

How to Change the Channel

~ To Make Thinking Feel Better

by
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Acknowledgements

I have borrowed from many traditions and ideas that were created long before I existed.

This book is an amalgam of Buddhist psychology, neuroscience, physics from its current perspective, Socratic questioning, cognitive therapy, moralistic hedonism, the teachings and humanitarian work of Amma the Hugging Saint, the joyous, compassionate lives and teachings of Desmond Tutu and the current (14th) Dalai Lama, and the teachings of my favorite ex-Boston cab driver and well-known psychologist and Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield.

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1. Steering Without a Star Map

An image I often have is that we are each steering our life as if it's a very large boat headed straight out into the open horizon. We don't know what's beyond the horizon, or how we got on the boat in the first place. But steer we must, because veering off course always seems to result in encountering rough weather and high waves, so, it doesn't feel very good.

But how to guide our boat to a place that feels safe enough and peaceful enough to experience joy and love and wonder -- that's the goal, because those things usually give us the feeling that we're headed in the right direction.

Of course, our thoughts and emotions, our desires and hopes, shift with the wind. And the truth is, we create our own imaginary bad weather a lot of the time, even on the sunniest of days.

Other times the weather barrels in on its own from current human history - the time and place we're living in -- or from personal circumstances beyond our control, or, from other people's boats that come near our boat to play or love or fight. Angels, pirates, we experience them all in time.

So the goal of staying happy and peaceful on this trip, and having fun along the way, can be extraordinarily complicated.

But the most important thing to become aware of is this one thing:

Our assessment of whether we're having fun, whether or not we're feeling happy moment-to-moment, is not usually dependent on an external source. It's coming from our

mind's typically untrained judgement, and short-term view of our immediate personal circumstances.

The mind has no telescope, and no compass. The secret we all know to be true is that the mind is just making things up as we go, second by second, affected by brain chemistry and physical health, and other people in our immediate sphere.

In the end, we search outwardly for happiness and fulfillment amidst all these changing seascapes. But even our definition of happiness and fulfillment can shift over time. Except perhaps for one constant:

We all long for connection.

Too often, consciousness and thoughts, by definition, cause *disconnection*. To be "I" is to be *other* than -- and disconnected from, pretty much everything else.

And when that "I," that ego, is unwatched and untrained, the result is, it undermines true consciousness.

So, most of the time, we end up alone in our boat, steering towards an empty horizon for reasons unknown. And there we probably are at this very moment. Lost at sea and lost in thought.

Taking all these tricks and illusions of the mind into account, I began to wonder if there was a way to create a star map to guide me.

Without it, I was probably going to keep sailing around in circles. I might even feel at some point like I'm falling off the edge of the world.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of this book is to share my map with you. Hopefully, it will help you find your way to a better place too.

Many people feel that meditation can help create that map. And I'm sure it can. But for me personally, I needed to find my own way, with eyes open, while walking around and dealing with the real world.

Gandhi, one who learned so much from the art and practice of meditation, said, "The mind is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master."

In that same spirit, the purpose of a star map is to make sure your mind doesn't end up steering the boat, hour by hour of each waking day, without your conscious consent.

2. Joy, Happiness, Fun, Connection

How do we get to the good stuff as much as possible?

Hint: It's probably not by hanging out on Facebook.

One key to being happy is -- don't think yourself into believing things are worse than they already seem to be.

Everyone has worries, fears, feelings of failure, desires un-met.

What we think about those things is far more important than the failure or success of the things themselves.

The biggest key to happiness is -- to need as little reason as possible to be happy, or to stay happy.

That's a very tricky thing.

As simple, obvious, and cliché as the idea may sound, ironically, the mind hardly ever wants to try to do that moment-to-moment.

There are always *Land Minds* along the way.

Land Minds are well-placed, usually quite ordinary weapons of mass destruction that guilt-trip us, or bore us into looking at the darkest parts of the sky instead of at the stars.

"Let's not live in denial," says the mind.... Or "We need adventure, something to increase our dopamine levels. Let's not just sit around here looking at the same forty sextillion stars in the universe. That's way too boring."

And, okay, maybe it *is*!

But then let's talk about a better way to get to a *long-term feeling* of joy and happiness.

The first thing we need to do is create an internal agreement.

This contract with ourselves vows to put in the effort to find true happiness as often as possible.

If you are willing to make that agreement with yourself, and take it seriously, the next step is to begin to observe your thoughts as often as possible, so you eventually develop the internal control to steer random thoughts in the right direction.

But this initial internal agreement to *want* to be happy is a big commitment.

Most people *want to want it*, but don't want to learn and then practice how to get there, so -- no cigar, as the old carnival barkers used to say.

For those who want to try to create happiness more often, here is a star map to get there:

3. The Discipline of Happiness

First, let's define happiness, and then create clear rules to develop and expand it.

One thing to be conscious of is, there is a big difference between *feeling* happy and *being* happy.

Feelings almost always arise from thoughts that then create a physical sensation in the body. Sometimes internal physical elements can alter our thinking, like hormonal shifts, illness, other life circumstances, and genetics that affect brain chemistry. But feelings -- emotions -- are *defined* by thoughts.

