and suffering, and their causes.

1. Remember a time when your mind was filled with fear and aggression. Think that others are experiencing that right now, and develop compassion for them, wishing them to be free from that suffering.
2. Remember a time when craving and dissatisfaction overwhelmed your mind, so that you ran here and there searching for happiness but could not enjoy what you had and wanted more. Think that others are experiencing that right now, and develop compassion for them, wishing them to be free from that suffering.
3. Remember a time when your mind was clouded over with deep ignorance and confusion, so that you could not use your mental faculties to protect or better yourself. Think that others are experiencing that right now and develop compassion for them, wishing them to be free from that suffering.
4. Remember a time when your mind was so saturated with pleasure that you became completely self-absorbed and couldn't think of anything else but your own happiness. Think that others are experiencing that right now, and develop compassion for them, wishing them to be free from that suffering.

### **Immeasurable Joy**

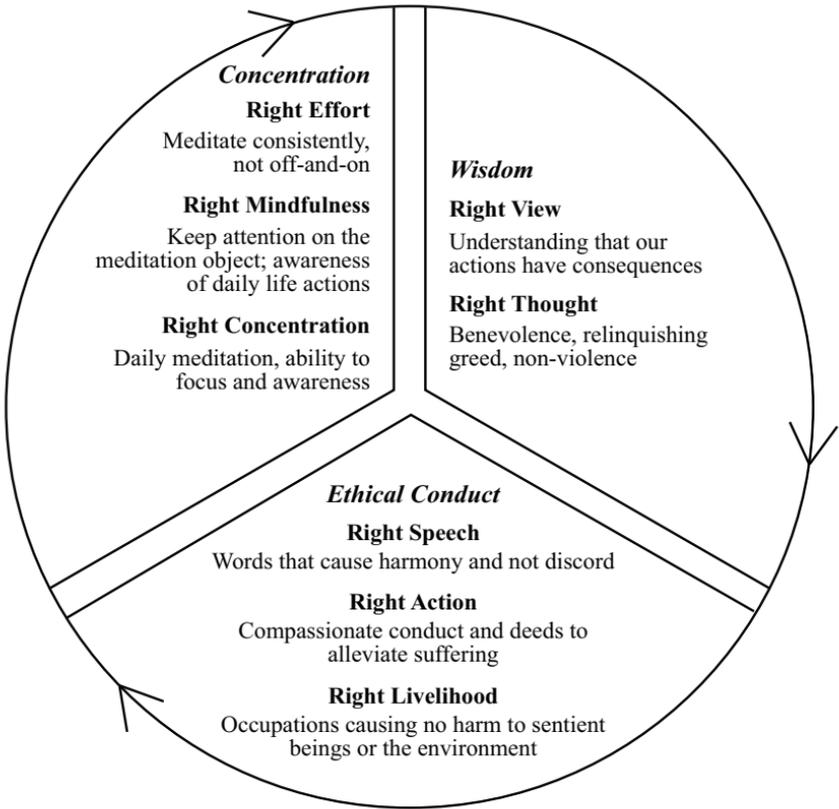
Rejoicing means to feel happy at the talents, opportunities, and success of others. It is the antidote to jealousy. Rejoice at the happiness and talents of living beings, beginning with specific people you know.

1. Spread your rejoicing to more and more living beings.
2. Think of specific virtuous actions, words, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations that holy beings have and rejoice at those.

# Beneficial Actions

## EIGHT-STEP POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL CYCLE

Every action we engage in has consequences. Each of the three categories illustrated on the next page are interconnected. Extract any component and you take the risk of opening yourself up to entering a negative behavior cycle. A more detailed explanation of each grouping follows.



### **Eight-Step Positive Behavior Cycle**

This positive behavior cycle is fashioned after basic Buddhist teachings and principles. It contains universal concepts that parallel the teachings of nearly every religion and ethical standard that enable societies, families, and individuals to function peacefully and harmoniously. Following this eight-step cycle will help us avoid getting caught in the traps and pitfalls of a negative behavior cycle. We must consciously train ourselves in these eight steps. Although few people are able to follow these guidelines 100% of the time, by being cognizant of each step and its relation to the others and by being aware of your thoughts, feelings, speech, and deeds, you will greatly reduce the chances of relapse.

Each step is preceded by the word “right,” which here means realistic and beneficial. For example, right action is beneficial and altruistic and leads to the growth of wisdom, compassion, and self-respect. Wrong action is governed by ignorance, attachment, malice, and harmful intent, and leads to pain and suffering for ourselves and others.

The eight steps are divided into three sections: wisdom, ethical conduct, and concentration. **Wisdom** includes right view and right thought; **ethical conduct** is right speech, right action, and right livelihood; and **concentration** includes right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. As you read the following descriptions of each step and study the accompanying diagram, think of examples in your life when you have acted according to one or more of the eight steps. Remember the beneficial results that ensued for yourself and others. Then consider events or situations that could occur in the future and think how you can incorporate these eight steps in your thoughts, words, and deeds.

