

Something Like
GOD

Six Weeks to
Spirituality

AARON A. RENO



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Something Like God

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FOREWORD

By Dawn Garcia



AT FIRST I WASN'T ENTIRELY SURE what to expect from this book. Turns out, it was more powerful and apropos than I realized. “Something Like God” is a guide that allows you to find that missing piece within yourself without label or judgment. Author, Aaron A. Reno, manages to find a way of tapping into the very fundamental curiosity that exists within every one of us; addressing questions we all have as to the existence of something outside of ourselves. He encourages readers to explore spirituality, affirm beliefs, and be willing to take risks in the search for something more. It’s a practical and soul-stirring book that invokes thought and careful introspection. As someone who has often questioned the purpose of organized religion and the essential value of spirituality—our connection to something bigger—I found this book to be not only informative and well-written, but to be a guide to be referenced at various stages in life.

Often times in life, we hit walls; sometimes literal, sometimes metaphoric. Either way, we find ourselves flailing in this abyss of life. We long to find the balance we need to get our bearings. Aaron creates a handbook that is both a workbook and a reminder

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that we are not alone in anything. Whether we dig deep within ourselves or seek a higher power, what matters is that there is an interconnectedness in this world, some unexplainable energy that not only gives us hope but gives us the courage (if we pay attention) to push past obstacles and move forward. This is a wonderful approach to a very complex and often oversimplified topic. “Something Like God” is a must-read, an easy-to-follow workbook for the soul, and a book that everyone can both understand and relate to.

—Dawn Garcia, CEO | Founder | Editor
ATOD Magazine (A Taste of Dawn)

INTRODUCTION

What is this book about?



“Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve.”

—Erich Fromm

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED if God exists? Of course you have—we all have. The very fact that you are reading this book tells me that you still have questions about your spirituality, and that is OK. While this is a book about the existence of a higher power, it is not a book about religion. In fact, if seeing or hearing the word “God” triggers negative feelings for you, feel free to use any of the following words instead:

Deity
Spirit
Divine Being
Universal Consciousness
The Creator
Higher Power

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Spiritual Energy
The Supernatural
... And so on

Any of the “labels” above can be used interchangeably with those found scattered throughout this book. In fact, your developing spirituality may be too complex for one term alone to encompass. Therefore, you may prefer to use one term while thinking about your physical body and another term while thinking about your spirituality. In any event, do not get hung up on any one label when there are more than enough words to convey any belief.

Within the pages of this book, I will attempt to digest and simplify a considerable amount of historical and contemporary information, bridge the gap between religion and spirituality, and help you to better appreciate what it means to live and to love. Finding your spirituality does not revolve around what you label your connection to the universe. Rather, your spirituality is directly linked to how you think, live, and relate to the tangible and unseen forces that surround you and flow *through* you. Rather than to simply come out and tell you whether or not God exists, this book will encourage you to look within yourself to find an answer ... to find THE answer.

Are you constantly searching for meaning beyond your day-to-day life? Does it feel that the more you search, the further you get from an answer? This book was written for those of you who are tired of merely searching for spirituality and are now ready to become more fully aware of your potential ... more fully alive. It is now time to stop running from your true self and to avoid becoming (or remaining) your own worst enemy. Everything you need to be happy is already in your possession. Now is the

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moment to take responsibility for your actions, your emotions, and even your thoughts. No longer do you need to create excuses for who you are. You are on the verge of learning to connect with your spirituality on a level previously reserved for spiritual leaders and historical figures. You will learn to develop complete mastery over your life simply by giving up unproductive thought patterns and unhealthy lifestyles.

Now, let's delve in a bit further. There is something inside of each and every one of us that speaks out when we are not living up to our full potential. Although this voice is sometimes faint and often drowned in a sea of technological and visual pollution, it is ever present. We sometimes know what we *should* be doing with our lives and yet we do not always act upon those intentions. You may have a "gut feeling" that there is some larger purpose for which you wish to devote yourself, but at this present moment are unsure of exactly what that purpose is or what action to take to achieve it. Throughout your life you may have even witnessed miracles, but interpreted the experiences as mere coincidence because you were not yet ready to understand their significance. What great things would have come your way if you had only paid more attention when the universe was speaking to you or *through* you? If these insights ring true for *YOU*, then your journey to spiritual awakening has already begun.

Not everybody who reads this book will understand its teachings and implications at first glance. However, those of you who are ready to take that next step *will* find places in this book (even in this intro) that promise the unveiling of undeniable truths. Regardless of whether you catch on immediately or gradually over the next six weeks, understand that there may be setbacks. When those setbacks occur, recognize them and realize that you may need to adjust your mindset before moving

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forward. For instance, many of the closest people to you may not be eager to listen when you reach out to discuss the deeper concepts contained within the pages ahead. In fact, as you begin to grasp the ideas laid out in the following chapters, you may at first feel *more* distant from your peers and *more* isolated from your family and friends. This is a regrettable, but completely normal part of the spiritual learning curve in today's widespread culture of instant gratification. Eventually, your new outlook on life and your newfound sense of spirituality *will* support you in feeling at ease, at home, and at peace everywhere you go regardless of the situations that life throws your way. As you move closer to this point of harmony with the universe, it will then be your turn to pass on these ideas to others, so that they too may benefit by your example.

Regardless of who you are, where you are, or where you come from, you have picked the best time to get started—*right now*. Every spiritual journey begins with its first step and you are now on your way to a deeper and more complete understanding of life, love, spirituality and ... *Something Like God*.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Keeping track of your progress



*“Motivation is what gets you started.
Habit is what keeps you going.”*

—Jim Rohn

THIS BOOK IS DESIGNED to be read twice. The first time, it should be read straight through from cover to cover. The second reading is organized in sections to be studied over a six-week period. While simply reading this book straight through is extremely helpful for most people new to the concept of spirituality, you will greatly increase your understanding (and thereby your “level” of spirituality) by following the course of action provided below during your second read.

The Second Read Through

Each week you will be assigned one of six sections. Each section contains *two lessons and two exercises*. All lessons are easy to read and are intended to present information in a straightforward and concise manner. The exercises at the end of each lesson will

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help you build on what you have learned by allowing you the opportunity to immediately flex your newfound spiritual, emotional, and physical muscles.