Feeling in love, or feeling angry won't become clear to us unless they are turned into thoughts that form stories which consciously or unconsciously become what you assume "you" are *feeling*. And therefore, who you are.

If one were to come to an alternate level of understanding -- that we can find happiness even while we *feel* sad or angry, for instance,-- or, learn to observe the story we are caught up in and steer it to a better ending -- these learned skills will create a very different psychological baseline from which to live, and from which to judge everything that happens to us.

The Four Rules of The Happiness Star Map

These four rules to the game are paraphrased from a talk I heard by a very amazing interpreter of Buddhist psychology.

1. When Happy Things Happen, Be Happy!

When happy things happen to you, try to actually *feel* happy about it, and then try to *stay* happy about it for as long as possible.

Don't let thoughts of future goals or desires, or past comparisons or regrets, throw you off course.

When your mind tries to kidnap you to another place, try to remember what's going on in the present moment.

2. When nothing particularly happy or unhappy is happening to you, be happy that nothing particularly troubling is happening to you. Stay on course. Don't let the mind create storm clouds in an open sky.

3. When an unhappy or troubling event comes your way, try to be at peace with it. Difficult things happen rather constantly in life. Try to become curious about finding a solution -- but without being attached to the outcome.

Or, maybe there *is* no solution available to you at that moment. In that case, see if you can find patience and optimism in the midst of a seemingly unsolvable problem.

Of course, *this is difficult*. It first takes the ability to develop the skills of 1 and 2 above. Then you would need to take those skills a step further.

But there are tools you can develop to help guide you that are beyond finding a successful solution to a problem.

One tool to be discussed in the next chapter is called "Changing the Channel."

4. When tragedy befalls you, it is extremely difficult to find peace of mind, and even more difficult to find a sliver of happiness as you live through the pain or suffering.

But the goal then would be to sense a larger perspective about life, and the mystery of it all. Perhaps notice moments of happiness or equanimity even during the most difficult of times.

Again, this fourth stage is not likely to be achieved unless you've spent time and effort developing skills relating to 1, 2, and 3 above. Again, Changing the Channel will be one of the keys to success!

What is Changing the Channel?

It's a tool to use when you suddenly realize that you don't like what you're thinking about.

Or you don't like what you're feeling when a certain image arises.

Or you realize the story you are telling yourself is making you feel depressed or fearful.

If this were happening from something you saw, or heard, on TV, you could pick up the remote control and change the channel. As you often do....

What if every time you caught yourself thinking, you asked yourself, "*Do you really want to go there? Do you really want to finish that story playing in your head right now?*"

What if every time you *didn't* want to "go there," you had an internal "universal remote control?" you could use to immediately switch to a better thought? Well, there is:

4. Changing the Channel

If you're still reading, it's likely that you already know how important it is to observe your thoughts with great care, and great suspicion.

We do not need a new mind, or a changed brain. We just have to take good care of the mind we have by training it to become aware of itself, and giving it tools to become who we want to be (rather than believing those random thoughts you have throughout the day are actually "you").

Scientific evidence is clear that the brain and the nervous system can change neurologically when we confront our fears, our depression, or our anxieties by shifting our thoughts in a new and more positive direction. Synaptic links can form that make the shift quicker and easier when we attempt it in the future. This is called neuroplasticity.

One of the ways to do this is by learning and playing the game I call Changing the Channel.

Let's say you're driving a car. Your mind is processing the mechanics of driving, but you are also thinking random thoughts about the day, about what your plans are that night, etc. At some point, you notice a lack of enjoyment about the things you are thinking about, and even seeing out your window. Maybe the long traffic light is bothering you as you sit there "wasting time," waiting for red to turn green. Or, you're thinking about something you did the day before that didn't go well. At that moment, it would be a good idea to immediately *change the channel*.

For instance, let's say while stopped at a red light you look out your driver side window and see a crushed beer can lying on the grass divider. And you begin to think how stupid and selfish people are, and how could someone do such a rude thing, polluting the environment? What about recycling, and what about the ocean, now filled with plastic? Global warming is getting worse. You've read about The Sixth Extinction! It's probably inevitable. You feel angry and hopeless. But then you remember, you could change the channel. So you do:

You *redirect* your mind to see the sun sparkling off a shiny silver object you would have normally labeled and judged as a crushed beer can. No defining the silver object allowed, no judgment of it, or, how it got there, and no fear or anger about more pollution, or climate change. Not now! Just for this moment neutrally observe it as a harmless visual object. It's beautiful in its own way, with the sun reflecting off of it. With the green grass bordering it, like a little nest.

Of course, you could also find a solution to your concerns by recording a quick voice memo to recycle more, or write to the city council about cleaning up the county highway, if that will make you feel better. But that's for later. Not "now."

The choice is yours in this moment to either dwell on an inanimate object, see the consequences, and let it upset you, and stay upset long after the light turns green, or, let go for now, by flipping a switch in your mind, and having a moment filled with color and light, and dazzling sunshine.

This is an example of the key discipline and creativity needed for those interested in surviving "what is," (all that is) and turning the present moment into innocence, joy, openheartedness, good intention, and peace of mind.