**Right view** begins with understanding the illusory na-

ture of the ego. The more we can let go of our self-centered viewpoint and our wrong conceptions of ourselves, the more we will see the world in a different way, with acceptance, understanding, wisdom, and compassion. Wisdom also includes awareness that our actions have an ethical dimension. Actions motivated by kindness, compassion, and truth bring us good results in the long run. Actions motivated by self-centeredness, anger, and confusion bring us pain in the long run.

**Right thought** includes renunciation, benevolence, and compassion. Renunciation here means giving up greed for and clinging to possessions, people, and ideas. It enables us to be open-minded. Benevolence is an attitude that seeks peace and does not want to harm ourselves or others. Compassion relinquishes all types of violence and wishes oneself and others to be free of suffering and all internal and external unsatisfactory situations and their causes. Cultivating these thoughts and motivations is an essential step in reversing negative behavior and gaining self-respect.

**Right speech** is a reflection of our thoughts. We speak with kindness, not hurting others with our words, nor venting our anger on them. Our words are free of backbiting and create harmony. We speak with kindness, not using our words to hurt others and not venting our anger on them. We also speak at appropriate times.

**Right action** is compassionate, wise, and ethical. We abandon taking the life of any living being, stealing their possessions, or harming them physically or emotionally through misusing our sexuality.

**Right livelihood** is engaging in an occupation that does not cause harm to others.

**Right effort** takes delight in goodness; we direct our en-

ergy in a caring and wise manner.

**Right mindfulness** involves being aware of our thoughts, emotions, words, and deeds and changing them when need be so that they reflect our motivation of kindness and non-harm. When we meditate, mindfulness keeps our mind on the object of meditation without letting it stray into distraction.

**Right concentration** stays focused and what is important and does not let the mind wander off in unproductive daydreams or spiteful planning. It prevents us from getting dragged down in ruminations on hopes and fears about situations that we cannot control.

### *What to do?*

Our efforts from here on will dictate how our life proceeds. We are responsible for our own thoughts, words, and actions. How we choose to view the people and events we encounter in life will influence how we respond to them. That, in turn, will influence our success and happiness.

## BENEFICIAL ACTION FOR SELF

### **Success**

1. Who do you see as successful and what do you admire about them?
2. What were you taught—what conditioning did you receive—as a child regarding the criteria for being successful?
3. How much of that conditioning have you accepted as your own thoughts?
4. What does success mean to you? Does it differ from what you learned as a child?

5. Are rich people necessarily happy? Are powerful people necessarily happy? What really is a successful life in terms of feeling happy and satisfied?
6. What can you do physically, verbally, and mentally to create the causes for a happy life?

### **Self-care and being balanced**

1. What does it mean to take care of your body and mind? How do you feel when you're balanced?
2. How do you become unbalanced? What happens when you are unbalanced?
3. What activities help you to remain balanced physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
4. What ways of thinking are conducive to being balanced? How can you make a habit of turning your mind to these ways of thinking?

### **BENEFICIAL ACTIONS FOR OTHERS**

#### **Giving**

1. Which things—money, possessions, time, positive feedback, love—do you give easily? Which do you have difficulty giving?
2. Do you give more freely to some people but hold back with others? Who?
3. Are you wise in what you give, to whom you give, how you give, etc? Have you ever erred in your judgment and given someone something that harmed them in the long term?
4. What factors do you need to be more aware of so that you can give to others more effectively?

### **Receiving**

1. Which things—money, possessions, time, positive feedback, love—are you comfortable in accepting from others?
2. Where do you have blocks in your ability to accept these from others? What is going on in your mind that creates those blocks? Do you feel obliged? Undeserving? Embarrassed?
3. How can you think so that you will be able to accept gifts from others with gratitude and pleasure, without these disturbing feelings?
4. How can you increase your ability to give and to receive wisely?

### **Helping others effectively**

1. Who are the people have helped you the most in your life? What did they do that helped you?
2. What are ways in which you have helped others?
3. What impedes you from helping? Fear? Lack of concern, etc.?
4. What ideas do you have for how to overcome those impediments?
5. What prevents the help you give from being effective? For example, do you mix helping with controlling? Do you have an agenda for how the other should act? Do you expect appreciation, love, honor, etc?
6. How can you remedy those and give with an open heart, with no strings attached?

### **Helping others with an open heart**

1. Do you ever feel guilty for not caring for others or obliged to care for them? What attitudes underlie that?
2. Is it really caring for others if you help out of obligation, fear, or attachment? How else can you look at the situation so that those attitudes don't arise?
3. What does it really mean to help someone? Does it mean doing everything they want? What if they want something harmful?
4. How does helping others relate to being a people-pleaser?
5. How does helping others relate to giving up attachment to our reputation?