As this book was designed to help you improve your life from this point forward, I would not advise that you skip chapters or read ahead before adequately practicing what you have learned. Although you may feel that you understand the lessons immediately, your ability to use what you learn will be dependent on your practicing each step. Comprehending a lesson does not necessarily mean that you will instantly become more spiritual. Many people can easily read and understand spirituality from a purely rational vantage point, but it takes practice to change your unhealthy behaviors and bad habits. For example, you would not expect to read a book on physical fitness and then be able to run a marathon the next day. On the contrary, learning must be immediately followed by practice in order to achieve long-lasting results. However, these particular exercises will be enjoyable from the start because they will instantly begin to help you relax your mind and energize your life so that you can become aligned with your true purpose.

Getting the Most out of this Process

While reading this book, there might be times when you have a “eureka moment” and ideas that have been elusive in the past will instantly become clear. Life changes do not always come slowly over time. In fact, change can sometimes hit you like a freight train when you least expect it. When it does hit you (*and it will*), immediately cease all activity and sit quietly with your thoughts for a few minutes. These eureka moments may only last for a split second, so they must be embraced immediately in order for this newfound clarity to become part

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

of your new identity. Regardless of how long the moment lasts, praise yourself for making another great leap toward your spiritual goals.

Getting Started

Below are the two tables designed to organize your spiritual development over the next six weeks:

Table 1 explains each of the three icons you will see throughout the book. **Table 2** will help you organize and track your progress each week.

Table 1: Icons

Exercise	Further Reading	Stop and Think
		



Exercise

The Exercise icon lets you know that you are moving away from the explanatory section of each lesson and into the practice section. Each exercise is designed to help you retain the information you've learned in the preceding lesson.

Together, these twelve “spiritual practices” will help you activate and integrate various parts of your brain and body allowing them to work in harmony and with less conscious effort. Some exercises will help you with relaxation, some with mental clarity, and others with physical fitness. As each practice complements the next, be sure to begin the assigned exercises as soon as you have finished reading each section. Any delay in your practice may detract from your rapid advancement.

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Further Reading

Following each lesson, I have suggested additional reading material that can be used in your future studies. The suggested books will help you delve more fully into the ideas presented in each lesson should you wish to further your comprehension. These books should not be read while on your journey with *Something Like God*, but instead can be read after to further your spiritual journey. (Exercise 12 will help you to organize your favorite titles and future study material.)



Stop and Think

When you come across a Stop and Think icon, put down the book for one or two minutes and simply sit quietly with your thoughts. Often a moment or two of silent reflection will help you internalize the significance of what you have just read and unify that understanding with your current beliefs. Also, remember to take time to stop and think anytime you have your own eureka moment at any point in your reading.

Calendar Your Progress

Now it's time to take the important initial step of organizing your progress. Grab a pen or pencil and write today's date in the "Start Date" box below (to the right of "Week 1"). Today, you will read Lessons 1 & 2 and then immediately begin the exercise at the end of each lesson. By the time you begin Week 2, you will have practiced both exercises 6 or 7 times. Week 2 will be started exactly one week—7 calendar days—from today and so on.

Take the time now to view a calendar and fill in the remaining dates for Week 2 through Week 6.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Table 2: Progress

Sections by Week	Start Date	Quick Reference
Week 1 Lessons: 1 & 2 Faith and Living	(Today's date) ___/___/___	Exercise 1 – Quick Decisions Exercise 2 – Mindful Breaths
Week 2 Lessons: 3 & 4 Health and Relationships	(7 days after Week 1) ___/___/___	Exercise 3 – Mini Workout Exercise 4 – Good Deeds
Week 3 Lessons: 5 & 6 Truth and Meditation	(7 days after Week 2) ___/___/___	Exercise 5 – Truth Journal Exercise 6 – Quiet Meditation
Week 4 Lessons: 7 & 8 Failure and Money	(7 days after Week 3) ___/___/___	Exercise 7 – Fail Often Exercise 8 – Visualization
Week 5 Lessons: 9 & 10 Life and Death	(7 days after Week 4) ___/___/___	Exercise 9 – Non-Judgment Exercise 10 – Imagine Death
Week 6 Lessons: 11 & 12 Creativity and God	(7 days after Week 5) ___/___/___	Exercise 11 – Be a Vessel Exercise 12 – Favorite Titles

By the end of your journey, you will have completed this six-week course and have 12 spiritual practices on which to rely. While this book is intended as a six-week crash course in spirituality, the exercises provided within each lesson should be continued after your six-week program. You can practice them for as long as it takes to create the mindset you seek, to find the peace you deserve, and to gain the spiritual lifestyle you wish to lead.

At first it may not be clear how lessons like truth, health, and creativity play into becoming more spiritual. However, keep in mind that all things are connected on a much deeper level than they may appear to be on the surface. By becoming clear-headed

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and focused through the provided lessons and exercises, all of the information in this book will begin to overlap and life will suddenly seem more exciting and easier to manage. Things that were once confusing may start to become more obvious. Your day-to-day life will start to become simple and pleasurable. Your health goals will begin to overlap with your relationship goals, your scientific views will fuse with your religious views, and your thought patterns will blend with the material objects of the physical world.

You now have your game plan and timeline laid out in no uncertain terms. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Now ... let's begin.



WEEK 1

Faith and Living

LESSON 1: FAITH

Religion and spirituality



“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

AS BRIEFLY DISCUSSED IN THE INTRO of this book, religion and faith do not necessarily have to go hand-in-hand. There are many people who practice faith on an ongoing basis and yet do not regularly attend a place of worship. On the other hand, there are those who attend sermons and/or religious classes every week and still have no true connection to their spirituality. This understandable disconnect is due to the fact that faith and religion are not one and the same.

Religion can be defined as “a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe.” Faith by contrast is often defined as “confidence or trust in a person or thing.” By comparing these definitions side-by-side we can see that one of these practices can easily occur with or without the other, as is so often the case. My purpose here is not to condemn one or the

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other, but rather to point out that true spirituality is not defined by your religious preferences or practices. You can practice faith within a specific religion as the foundation of your spiritual belief or you can practice faith in a universal power without any specific religious affiliation whatsoever.