It is also possible to ultimately turn truly worrisome things, or utterly boring things, or physically painful things into something creative and beautiful. It just takes practicing the game longer to do it on that level. First, we start with easier things to practice on. Like a beer can.

5. Another Way to Practice Changing the Channel

You can practice changing the channel by a specific kind of meditation for three minutes a day, timed on a timer if you wish, or by meditating longer if meditation is already part of your daily routine.

While you're sitting, or walking, during this type of meditation, keep your eyes open, and take in what you are seeing around you. Allow yourself to watch the light show of shapes and colors going on, but without thinking in words, or creating judgments or forming conclusions.

Don't even get attached to what you think while trying not to think. Like, "I can't not think. Even this is a thought. I can't do this." Let that thought go too.

Keep letting go of every image, every thought and conclusion that arises.

That is the entire practice during these minutes of meditation. Nothing more.

If you notice yourself thinking how good it feels during the times you think you're *not* thinking, -- let that thought go too.

Do not judge yourself if you catch yourself wandering off, like finding yourself organizing mundane chores you'll need to do afterwards. *It's all a part of becoming more and more aware of the mind's chatter.*

There is no failure in this game, as long as you're committed to playing the game.

Be aware of your thoughts as much as possible, and then consciously let them go, have them pass through you like an amorphous cloud.

Nothing stays. Nothing means anything.

Every time you become aware that you're thinking, change the channel back to following your breath, or watch the world in shapes and colors, with no judgment attached to them.

When you refuse to continue playing out the stories that arise, and refuse to judge the thoughts that arise as "good" or "bad," they will not survive long. Another thought will quickly take its place. It might be better. It might be worse. But *catching yourself thinking that thought* is the key to the game.

Because you can't consciously decide to change the channel unless you are conscious and aware of what you are thinking in the first place.

You can learn to do this kind of meditation at will, spontaneously, when you're walking around in the world, or interacting with people, or when you are in those moments just before sleep.

This type of meditation is a slightly altered version of a meditation practice called Vipassana, or insight meditation*.

Changing the channel is a secondary tool. It gives us the right to think about something better than the current thought any time you don't like how you feel about what you're thinking, or don't like the direction of the story you're telling yourself.

Keep your thoughts as joyful and kind and creative as possible any time you are conscious of thinking.

Be who you hope to be internally -- thought by thought. Work at it as much as you can each day.

And when you disappoint yourself, as we all do, or forget to change the channel, don't judge it as failure. None of us can do it all the time. Just continue to play the game whenever you remember to do so.

* The historical Buddha was a man who challenged his followers to discover the truth for themselves. The sacred writings of Buddhism provide valuable guidance to "seekers of truth," but merely believing in what the scriptures say is not the point of Buddhism.

Also, Buddhist psychology does not try to interpret the scriptures, or rely on faith in any way.

Buddhist psychology is simply stating true things about the workings of the mind. Unlike Buddhism, or any religion, you will know those things to be true the moment you hear them.

6. Clarifications about Certain Controversial Concepts

Let's clarify a few things. Because basic Buddhist psychology concepts like the ones I'm referring to in this book are often misinterpreted.

Since we are alliterating the title of this chapter with the letter C, let's *see* what we can clear up regarding concepts such as Changing the Channel.

Empathy or Apathy?

Changing the Channel is not about becoming psychologically lazy, living in dreamy denial about painful realities that affect us, living a nihilistic or narcissistic life, or being apathetic to the plight of others.

It's about gaining self-control and mental strength by becoming aware of your thoughts as often as possible, and then making good decisions for yourself moment to moment about what you want to focus on.

So, for example, if someone you care about needs your help, or advice, or even just wants someone to listen, by all means try to help them. Sacrifice time and energy. Be there for them. But don't obsess on their problems to the point of having it overwhelm *your* life.

All doctors, nurses, therapists, lawyers, operate on these same principles of wanting to help, to serve, but also on some level, they need to be detached from that reality, and live a happy, meaningful life outside of their work, or they will quickly lose their ability to help anyone. They

would lose themselves in the problems, and pain, and occasional tragedies that they are faced with every day.

Not being attached to the outcome doesn't mean not trying to help, or not caring passionately.

Quite the opposite: It means we try to remain detached enough to stay rational and calm, so we can see the big picture, and possibly even come up with another solution to try. If that solution doesn't work, we can again reassess without falling into feelings of failure.

Not being attached to the outcome doesn't mean to simply give up, surrender. Conversely, it allows us to use our mind to its fullest capacity.

Being a Hero to Others, vs Being a Victim.... of Yourself

Most good people want the lives of others, especially those they care about, to work out well.

Most good people want to help when help is needed. Most good people won't give up if the first attempt at helping doesn't succeed. They want to be a hero. They want to feel like they are successful, at work, as a friend, as a spouse, as a parent.

But if we try to help someone else to the point where we feel overwhelmed, burdened, depressed, or anxious, then we have turned ourselves into a victim of someone else's circumstance, which in the end helps no one. It just creates more victims.

A true hero finds the strength to stay focused on their own life path at the same time they care for others. That's how they find the strength to care for others.