### **The Gold**

Whatever Midas touched turned to gold; at least that is how the story goes. Ever since she was a little girl, Becky was captivated by the fable and the idea that Dionysus had the power to give Midas the ability to turn everything into gold by a simple touch. She fantasized about all the things she could buy if she had that ability, giving no thought as to how she would be able to eat or drink if everything she touched turned to gold. As she got older, her childish dreams faded away and were replaced with more realistic goals such as having a good job, a nice car, and a decent home. These were not unreasonable goals in themselves. Becky felt that if she had those basic things, she would be satisfied and happy with her life. So she went to school and in three years got a degree in Business Management and Telecommunications. With a 4.0 GPA, Becky immediately got a job with an internation-

al corporation as a minor office manager. She was earning enough money to afford a new Volvo and a nice apartment. She was fairly happy, but wanted more.

For the next six years, Becky worked hard at her job and did whatever she could to prove to her supervisors that she was invaluable to the company. Her dedication to work led to her being promoted to Chief Executive of Personnel Management. By that time, she was earning six figures and had saved enough money to make a down payment on a beautiful cedar home tucked away in a forest just a 30 minute drive from work. Life was good; she had everything that she ever wanted. But for some reason, she was not completely happy.

As Becky sat in her favorite chair at home with a glass of Chardonnay, she realized that she was lonely. All the time she had devoted to her work did not allow much time for social interaction. Aside from her parents, who lived on the other end of the country, and a few co-workers, she was alone and really didn't have any close friends. To avoid thinking about her condition and doing something about it, Becky sought happiness by purchasing things for her house and garden. When she ran out of ideas of what to buy for her home, she started buying jewelry. When Becky tired of that, she bought fine clothing, and later a BMW. One day she caught herself standing in her living room without any idea of what to do next. The happiness that she thought would come with success and money had evaded her. She had no idea how to change from mechanically going to work each day and returning to the silence of her home.

One day Becky was called into the CEO's office for a meeting. She had been there a few times before and was not concerned about being called to talk with the head of the company. Ten minutes after going into the meeting, she came

out with a stricken look on her face. She had been laid off due to company downsizing. The CEO offered her a weak explanation for her dismissal and severance pay of \$20,000. Becky owed more than \$20k on her new car and much more on her house. She went home and sat in the darkness of her living room trying to figure things out.

Several months later, Becky was able to get a job with an organization that provided shelter, food, and clothing for the homeless. She sold her home, her expensive car, and many of the things she had accumulated over the years. Her wages were only a fraction of what they had been, and she now lived in a small, one bedroom apartment. But she was surprised to discover how much she enjoyed her work. Through her energy and effort, the agency was able to increase the services that they provided. She was able to raise considerable funds that went to benefit the homeless—especially by giving them job training and fulfilling their basic needs so they could get on their feet. Even on her days off she volunteered her services by delivering meals to the elderly. The community improved markedly with Becky's involvement. There were now fewer homeless and more people getting housing. Children in the poorest part of the community received a healthy lunch every day and had afterschool sports and crafts. The elderly and the infirm were able to obtain services that they never knew about. This was all due to Becky's efforts and dedication. Everything she did seemed to turn to gold. The more she did for others, the more successful she was in helping others. Every night when Becky returned to her small apartment and crawled into bed, she went to sleep happier than at any other time in her life.

When we understand what the basic needs of others are, and we use whatever talents or resources we have to meet

those needs, and we do this without any thought of personal gain, we will realize a level of true happiness that cannot be purchased at any price, or in any place, or through anyone.

*Reflection*

Describe a time when you gained great satisfaction from something you did for someone else or for a group of people, or plants, animals, or the environment. How did it feel?



## A Final Note

Everyone wants to be free—free from pain and suffering, free from uncomfortable and stressful environments, free from personal demons, free from addiction, free from debt, free from incarceration—the list is endless. But no matter how much many of us want to be free of the things that imprison us, we remain chained to our suffering. This is because we do not know the causes of happiness and the causes of suffering, and mistakenly think that these lie outside of ourselves—in beautiful possessions, attractive people, high-ranking social status, and so forth.

In fact, the causes of happiness and suffering lie within us. Actions done with greed, anger, and confusion bring suffering. Actions done with kindness, generosity, and tolerance bring happiness. We must abandon the former and practice the latter.

Changing our attitude is another key to happiness. We all experience difficult times, loss, and pain but we can still be happy by not focusing on the negatives. By looking for that which is positive in every situation, you will learn to be more tolerant, sensitive, and understanding in your everyday interaction with the world, and that will lead you to happi-

ness.

In my (Chodron) work with people who are incarcerated, I've discovered that they light up when they hear teachings on compassion. Then they think, "Whatever my past has been, I do not need to be weighed down by it. Selfishness, greed, and anger are not my fundamental nature. In fact, the nature of my heart and mind is pure, and my good qualities can be developed limitlessly. Even now I have talents and abilities to offer to society. I have a compassionate heart and I can do good by others."

With this kind of attitude, go for it. Think of how you can benefit the people around you. It can be in little ways—a smile, a kind word, a helping hand, being patient with someone, being tolerant of those who have different ideas, responding to a taunt with humor and letting it go.

Have a big vision for your life and then slowly go about creating the causes to actualize it.