If you are a religious person, it is this author's opinion that you keep practicing your present religion as you learn to become more spiritual. However, there is no *right way* to be spiritual and everybody must ultimately seek their own path. You can find a way to exercise your developing spirituality while in church, temple, or simply by speaking with like-minded individuals. I believe you will find that connecting to your spirituality as laid out in this book will help you to grow your faith within the context of your current beliefs.

If you are a person who was brought up without a specific religion, a person who has renounced their religion, or a person who has not yet made up their mind, faith remains easily accessible for you. Open your mind to the possibilities of developing your faith through your own research, your own thoughts and through your own practice. It is becoming perfectly acceptable in our modern society to be a spiritual person without being associated with a particular religious sect.

Regardless of religious affiliation (or lack thereof) you may at first feel that you are becoming a kind of outcast amongst your friends and family. When this happens, remember that you are on your own path to spiritual enlightenment and they are on theirs. You will know you are on the right path not by what others say, but by how you feel when things are finally going your way. At first, this feeling of being *on track* with your growing faith may be fleeting, but as you continue to practice and learn, your self-doubt will vanish and you will start to attract others who

LESSON 1: FAITH

have similar views. You will find that life begins to miraculously change and come together in a way to best serve you and your beliefs. Your every waking hour will become filled with a love energized by faith. You will find that every moment is worth living to its fullest potential. Professor of Psychiatry, Emmanuel Teney emphasized this observation when he said:

“As your faith is strengthened you will find that there is no longer the need to have a sense of control, that things will flow as they will and that you will flow with them, to your great delight and benefit.”

Now that you have had a brief overview of faith, let us take a moment to discuss a few of the various forms in which faith can be practiced:

Faith in a Higher Power

Having faith in a higher power allows us to be less concerned with the small things in life by realizing that we are all part of an undivided whole. As a small but significant part of the universal intelligence, we have nothing to prove in our life and everything to discover. This type of faith informs us that we are not alone on this planet. Rather, we are but small cogs in a universal machine which lies just beyond the comprehension of our developing human intelligence; and because we are inseparable from this universal intelligence, we are able to readily tap into its power once we are more fully connected with our own spirituality.

One of the ways to focus your faith in a higher power is to pay close attention to the miracles that we often label as “coincidence.” For instance, have you ever thought about calling someone that you haven’t spoken to in quite some time, only to have them call you

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first? Or, have you ever had an idea for an invention only to see it in the stores a few months later? While both of these examples can be chalked up to coincidence, there is truly something much greater at work. On the surface it is easy to label these circumstances as “flukes” or “quirks” because we think of thoughts as somehow separate from our physical bodies and therefore from the rest of the universe. However, we are *always* connected to the higher power and we constantly give off and receive messages that create situations that are statistically improbable if not impossible. Start paying closer attention to all coincidences in your life both great and small. You will find that your faith cannot help but to grow when your awareness is focused upon the connectedness (often called “Oneness”) of all things.

Faith in Oneself

Faith in oneself is the genuine belief in your ability to turn your thoughts and dreams into reality. It is the underlying assuredness that you are on the right path and that you can accomplish whatever you set your mind to. This type of faith provides the ability to dream big without the interference of negative influences from others or from your own self-doubt.

Having faith in yourself is not to be confused with being conceited or unkind as it is simply part of aligning yourself with the unseen powers in the universe. As an interconnected part of the universal whole, you are not acting alone in your pursuits. Rather, you become a vessel of the higher intelligence and simultaneously learn to act in accordance with your higher purpose. This alignment supplies the confidence you need to act on your intuition without the anxious feelings that often accompany great thoughts, allowing you to pursue your goals and follow your dreams without hesitation.

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Faith in Others

Faith in others provides us the opportunity to enjoy the company of other people even within the boundaries of our perceived differences. Each person is on a unique path that is specifically suited for that person and that person alone. It is not our job to judge others, just as it is not their duty to judge us. You can have faith in your beliefs while allowing others to follow their own equally essential path toward spiritual awakening. Because each and every person's value is "built-in" to their very existence, it does not diminish due to their actions, words, or beliefs. This does not mean that we have to associate with everybody that we are not fond of. It simply means that we can appreciate everybody's fundamental value as an equal part of the fabric of our universe.



Exercise 1 – Quick Decisions

Quick Decisions become easy to make when you have faith in yourself. By making quick decisions and being slow to change your mind, your faith will grow as will your ability to succeed.

Directions

Taking too long to make a decision (or making no decision at all) is often the worst "choice" we can make in life. People often spend their whole lives avoiding important decisions while time gradually passes them by. Procrastination during the decision-making process shows a lack of faith in your ability and/or your intelligence to make the "right" decision. This does not mean that you should make a hasty decision when you have no available information or inspiration. However, as soon as you get that intuitive nudge that

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tells you something is a good idea, you should already have your mind made up. Or, when you get the “feeling” that something is the wrong choice, you should listen to that voice and decide accordingly.

Many times, we think that we need to study each and every angle of the problem so that we can make the correct decision. However, more often than not, having more information only compounds the problem and dilutes our innate ability to know what is right for us at any given moment. Too much information can be far worse than not enough information because our conscious brain can become more confused when inundated with facts, figures and “what ifs.” In the end, ANY choice is better than no choice. If your choice is correct, you will soon be reaping the rewards. And if your choice is incorrect, you can quickly change course and choose the correct path knowing that you have already tried the alternative. However, if you make no choice at all, you will never get what you want out of life. For, what is life if not a series of thoughts, emotions, circumstances, and choices?

Show some faith in yourself and make quick decisions starting right now and for the rest of the week! Begin with those decisions that can be made in just a few moments and that do not generally have dire consequences, such as those found below:

1. Where to eat
2. Which route to take
3. Who to invite
4. Where to vacation
5. When to exercise

As you become more comfortable, start utilizing your quick decision-making power for the seemingly more difficult choices in your life.

LESSON 1: FAITH



Lesson 1 – Further Reading

- *Blink* by Malcom Gladwell
- *There's a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem* by Wayne W. Dyer

... Continue to Lesson 2.

LESSON 2: LIVING

The *trick* to being happy



“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.”