Non-heroes too often turn themselves into co-victims, doomed to be dragged down into the same Hell they were trying to pull someone else out of.

So, let's choose to try to be heroes.

Being a Coward vs. Knowing Your Limits

I personally cannot watch dark or violent movies. I don't mind watching dramas with a message, or adventure movies. I don't mind being taken on wild emotional rides, or seeing violent things take place if they have a message attached to them -- like the old movie Casablanca, for instance, or another classic movie Inherit the Wind. Or more recently, The Adam Project.

But when it comes to horror movies or violent movies that are simply there for shock value, I don't find them stimulating, funny, thought-provoking, or even tolerable. They just darken my dreams, and mess with the images in my mind, sometimes for days.

Like most of you, I already have enough difficult or dark things to deal with on a daily basis, from trying to help someone I love, to dealing with my family finances, to facing my own mortality. Why would I make things even harder on myself, by CHOICE?

I know my limits. I want to be a hero in ways I feel I can be. But you don't have to face horror and visually numb

yourself to disgusting or tragic images on a screen to be a hero.

To quote my daughter from one of the first songs she ever wrote at six-years-old, "If I had a choice between a kick or a pat, I would choose a pat."

Call me a wimp. But if I have a choice between fear and fun, I would choose fun.

Then the game becomes.... how do I find fun?

Now we're back to the idea of Changing the Channel any time you need a "Get Out of Hell Free card."

I will continue to touch upon these things, especially the "fun" part, in later chapters.

7. The Wisdom of the Inner Guide (Co-creating with What Is)

Those who do not choose to play "Changing the Channel," *are playing anyway.*

But we become pawns instead of the chess player, because we are no longer in control of the remote. The channel is being changed at random.

And you've given up the remote.

Soon you *become* a channel you never intended to tune into. It's called your life without the observing mind.

So who are YOU, really? There is a place deep inside you that knows the answer. It's the inner guide.

The inner guide is your deepest self, your wisest self. It's the part of you that desires to live a truly good and happy life. Some call it "The Witness." Others might call it the soul.

The inner guide is the most powerful player in the game.

*Ask your inner guide -- What is my goal right now in this moment? What do you want me to do, or think *right now* that will help me access love, or joy, or a sense of meaning, or a sense of peace, without harming myself or anyone else in the process?*

What can I focus on in this instant that will make me feel better, not worse?

Initial thoughts unobserved are quite good at convincing you that you are bored, or feeling sad, or fearful

or lonely, or that you are a failure, or should feel guilty, and then your unconscious mind will gladly oblige and create endless mental and emotional images and internal stories to bring those thoughts to life, and prove them to be true.

Many of those inner stories you have heard before, with slight variations. Maybe you invent new reasons to feel victimized, or wrong, or unloved and alone.

Your inner guide cannot stop the unwise initial chatter from taking over unless you learn to observe the chatter and catch it in the act.

The conclusions of the unguided mind are almost always traps and booby prizes.

But when we get in touch with our deepest inner voice, we will find it is not only a good guide, but the creator of a better reality. Eventually it can become the creator of what you define as "my life." It will be a much better interpreter of your life than alternate interpretations you were being forced to listen to, by yourself or others, without your conscious consent.

The meaning of human existence may never be clear to us. What our purpose is may never be known with one hundred-percent surety. But defining meaning may not be the point.

The universe and the mysteries of life itself may never be fully discovered by religion, or by science.

Or, maybe science will eventually come to discover the workings of the universe, and the meaning of life itself!

Or, maybe we will discover that God (some specific religion's definition of God) is real! And the winning religion is....

Maybe He or She or It appears before us one day and announces the truth about holiness, and existence, and right and wrong, and exactly how to live a beautiful life.

Or maybe He or She or It has already said all this to us thousands of years ago, or is trying to tell us right now -- we're just not listening closely enough.

Maybe we will live for two hundred years with science and life extension products helping us do so. Maybe we will all die tomorrow.

In all of these hypothetical circumstances, there are still only these two clear things to do -- the only way to become truly happy: Be happy now. Feel peace now.

When you cannot find your way at this moment to get there, try changing the channel:

Look around in an empathic state of mind.

Listen to your mind joyfully, as if you're listening to a child. Patiently teach your mind to be your best friend.

Feel consciously. Love courageously. Use your senses creatively.

The power is in your hands *the moment you become aware of thinking.*

You win when you control the stories you tell yourself.

Whatever you believe spiritually, even if you believe in nothing at all -- you have no excuse not to play this inner game.

Because not playing can be downright dangerous.

Because, if you do not stay motivated enough to play, the game plays you.

8. Cognitive Reframing

Stepping back to view a wider perspective of Changing the Channel, there is a concept known in psychology as cognitive reframing.

In the amazing documentary -- Mission: Joy -- Desmond Tutu asked his dear friend the Dalai Lama if he had sadness or regret about having to leave his country of Tibet after the Chinese invaded when he was just 16 years old.

The Dalai Lama was the leader of his country, and insisted on diplomacy, attempting a non-violent resolution. But the Chinese were duplicitous. Eventually, the Tibetan people took up arms and tried to fight the invaders. They tried to protect the Dalai Lama, their country, their traditions, their culture. Many Tibetans were killed in battle. In the end, the Dalai Lama made the extremely painful decision to attempt an escape. He left his palace by night, disguised as a soldier, and travelled a dangerous path by horseback until he crossed the border into India.