—Albert Einstein

LIFE IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW. In fact, life only happens (can *only* happen) in this very moment. This may sound self-explanatory if not silly, but let’s take a moment to delve further into the idea of what it means to live in the moment, to be present in both your thoughts and actions and how this idea relates to happiness.

How often are you truly happy in your everyday life? Some of us are happy most of the time, while others are happy for only fleeting moments out of each day. All too often, people are drawn into deep depressions that suppress their natural curiosity for life and cause them to wander around like zombies rather than to live their lives to the fullest extent possible. In many cases, these same people would rather sleep their lives away than be forced to deal with the “demons” that plague their thoughts.

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While science has told us that there are natural variations of happiness, some as deep as genetics, childhood development, and brain chemistry, this research seldom helps us to feel happy. There is not much that can be done to alter our genetics, our childhood has come and gone, and our medical professionals merely mask our perceived problems using prescription drugs. What then is the trick to being happy? In order to explain this further, let us take a look at what most of us think (and therefore how we act) by default. This involves uncovering those “hidden” thoughts that inadvertently keep us from living our lives with true passion and excitement.

Future Living

Have you ever noticed that the future never seems to arrive? Wasn't the year 2000 supposed to mark “the future?” And yet, even though we never quite arrive into the “future,” many of us put all of our hopes and dreams into some future place in time. Although we stumble into happiness now and again, our joyful state seems to dissolve quickly and for no apparent reason. Is it any wonder then, that we are sorely disappointed most of the time? While the future certainly exists in our mind, we can never truly “arrive” in the future. As soon as the present moment has passed, we arrive in the next present moment. Five, 10, or 20 years from now, when we finally arrive in this make-believe future moment, it will once again be the present moment.

You can obviously set appointments for future dates. You can plan events days, weeks, years, or even decades into the “future.” However, when that scheduled event finally arrives, you will find that it is once again the present moment. This is truly important to comprehend because how you think about the future can greatly affect your state of well being in the present moment and your

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overall success in life. If you are always looking to the future for your happiness, you will spend your life searching for happiness in a future that is always just out of your grasp. Author and Ph.D. Leo Buscaglia points to this idea in the following quote.

“Life lived for tomorrow will always be just a day away from being realized.”

To find out if you are holding on too tightly to this idea called “the future,” ask yourself if you have ever thought (or spoken out loud) any of the following statements:

I will be happy when ...	
... I can drive	... I have kids
... I am an adult	... I am rich
... I have graduated	... my kids are grown
... I own a house	... my house is paid off
... I am married	... I am a grandparent
... I am successful	... I retire

Do you see the pattern here? If not, take a minute to look again. This “I will be happy when” idea can take you to your grave without ever providing lasting happiness. These types of milestones may be important indicators about how far you have come in your life and may even create immense happiness for a short time. However, this kind of happiness is always temporary and can fade very quickly. For as soon as you have achieved one goal, you will set your mind onto the next. With the risk of seeming overly dramatic or morbid, this sort of future-thinking can really only be “completed” when your physical form ceases to exist.

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Now, take a third look at the previous list. Do you see the pattern more easily now? If you wait until you are retired to be happy, you will have wasted the majority of your youth running toward your next goal. Youth aside, would retirement itself truly make you happy at any age? Most likely, it would not. At least while you have goals, you have something to work toward on a day-to-day basis. Upon reaching the end of your “to-do” list of life goals, you would no longer have a future goal to live for and would be more likely to race to your demise.

Of course, future thinking does have its positive and necessary uses. Without thoughts of the future, how could you possibly set appointments, arrive to work on-time, throw parties, get your kids to school, etc.? There are obvious uses for thinking toward the future for specific purposes such as these. However, in all of these instances, you are using future thinking as a tool in the present moment as opposed to creating a lifestyle burdened with the stress of future living. Do you see and understand the difference? In the first example, you are merely applying this idea of “the future” to help you plan for events which will take place in a future now—a future present moment. You are still planning for the future, but you are enjoying that planning process right now. And when that future moment finally arrives, you will be able to live in that moment fully aware and able to make appropriate decisions. In the second instance, future thinking is overwhelming all other thoughts and causing you great distress. This distress is due to the fact that you cannot be happy and productive *in* the future because the future is always slightly beyond your reach.

Past Living

While some of us live full-time in a future full of anxiety and fear, others find themselves replaying the past in a way that brings them

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down into a state of regret and shame. By living in the past, we destroy our sense of peace and happiness. Even when physically present, past living causes us to misunderstand the events that are happening in the present moment and therefore lessen our joy of life. Instead of peacefully going about our day, we begin to judge people and circumstances based on previous negative memories. While experience is often essential to decision making, being caught up in past memories only serves to hamper current growth as a spiritual being.

Just as we found that the future does not truly exist, neither does the past truly exist. What we label “the past” is simply a series of present moments that have come and gone leaving mere memories in their place. As you progress through this book, you will begin to see that memories of the past are often faulty and misconstrued. In fact, the same event can often trigger totally different memories in two different people. You may even hear a person speak positively about a specific memory, only to hear that same person explain it again in a negative context at a later date. Did the past change? In essence, yes it did. We create our past by the stories we tell ourselves and others about the previous events in our lives.

How you think about the past has an enormous impact on the way you live in the present moment. If you have negative thoughts about your past, you will often miss opportunities for change and personal growth in the present because you remain stuck in a moment that has already passed you by. It seems that we are taught from a young age that this is how we are supposed to live. We begin telling ourselves things like, “I am this way because of my social status.” Or, “I would be a better person if my parents had raised me better.” We could all probably find reasons to blame our environment, parents, teachers, or peers

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for who we are today, but if we are old enough to analyze our past and to dream of what might have been, we are old enough to take full responsibility for our present thoughts and actions.

Of course, past thinking also has its positive points when utilized properly. We learn lessons from our experiences in life that are often useful for decision-making in the present moment. Without past experience, we would not be able to grow as individuals nor as a society. These important lessons in our past need our attention from time to time while deciding what to do “in the now.” When we look back and need to recall one of these past lessons, they remain available to us stored as memories, photographs, videos, etc. However, once we have grasped what we can from a particular experience, it becomes harmful to dwell too intently or too often on that past moment. In essence, paying *too* much attention to the past causes the present moment to slip away undetected. Michael Cibenko, a teacher of theology and language, puts it this way:

“One problem with gazing too frequently into the past is that we may turn around to find the future has run out on us.”

Having realized the many negative impacts of future and past living, it is now time to address this concept as it pertains to your current thought patterns. Take another moment to sit silently and see where your thoughts take you.



What did you think about during that brief pause? Were you remembering a past event, thinking of what you have to do

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later today, or were you enjoying a brief moment of silence with little thought whatsoever?

It is not always easy to realize what it is we are thinking at any given moment. Knowing your thoughts as they happen requires that you create enough space between each thought in order for “thought awareness” to exist. Because we have not yet touched on how this is accomplished, we will start instead by taking the easy route to knowing our thoughts. In order to know exactly what you are thinking, as you are thinking it, all you need to do is pay attention to your current emotions. Because your emotions are directly influenced by your thoughts, becoming aware of your emotions will lead you directly back to the thought process that generated the feeling.

Because all negative emotion can be attributed to either excessive future or past thoughts, learning to decipher your dominating thoughts upon a quick review of the **Emotion Table** below will help you become more aware. As you review the table, take a quick moment to write down your top three **thought emotions** to find out if you are living in the past, the future, or a culmination of both.

Emotion Table

Future thought emotions	Past thought emotions
Worry	Regret
Anxiety	Remorse
Fear	Guilt
Apprehension	Shame
Nervousness	Grief
Tension	Disgrace

Now that you have identified your three primary negative emotions, we need to discuss what can be done to move beyond

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the triggering thoughts that are responsible for these negative feelings. If we shouldn't be living in thoughts of the past or the future, where then do we turn our attention? We must center our thoughts around the only place in time that truly exists—this very moment.

Can you feel the pages of this book between your fingers or the texture of the e-reader within your hands? Can you simultaneously view this text while expanding your peripheral vision to see what is around you right now? This is the present moment. This is life. There is real power *only* in this present moment. You have the ability this very second to change and to affect **anything** about your life that you do not like. There is no being happy tomorrow and there is no use in wondering “what if.” Life can only happen now. Tap into the energy of this moment. Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold it for a few seconds. Now slowly let the breath out through your mouth. Once again, take a deep breath in through your nose. Hold it for a few moments. Slowly let it out through your mouth. Now mark your page in this book and take one minute to look at your surroundings practicing non-judgment. Simply place the book down and enjoy the present moment.





Exercise 2 – Mindful Breaths

Practicing Mindful Breaths is an easy way to bring your attention back to the present moment. By simply paying attention to your breathing, you can relax and enjoy your life more fully.

Directions

From the time we wake up to the time we go to bed, our minds often race into the future and/or the past. While it is sometimes necessary to look forward into the future to make plans or to look back into the past to avoid repeating a mistake, we need to stay primarily focused on the present moment in order to achieve a state of peace in our everyday lives.

When you find that your thoughts are not on the current moment, simply pay attention to your breathing. There is no need to change the way you are breathing for this exercise. Simply keep your attention on your inhalation and exhalation for five full breaths. This simple act will help you to refocus and re-energize in the current moment, which is the only true moment that exists.

Because we often do not even realize that we are daydreaming of past or future moments, you may need to use situational reference points as a reminder to practice. To get started, choose two of the 10 examples from below that best fit your lifestyle and write them down. Each time you find yourself in one of the situations you have chosen, focus on your breathing for five full cycles.

1. While stopped at a traffic light
2. Upon arriving to work
3. Before an important business call

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4. While stuck in traffic
5. Before going to sleep
6. After a difficult conversation
7. Before reprimanding a child
8. While waiting in line
9. Before sitting down to a meal
10. *Upon realizing that your mind has wandered

*Always use this technique when you become aware that your mind has wandered away from the present moment and into the past or future.



Lesson 2 – Further Reading

- *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle
- *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen
- *The Way of Peace* by James Allen

STOP!

Practice Exercises 1 & 2 and I'll see you next week.



WEEK 2

Health and Relationships

LESSON 3: HEALTH

Your body and mind



*“Every human being is the author of
his own health or disease.”*

—Buddha

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH are so deeply intertwined in terms of your overall spiritual wellbeing that to promote one at the expense of the other would be futile. For example, when you are having negative thoughts, these thoughts begin to act within your body to produce stress hormones which in turn cause premature aging as well as any number of stress-related diseases. On the opposite side of the coin, something as simple as smiling or laughing (even when you are not happy) can change your body’s chemistry and affect your mood in a positive way. Therefore, in order to create a healthy lifestyle, which will promote spirituality, you must focus both on your physical and mental health simultaneously. Ideas for better mental health are abundant throughout this book, so in this lesson we will focus on the physical aspect only.

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The universe loves action. The sooner you take action after receiving a thought or inspiration, the more likely you are to materialize a successful outcome. In this very moment, your intention should be to improve your physical well-being as part of a well-rounded lifestyle, which will act to promote peace and spiritual enlightenment in your life. Quotation anthologist Terri Guillemets points to this sense of urgency when she says:

“When it comes to eating right and exercising, there is no ‘I’ll start tomorrow.’ Tomorrow is disease.”

With that said, there is no reason for further delay and there is every reason to improve your health starting right now. In order to help you jumpstart your progress immediately, we will begin with something you can work on even as you read these pages.

Posture

You can begin to increase your physical health this very moment by paying attention to and correcting your posture. Start by sitting (or standing) up straight. Relax your shoulders and bring them slightly down and back. Tuck your chin down and back as if you were holding an apple between your chin and neck. Next, plant your feet flat on the ground hip-width apart with your feet pointed forward. (If you are standing, keep your knees slightly bent to avoid excess strain on your joints.) To align your hips, roll your pelvis forward (pushing your butt out) as far as possible and then roll your pelvis back (tuck in your butt) as far as possible. The position directly in between those two extremes is a good starting point. Lastly, suck in your belly button as if a string were attached to it from the inside, pulling your belly button closer to your spine. (Pretend you have your shirt off at

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the beach.) Your breathing may at first feel labored, but working past the awkward stage is a small price to pay for better posture and increased physical health.