Dalai Lama's response to Desmond Tutu's compassion and empathy was remarkable. Tutu asked his friend: "Why are you not morose? You've been in exile so long from the country you loved!" The Dalai Lama said he didn't regret having to escape and live in exile for more than fifty years.

"I personally prefer the refugee life," the Dalai Lama responded. "It's more useful. More opportunity to learn, more experience."

He went on to say instead of hiding away in a thousand room palace in Tibet, expecting his people to protect him with their lives, it has given him an opportunity to reach

more people than he ever could have.

Desmond Tutu laughed and said, "Yes, and we have the Chinese to thank for that!"

This cognitive reframing of the past by both of these wise men is a very important lesson for all of us.

We each create our own past, consciously or unconsciously!

It's not about what happened, but how we define what happened. For instance, being victimized by circumstance can become an opportunity to learn compassion for others who have also met a similar fate. Failures can become lessons learned, leading to better future outcomes. Successes can be reframed in a humble way as a stroke of luck, which then compels you to teach or help others to become successful as well.

Whatever past you recreate in your mind is... true.

Reframing our past can create a better present, and a clearer path to a more meaningful future.

9. A Peacock Fan of Thoughts

In one of my favorite SpongeBob episodes, Squidward moans to SpongeBob and the wonderfully eternally-dumb starfish, Patrick, "*Please stop screaming and prancing around. I can't hear myself think!*"

To which Patrick asks, "Can you *smell* yourself think, Squidward?"

SpongeBob chimes in, "Can you *taste* yourself think?"

Patrick adds, "Can you *see* yourself think?"

Patrick was wise (for probably for the first and last time ever) because you *can* hear *and* see (observe) yourself think. And it's extremely valuable to do so as much as possible.

A wise person, far wiser than Patrick or SpongeBob, once told me about The Peacock Fan of Thoughts. It is a mental construct that goes like this:

After each thought, and each event in life, the mind has a choice. Which doorway of thought will it choose to enter?

The mind usually makes this choice without our consent.

But what if we had the will power, and the common sense, to choose the doorway?

Imagine there is a one-hundred-eighty-degree spectrum of thought choices, spread out like a peacock fan. On one extreme there are all the very dark fearful thoughts. On the other extreme, all the very light positive thoughts, epiphanies, thoughts that lead to a feeling of peace and

connection.... with a dozen vertical lines or gradients between the extremes -- like peacock feathers.

Each one of the gradients, or feathers, represents a doorway our mind can enter.

Through each one of those doorways is an imaginary room with a matching emotional atmosphere of the door you just entered -- sadness, or anger, or fear, or humor, or peace, or forgiveness.

The mind, when left to its own devices, is not fully aware that it has a choice of what doorway to enter from moment to moment, and, normally, it will too often drift into the darker spectrums, hypnotized as if we are walking around in a dream.

It's very difficult to move into a light spectrum once you are deep inside one of those dark rooms, because typically thoughts connect to similar consecutive thoughts. So, once your mind goes through a door without your consent, typically it's going to wander into a connecting door next -- either slightly darker or slighter lighter.

On the other hand, if you become conscious of your thoughts, even when unwanted thoughts or events arise, you can learn in an instant to walk through the spectrum of thought that offers more light and hope, love and peace, humor, and insight. Less darkness and fear.

If you do this even once, the new neuropathways you create in the brain will make it easier for you to do it next time.

We have the power to choose the doorways we walk through second by second, each moment we become aware of thinking. If we wish to move towards the light, we have that power

10. Sad Tales

If your first thought after reading the chapter title was you might want to skip this chapter, *good!* You're on the right track. Skipping sad tales is what this chapter is about.

In one of my favorite movies, *Jerry McGuire*, Jerry (Tom Cruise) and Dorothy (Renee Zellweger) are on their first date. They're at a Mexican restaurant. She hears about Jerry's previous girlfriend, and how they broke off their engagement. She begins to tell Jerry about her past marriage, and the death of her husband, who in truth she didn't really love. Then she stops herself mid-sentence, leans across the table and says, "Jerry, let's not tell our sad stories."

You can see in Jerry's eyes that he *gets it*. He's impressed, as well as relieved, that it's not going to be "one of those nights."

Let's not tell our sad stories... even to ourselves.

With emotions, especially sad or angry ones, we almost always have a story we are telling ourselves. That story may have dozens of branches to explore, with the story shifting slightly every time we re-tell it. We increase the emotional charge the longer we allow the story to go on. The story confirms and magnifies the emotion we're feeling, sometimes justifying it into existence, sometimes validating why we should feel victimized, or guilty, or ashamed, or why we have a reason to criticize someone.

This is the ego talking to us, non-stop. Jack Kornfield once told me he heard a wise man define the ego as "one insult after another." We're constantly telling ourselves stories about the past, ending in, "I should have...." Or, "If only...." Or, "Why did that have to happen to *me*?"