Now that you have begun increasing your physical health in the *here and now*, let's explore a few easy steps you can take to further increase your physical condition in the upcoming weeks.

Cardiovascular Exercise

Most of us are very familiar with cardiovascular training in one form or another. You've probably bored yourself to tears at the gym while riding a recumbent bike, climbing endlessly up a stair climber, walking and running on a treadmill, or using one of the newer cross trainers. These machines are all tolerable alternatives to natural movement when natural movement is limited by your living situation or by current health issues. However, depending on your fitness level and goals, you may eventually be better served by doing the actual activities that these machines were created to replicate. By "actual activities" I mean actually riding a bike outdoors instead of riding the recumbent bike, climbing stairs at a local stadium rather than using the stair climber, or hiking on a nature trail rather than walking on the treadmill. An elliptical machine may have less "real world" application, but swimming comes to mind for those who have access to a pool. In any event, 20–30 minutes of "cardio" most days of the week (depending on your specific fitness goals or directions from your doctor) will play a key role in your overall physical and spiritual health.

Resistance Training

Resistance training is what people often mean when they say "weight training." Most beginners tend to feel intimidated by the

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muscle-bound men lifting dumbbells in the corner of the gym where the free weights and bench presses are found. Instead of overcoming our fears or finding an alternative, most of us just skip resistance training altogether. Although resistance training is often done at the gym with weights, it can also be done with rubber bands as well as with our own body weight (against the force of gravity).

While working as a professional fitness trainer, from 2000–2003, I heard every excuse in the book for not practicing resistance training. One of the major excuses was that people were afraid they would build too much muscle. They were worried that they might end up looking like the body builders they see on TV or on the magazine rack. However, developing the physique of a professional body builder takes so much effort, that the chances of you becoming overly muscular without your consent are next to none. These extreme athletes put their bodies through severe “torture” the likes of which you and I may never understand. It requires years in the gym training specifically for the purpose of hypertrophy (muscle growth). Looking like a body builder also requires an increased caloric intake (eating in excess of 4,000–12,000 calories per day) and often requires the use of supplements, steroids and/or other anabolic drugs, not to mention tanning and/or air-brushing.

Another excuse many people use for not incorporating resistance training is that they are trying to lose weight and that putting on muscle will slow or reverse their progress. This addiction with “scale weight” is a huge problem in the United States and other developing countries. If you can simply change your goal from “losing weight” to “looking and feeling great,” you will have done yourself a huge favor. After all, if you look

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and feel great, it does not matter what your weight is according to the scale. By itself, weight is simply a number indicating your relationship to gravity and it does not reflect how much fat is in your body as compared to lean body mass. In other words, would you rather weigh less and look terrible or weigh a little more and look and feel fantastic? If your answer is still “to weigh less” then you have not yet grasped the concept of what it means to be fit.

To exacerbate the problem, we often hear the phrase, “Muscle weighs more than fat.” While this is literally impossible, it is regarded as a well-known fact. In reality, a pound of muscle, of course, weighs exactly the same as a pound of fat. The difference then is how much space a pound of either takes up in your body: a pound of fat would appear much larger than a pound of muscle. Because of this visual imbalance, you could lose 15 pounds of fat, gain five pounds of muscle and your overall physical appearance would be much greater than your net 10 pound loss. As well as looking much more fit for having added a little muscle, each additional pound of lean muscle gained would be consistently burning 30–50 calories each day while at rest. So not only would these five pounds of lean body mass (extra weight) make you look and feel much better, you would also be burning 150–250 extra calories per day just by being in better shape. Gaining five pounds (of muscle) suddenly seems like a great idea!

Nutrition

Now that you have changed your mindset to starting (or modifying) your exercise program, you will need to feed yourself accordingly. For example, you would not put regular/leaded gas in a

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sports car because a high-performance vehicle requires energy that burns cleanly and efficiently. By this same standard, you must feed your body with more nutrient dense (high nutrition content per calorie) foods as you begin to increase your physical health. Also, by eating more nutritious food such as vegetables, lean white meats, legumes, and fruits, you will not need to eat as many calories to become satiated (full), which is great for getting in shape. When you are on a restricted calorie diet (as opposed to a “see-food” diet), you must pay very close attention to the nutrient content of your food. The fewer calories you consume, the more critical it is that the calories you *do* consume are comprised of mostly healthy choices.

Fast food is generally a bad idea, although most fast food restaurants at least offer healthier alternatives to their “dollar menu” items. On average, meals that consist of vegetables and lean protein are going to be better for you and contain fewer calories than a fast food hamburger with fries or a combination burrito with a soda. Not only is fast food high in calories, but also it is typically low in nutrients. This is part of the reason why you’re hungry too soon after eating a large meal from a fast food restaurant.

There are volumes of books written about proper diet and meal preparation, so let us instead have a brief discussion about how often to eat. Although every body is unique, there is little evidence to support the three-meal-a-day routine that we have been taught since we were children. Ultimately, you want to feed your body regularly throughout the day. By eating the standard three-meal diet, your body can become confused and shift into a state of starvation. If you feel “starved” by the time your next meal comes around, you will know that it has been too long since your last meal or snack. Eating so infrequently can condition

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your body to store the energy (calories) in your fat cells for safe keeping as opposed to burning them off (as with those who are referred to as having a fast metabolism).

Unfortunately, not all excess nutrients are stored in our bodies with the same ease as excess fat. Your body will use only those nutrients it needs at the moment and excrete the rest as waste. Even though you may have eaten enough calories for an entire day in one meal, you may again feel hungry within a short period due to your body's lack of available nutrients. Because stored body fat is low in nutrients, your body will enter a state of catabolism and begin breaking down your lean body mass to get the energy it needs. While this state of catabolism is perfectly normal in moderation, it will lead to major health problems if left unbalanced.

If we were all perfect human machines with no outside responsibilities to distract us, we would feed ourselves in small snacks throughout the day every few hours. Although this may be contrary to how you have been eating up until this point in your life, it is never too late to make the necessary improvements. With a couple of minor changes to your daily habits, your body will be on its way to becoming a well-oiled machine. Eating small frequent meals will not only help you feel better, it will also help to speed up your metabolism so that the calories you *do* consume are burned more quickly and efficiently. With your metabolism primed and your muscles raring to go, you will be able to reverse some of your old habits and initiate an internal state which enables you to get the most out of life both physically and spiritually. When you feel well you think well. And when you think well, you will be in a better position to grip the wheel of life and steer yourself in any direction you wish to travel with the wind at your back.

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Common Myths

Sometimes we hesitate to begin a new health routine because of past failure. However, this “failure” is often due to the confusion between what really works and what is merely “gym fact” (myth). While it is probably not your goal to become Mr. or Ms. “Fitness Guru,” there are a few myths we should dispel before moving forward.

- **You can turn fat into muscle.** You can lose fat and gain muscle in a relatively short period of time, but fat does not turn into muscle. Rather, the more muscle you gain, the more likely you are to burn body fat even while at rest (watching TV, sleeping, driving, etc.).
- **Doing sit-ups or crunches will reduce belly fat.** This myth is called “spot reduction” and is the very foundation upon which most exercise products are sold. Where your fat was deposited (your particular body shape) was most likely decided by your genetics and food choices. Your body stores and removes fat from any location it deems appropriate. This often means that your “problem areas” persists even as the rest of your body becomes firm. Eventually though, your body will have no choice except to burn the remaining fat from wherever it is still available.

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- **The best way to lose weight is to skip meals.** Skipping meals has actually been shown to slow your metabolism by putting your body into a state of starvation, thus making it more likely that your body will store excess calories as fat instead of burning them for energy. Instead, eating smaller and more frequent meals will help to rev up your metabolism and put you on track toward your desired results.
- **No pain, no gain.** This myth states that you must exercise at a very high intensity and/or for many hours to get positive results. However, research shows that even low intensity routines provide significant health benefits. In fact, if you are not fond of pain, being in significant pain while exercising (or for days/weeks after exercising) will negatively influence your progress.
- **You should not eat past 6pm.** This myth suggests that we do not burn calories while we sleep as effectively as we do during the day. In fact, it has been shown that sleeping actually burns more calories than watching TV. This is not to say that you should save your calories for the evening. Instead, make sure to start each day with proper breakfast and eat every 3–4 hours thereafter so that you do not feel like you are starving during the evening hours.



Exercise 3 – Mini Workout

The Mini Workout is a five-minute daily exercise schedule. Make the following changes to your daily routine to help strengthen your body while you develop your mind.

Directions

Standing Posture (always)

- Distribute your weight between the balls of your feet and heels.
- Keep your feet about hip-width apart.
- Let your arms hang down with your thumbs facing forward.
- Keep your knees slightly bent (as opposed to locked).
- Tuck in your chin as if to hold an apple between your chin and chest.
- Pull your shoulders back and down.
- Breathe naturally.

Plank (2 minutes)

- Lay face down (prone) resting on your forearms.
- Lift your body up and back off the floor and onto your toes.
- Keep your back flat and straight from head to heels.
- Flex your rear end (gluteus maximus) and pull your hips in so that your lower back is not hyperextended.
- Hold for 20 to 60 seconds, then lower and repeat for 3–5 reps.
- Keep your eyes focused on the ground to keep your neck straight.
- Breathe naturally.

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Bridge (2 minutes)

- Lie on your back (supine) with your feet on the floor hip-width apart.
- Rest your arms at your sides and bend your knees.
- Place your feet on the ground with your weight evenly distributed.
- Contract your stomach muscles and lift your hips off the ground.
- Keep your back straight at the top of the exercise.
- Hold for 20 to 60 seconds, then lower and repeat for 3–5 reps.
- Breathe naturally.

Smiling and Laughing (1 minute)

Studies consistently show the positive effects of smiling and laughter on your physical and mental health. These effects can occur whether or not the act is “fake” or real. So do yourself a favor and fake happiness for one minute every day. You will reduce the buildup of stress hormones in your body while increasing the effectiveness of your immune system. Who knows, you may even find yourself smiling and laughing more often in everyday situations.

Nutrition (always)

The only “diets” that actually work over long periods are those which are based in proper nutrition and can be adhered to indefinitely. In order to make progress starting immediately, circle three of the 11 items below and implement them at once.

From this day forward I will ...

1. ... drink more water.
2. ... watch less TV.

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3. ... drink less soda.
4. ... turn off the TV while eating.
5. ... chew food slowly and thoroughly.
6. ... eat breakfast.
7. ... eat smaller portions more often.
8. ... eat more natural whole foods and less processed food.
9. ... eat more vegetables.
10. ... prepare meals with a wide variety of natural color.
11. ... decrease my intake of red meat to once per week.



Lesson 3 – Further Reading

- *Eat This, Not That!* by David Zinczenko
- *The Human Body* by Charles Clayman, MD

... Continue to Lesson 4.

LESSON 4: RELATIONSHIPS

Love yourself



“You cannot be lonely if you like the person you’re alone with.”

—Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

HOW GENUINE IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP with yourself? How in touch are you with your thoughts and feelings? Although these questions appear odd on the surface, they are important matters to answer truthfully. As simple as these questions are, the answers are sometimes unusually difficult to answer immediately. However, if you dig just below the surface, you’ll find that it is actually very easy to answer these questions due to the direct correlation between your relationships with others and the relationship you have with yourself. For instance, if you have trouble getting along with others, you have much to learn about your own thought process. In fact, if you pay close attention to the personality traits of the people that most irritate you, you will assuredly find these same negative traits within yourself (to varying degrees). Although this may be difficult to accept at first, until you

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take full responsibility for your own role in your relationships, you are destined to repeat the same patterns indefinitely.

So, in order to begin this exercise in self-assessment, finding faults in others is a good place to start. This is not meant as an exercise in blaming or in feeling superior to others; it is merely an exercise of short-term faultfinding for the purpose of creating better habits in our own lives and more easily forgiving others for their own perceived faults.