We also sometimes, like Dorothy in the movie, end up telling our sad stories to others. Telling sad stories to a therapist, or certain friends who can help you understand your sadness, and feel more hopeful and optimistic about your circumstances, *can be* helpful, insightful, illuminating.

But often telling them to a friend is not good for them, even if *you* feel better.

*Talking to a therapist, especially if you experienced tragedy, violence, abuse, or trauma, can be critically important to healing. Tragedy goes beyond the scale and intention of this book.

Changing the channel is not about denying to yourself that an event happened, or not wanting to confront issues that must be addressed and worked through legally or psychologically.

Stopping a sad story as soon as we become aware of it does not mean we become immediately happy.

But like changing the channel, stopping the sad story in its tracks allows for the possibility of accessing a better spectrum of thought at that moment, and not being dragged down by.... *ourselves*.

If you want to know whether the story you just told yourself was a mistake to finish, ask yourself at the conclusion if it made you feel better or worse, happier, or

more depressed or angry. Then you'll know. Hopefully, with enough time and practice we'll quickly stop the sad tale as soon as we become aware of it, and change the channel to something better.

When, If Not Now? (WINN)

Don't wait one second longer once you become aware of the sad story you're telling. WINN the mind game!

Stopping the sad stories also includes stopping the conclusions you are coming to -- about people, events, or pretty much everything we get imprisoned by.

Our impressions can easily imprison us if we don't approach our thoughts with awareness, and steer them with conscious intention.

Cutting off the story as you're telling it does not mean you make up an ending that isn't true. It means you use cognitive reframing to see reality from the perspective you *choose*.

For instance, if you find yourself remembering, or talking about a past relationship that didn't end well, you might try to change the channel to recall some very positive or beautiful moment you shared, or an event or discussion that led you to change for the better. Realize you might not be the best of yourself without having had that relationship. Perhaps if that relationship had not happened something better might not have happened.

How do we know what perspective to choose?

If the story changes to uplift your spirits, if it offers love, hope, joy, to yourself and others, if it disparages no one, and does not add to the toxic gossip and negativity

clouding the human mind, then go ahead and follow the story to the end, and believe it. Remember it as equally true.

The end result of stopping the story, or reframing it to focus on deeper, more positive perspectives, is not just wishful thinking, and it's not about denying something that happened. The point is, you've already been through that story and worked it through before. This is an attempt to stop replaying, relitigating, and emotionally re-experiencing something that only happened once.

Reframing, or choosing to remember a certain aspect of a story that broadens your perspective, doesn't try to deny, or hide all that happened.

Reframing a sad story can help to integrate your life, and make better sense of it. It creates perspective through reflection. Reframing can allow for forgiveness, laughter, gratitude, reverence -- rather than anger, bitterness, or feeling victimized by life.

And *THAT*'s the real story.

11. A Buddhist Story about Letting Go

Crossing the River

Two monks were walking through the forest. They came to the shallow part of the river and prepared to wade across it. The deepest part appeared to be up to their knees.

But before they began their crossing, a woman appeared. She asked if one of them would be kind enough to help her across the river. So one of the monks picked her up and waded across with her in his arms.

When they arrived at the other side, the woman said, "This was such a good deed you have done, sir. Surely you will be benefitted by your selfless service in ways no one can imagine."

She bowed and thanked him again, with tears in her eyes, and went on her way.

As the monks began to walk through the forest on the other side of the river the monk who had not carried the woman felt himself becoming angry, until he was compelled to say something:

"I am feeling quite upset with you," the monk said to the one who helped the woman."

The other monk stopped walking, turned to the angry monk, and said, "Why?"

"Because you got a chance to do a good deed by carrying the woman across the river, but you never once stopped to think that I might have wanted the opportunity to carry her across!" he said.

The first monk replied, "Oh, do not worry about that, dear friend. You see, I only carried her across the river once. You are still carrying her!"

We all need to learn to stop carrying our jealousy and envy, and greed and regrets, not only across the river, but through the forest of future days and weeks and years.

Otherwise, each one of those emotions will continue to follow us everywhere we go through time.

12. The *Maybe* Story vs. Being Punched in the Face

There is an old Taoist story about fate, the conclusion being -- You never know if an event that happens to you is going to be a good or bad thing in the long run.

The famous story goes like this:

An old farmer depended heavily on his horse and his teenage son to tend the fields on the land he owned. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbor came to visit. "Such bad luck," he said sympathetically.

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. When hearing the news his neighbor exclaimed, "You are the luckiest man I have ever known."

"Maybe," replied the old man.

The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown off, and broke his leg. Many neighbors came to offer their sympathy. "Who will now help you tend to your fields while we tend ours? This is a very unlucky twist of fate indeed."

"Maybe," answered the farmer.

The day after the son broke his leg, a group of military officials rode into the village looking to draft all the village's healthy young men into the army to go off to war. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out.

"Maybe," said the farmer.

On and on life goes....

On the other hand, there is a joke told by the modern-day comedian, Demetri Martin, which goes something like this.

"I was at this party, and everyone was drunk. I got into a conversation with this new-age guy, and I'm telling him about this girl that just dumped me. And he says, "Well, you know, everything happens for a reason."