While it is often difficult to uncover our personal faults, it is very easy to find faults in others. Take a few moments right now to ponder some of the things about those close to you (friends, family, co-workers, etc.) that you find irritating. Now, grab a pen and write down the first five negative traits that come to mind in the spaces provided below or on a separate piece of paper.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When you are done, take a very close look at your list to see if any of these traits could be used to describe *you* as well. If you really want to drive this lesson home, show your list to a friend, but don't explain how the list was created. Instead, ask them to circle (with complete honesty) each and every trait on the list that could be used to describe you. It's a scary lesson to learn, but you are ready for it.

LESSON 4: RELATIONSHIPS

Value Your Thoughts

In developing your interpersonal relationships you must also learn to value what you think about yourself over what others think about you. We sometimes think that we are not affected by outside opinions, but this next practice will help to determine if you are more affected than you might have thought. Take a moment to remember something somebody said to you (or about you) that really made you upset or caused you to doubt yourself. What was it they said that upset you or caused doubt? Was it a close friend, an acquaintance, or a perfect stranger? Why did what they say have such a strong impact on you? If I told you your tongue was green would that upset you? I doubt that it would. You *know* that your tongue is not green. You may look in the mirror to verify that somebody didn't play a practical joke, but your feelings would not be hurt. Using this example, it is safe to say that nothing anybody says about you would hurt your feelings if you did not believe on some level that it was true.

Now, if I called you a name like stupid, fat, or ugly, would that upset you? If it would upset you, there is some part of you that already believes it to be true. This is a harsh statement, but you will find it to be accurate if you pay close attention to your feelings. Maybe you were called stupid while growing up and it started a chain reaction whereby you struggled through school and then landed a low-paying job. Maybe a schoolyard bully called you fat which then caused you to eat in order to bury your emotional pain thus initiating further weight gain. Or maybe you were told you were ugly by a love interest early in life and that emotional wound never healed, making real intimacy fleeting or impossible. None of the previous statements have any power to hurt us except for the power that we give them by allowing such

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a statement to sway our emotions by way of our mental vulnerability. But from where does this vulnerability stem?

We are taught from a young age that we have the ability to hurt the feelings of other people by what we say to them and by contrast, that others can hurt our feelings by what they say to us. For instance, your parents might have made you apologize for hurting your friend's feelings after you said something mean or inappropriate. While this apology may have provided a valuable lesson in treating others with respect, you may also have learned that your words are very powerful. You soon realize that what you say can hurt other people on an emotional level. You may then naturally come to the conclusion that the opposite must be true ... what other people say can hurt *your* feelings.



However, as you learned earlier, this is not entirely true. You **cannot** be hurt by what other people say unless you somehow *believe* that what they are saying has merit. It is time to strengthen and repair your self-image so that you can learn to love yourself more fully and share that love with others without an over exaggerated fear of hurt, rejection, or failure. As French critic and poet Paul Valery points out:

“We are want to condemn self-love; but what we really mean to condemn is contrary to self-love. It is that mixture of selfishness and self-hate that permanently pursues us, that prevents us from loving others and that prohibits us from losing ourselves.”

LESSON 4: RELATIONSHIPS

Love Yourself

Learning to get along well with other people comes far more easily when you learn to love yourself. Although this saying is cliché, it is no less applicable because of its overuse. There is a pattern throughout humanity whereby the most loving and happy people on earth are those that give the most of themselves to others. Contradictory to the popular saying “Every man for himself,” the more that one gives of oneself to others (in both time and energy), the more peace they achieve in their lives and thus the less complicated and more fulfilling their relationships become. Therefore, the first and best step to creating a higher self-image, thereby improving your personal relationships, is to give more of yourself to others.

Give to Others

Even if you are not yet feeling great about yourself or your current life situation, giving to others will help to turn your attitude around. If you want to feel loved, you must first give love to others. If you want to laugh, share a funny story with a friend. If you want people to do nice things for you, do something nice for them. It is ok if this giving is forced at the beginning because you have to find a place to start, and sometimes you have to “fake it ’til you make it.” Even if you are down on your luck, broke as a joke and feeling as if your life is spinning out of control, there is always love to give ... *Always!* And this love that you share will return to you tenfold. It may not come back in the exact form that it was given, but just as surely as day turns into night, you will receive great benefit from giving. I love how Albert Einstein was able to capture the essence of this thought in one simple quote:

“The value of a man resides in what he gives and not in what he is capable of receiving.”

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Before you know it and simply by practicing giving to others, you will have developed the habit of seeing the best in those around you and they will take notice of the difference. They may not vocalize their thoughts, but you will know by their actions that they recognize something in you has changed. You will feel as if you are now somehow magnetized and good energy and great people will be attracted to you as if by magic. This is not an accident and it does not happen by chance. You will have created these new relationships for yourself by learning to love who you are and by giving that love freely and often to others. Now that you are learning to love yourself, it is time to share that love with the world.



Exercise 4 – Good Deeds

Good Deeds come in a variety of forms and are not only easy to perform, but also make us and others feel great. Exercise 4 takes only a moment, but its effects are life-changing.

Directions

Every day, starting today, make a point to do at least one good deed for somebody. This deed can be done for your spouse, neighbor, friend, or for a complete stranger. Below is a list of example deeds that you can carry out to energize your life, spirit, and relationships. Peruse the list and circle (or write down) the good deed you will perform today.

10 Example Deeds:

1. Smile at a stranger and silently wish them a great day.
2. Tell your co-worker how great they are doing.
3. Hug your spouse a little tighter and longer than usual.

LESSON 4: RELATIONSHIPS

4. Call a friend and let them know you are thinking of them.
5. Turn off the TV when someone wants to talk about their day.
6. Send a relative a greeting card when it is not a holiday.
7. Tell a cashier how great his attitude was while helping you.
8. Wash the dishes or take out the trash when it is not your turn.
9. Offer to pay for lunch.
10. Take a day off of work to spend time with a loved one.

There are infinite possibilities when it comes to doing good deeds. Be creative and try something a little different each day. If you do not get thanked for your good deed, or if your deed goes unnoticed, so much the better. You are not performing these acts in order to receive something specific in return. Rather, you are doing good deeds because they make you (and others) feel great. And when you feel great, your relationships will become even better.



Lesson 4 – Further Reading

- *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
- *The Five Languages of Love* by Cary Chapman
- *Law of Connection* by Michael J. Losier

STOP!

Practice Exercises 3 & 4 and I'll see you next week.

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