So I punched him in the face.

He gets up from the floor and says, "What the hell did you do that for?"

I said, "I don't know, you tell me."

This is why I told you The Maybe Story and didn't just say that everything happens for a reason. I didn't want to get punched in the face.

Demetri may be on to something: It *is* possible that there are no predestined reasons. Things just happen. Random things. And that's life.

But it is equally true that we cannot predict whether any particular event will lead to something better or worse in the future.

Sometimes it depends on how we define 'better or worse.'

Part II

How to work with Changing the Channel

13. Desires and Goals

Desires, passions, and fantasies are *wonderful*, as long as they do not potentially harm you, or anyone else.

And if they come true, they can be peak experiences.

But the attempts to have them come true has to be balanced by making sure that failure to get what you want won't make you feel darker than the attempt to get it in the first place.

When attempting anything, or setting a goal, I remember a story I heard when a poet was being interviewed about his work. He was asked, "How many poems do you write in a year?"

He responded, "365.... Every morning I make some tea, go down to my study, and write a poem."

The interviewer was shocked. She said, "You write a poem every day? How in the world do manage to do that? What's the secret of being that creative?"

He said -- "Lowered expectations."

That is a brilliant way to approach creating, or wanting anything! (Including creating a better internal dialogue with ourselves over time.)

Hope for the best, approach goals with a positive mindset, but *be prepared* to accept less, or even failure.

The key to finding happiness amidst failure or disappointment is to accept whatever results may come from your attempt, then reassess, and strategize the next plan.

So the mindset is, there is no failure, just steps in the process that will teach me something, or make me stronger, when I attempt something else in the future. Everything is a

process. Everything is practice. And the one that is practicing is your inner voice, your inner spirit. If you learn to enjoy the game, you never really lose when you don't succeed.

Lowered expectations will always steady the boat of the mind.

Accepting imperfections and failure won't kill you.
Insisting on only succeeding, might!

The body affects the mind, and the mind affects the body. So part of our self-responsibility is to oversee the health and well-being of both.

..... Love, sensual experiences, creative expressions such as music, art, and dance, and even improvising with "what is" to make it more enjoyable or fun, can all be essential nutrients to self-create a happier life.

As long as we keep our longing in tune with our best long-term interests, and keep our expectations in check, the stories we tell ourselves will find meaning.

-- With creative, conscious thinking, our life can be blessed with *as much happiness as we can imagine*.

14. Cows

There is a Buddhist story that goes something like this:

Buddha is sitting in a wide green valley meditating with his devoted monks. They are all sitting in complete silence when a farmer comes running over the hill, waving his arms frantically, and stops in front of Buddha.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," the farmer said, trying to catch his breath. "But you see, I had a large area of fencing to hold in my cows. This morning, one of the cows broke through the fencing and all the other cows followed, and now they are all dispersed across this hillside. I must find every one of them. They are precious to me. They are my livelihood, I cannot survive without them. So I am wondering, have you seen any cows pass this way?"

Buddha looked at the man with compassion and shook his head, "I am so sorry sir, I have not seen any cows here, or even in the far distance."

The farmer cried out in panic, "Well, *please* sir, my farm is right across that hill to the north, if you see any cows, even one of them, will you come and let me know immediately? They are my entire life. I am worried sick about this."

Buddha said firmly, "I promise I will, sir."

And with that, the farmer ran off, his arms flailing above him, running over the next hill.

When silence came again to the valley, Buddha looked at his monks and said, "We must all be so very thankful that none of us have any cows."

Desires, goals, needs, material possessions -- with each one of these sacred cows, consider the possibility that we might be better off letting them metaphorically escape over a distant hillside.... *for this moment.*

Imagine how good it would feel to let go of these things during most of your waking conscious day. And then fill that moment with a better, happier, or more peaceful thought.

What if we were able to free ourselves from our own internal commands, fears, guilt, controls, prayers, and hopes?

At some point, we too might look back and be so very thankful that *in those conscious moments*, we didn't have any cows.

(Or at least not as many as we had before.)

15. A Solution to All of Your Worries

What if a current present moment you are experiencing is overwhelmed by a painful or concerning circumstance, and you begin to worry, or feel fear, and want to find a solution?

These kinds of worries can usually be broken down into three categories:

1. A repetitive worry that seems like it has no permanent solution. No action or thinking about it in the present or future will help in any positive way.
2. A repetitive worry that does not have a clear solution at the moment, and there is nothing you need to act on *at this time*. But you feel a solution might arise in the future.
3. A worry that needs a solution now, and it's possible one exists.

Examples of each:

1. A repetitive worry that seems like it has no permanent solution. No action or thinking about it in the present or the future will help in any positive way.

~ There is no lasting love. Everything keeps changing. What if the love someone feels for me ends someday?

There is no way to stop people you love from changing, or disagreeing with you, and occasionally thinking or acting *kind of crazy*, in your humble subjective opinion.

You also can't stop them from thinking *you're* acting crazy.

There is no way anyone can be perfect, and you can't teach them how to be perfect, since you're not perfect.

Or:

~ You find yourself waiting for all the things you're worried about to fully resolve before allowing yourself to FINALLY feel totally happy, or at peace. And you're worried that day will never come.

(The fact is, even if the day arrives when there is absolutely nothing to worry about on any level, it will certainly be followed by many many days very unlike that day. So you are going to find yourself repeating an endless loop of worrying about worrying.)

Or:

~ What if there is no God, and when I die...? (Fill in the dots.)

So, what is the solution to the kinds of worries that have *no solution, and never will?*

The answer: **Do not think about those things.**

When your mind pulls you in that direction... Change the Channel.

You simply have to train your mind to move on.
And *Changing the channel* is the training.

2. A repetitive worry that does not have a clear solution at the moment, and there is nothing you need to act on at this time. But a solution might arise in the future.

Maybe you are having problems in a relationship you value. Or maybe you are having a business problem with no easy or simple fix.

Ask yourself first if there is any *new* idea you can think of in this moment to help solve the problem.

If you cannot think of a new creative solution that feels good and right, then move on. Change the channel. This will have to wait for another time.

Before you do:

You might want to write the worry down, so you can allow yourself to move on, but also, look at what you wrote down occasionally to see if a solution suddenly arises.

3. Some worries need a solution now, and it's possible one exists.

If you come up with a possible solution to a worry you have, by all means consider it, and act on it if you feel it's the best thing to do for everyone involved.

Stay within your integrity. Be firm but fair with others. Then see what happens after moving ahead with your solution.

It may solve the worry. It may not.

It may create new worries on top of the initial one, or it may make that original worry worse.

But over time, successful solutions will increase your ability to solve future problems. And the failures will teach you humility, patience, and hopefully a bit of wisdom.

The most important lesson to learn is to *accept what is* -- accept the outcome, and then either find a new and better solution to the new situation you find yourself in, *or, let it go. Move on.*

16. Don't Ask That Question

Here is a little poem I wrote on my thirtieth birthday:

Now that I'm thirty, I realize that
All the answers I came up with in my twenties
Didn't have any questions.

Yes, that was the whole poem. I was a minimalist back in those days.

In the spirit of minimizing -- here are some of the things I cannot know, and really should not spend any time pondering when they enter my mind. Which, of course, they will:

Can anyone actually know the future?
What exactly is the future if it doesn't exist in the present?

What is the meaning of my existence?
How did existence come to be?

What happens when I die?
Is there really reincarnation (beyond the kind that happens upon waking up each morning, or with each blink of an eye?)

Is there a God? How will I know?
Does God wear clothes? And if so, what style of clothes?
Roman toga? Blue jeans? A lovely skirt from Nordstrom's if God turns out to be a Mom?

My "answer" to all these questions is the same:

Don't Ask That Question....

To be more specific, when we do ask the questions, which of course we will, since we are curious beings with the ability to wonder, let's interpret this more specifically to mean.... don't spend time trying to answer these questions.

Change the channel.

"Don't ask this question," is the most freeing command in the mind's very extensive command box.

It can save us hours, perhaps years of hours, fretting over the unknowable.

Obey the command often enough, and you will no longer feel responsible for coming up with answers that don't really have any questions -- if you think about it.

Free yourself.

Move on, change the channel. Life is too short to guess about, and argue about, all the unknowable things -- which in the end is almost everything.

17. A Lesson from Star Trek

A day is rarely filled with just one or two problems or worries. There may be deadlines, disappointments, mundane tasks at work or at home, people not treating us as well as we want them to, and many other things that make our lives feel disconnected or meaningless.

But worrying is very much like being put in the Star Trek transporter. One can travel straight to Hell in seconds, in a mere flash of synaptic light. Just press the button and we dis-integrate.

We end up wandering around on an unknown planet potentially full of monsters. We hold our phasers out in front of us, waiting for the actual moment of danger to reveal itself.

Trekkies Beware: The present moment is the only real and permanent thing in the universe. And if you perceive it as dangerous, then suddenly, it is.

18. How To Be the Giver, and *Therefore* the Given To,
By Extending Sun Rays Outward

Here is something to consider:

~ Everything will never be okay.

More precisely, everything will never be totally okay all at once, and then stay that way.

When we look at all the people in our lives that we have a positive emotional connection to parents, children, friends, as possible examples, (as well as your self), it's perfectly natural and good to wish them all well every moment of every day.

But it's not likely all of them, and you, will be totally okay all at the same time. And it certainly will not be that way every day.

Imagine all these people as part of a mosaic in your mind. Each one of them represents a beautiful colorful tile in the mosaic that you love and care about. But it exists in a room with no natural light. The mosaic is all in your mind. Without thinking about it, it goes dark, it doesn't exist.

Now some people expect the tiles in this mosaic to supply their own light. We unconsciously expect, or want, those people to light something up within us, for our benefit.

In other words, we hope and want, and sometimes come to expect, each of the people we love and care about to make us happier. When they are happy, we are happy. When they do or act the way we want them to, we are satisfied with that ray of light they are giving us. And when

they are sad or in pain, and no light comes our way, we feel that sadness and pain too. We feel darkened, upset. We feel darkened by the lack of light we were hoping they would supply to us.

If even one part of the mosaic (one of those people we care about) is in shadow, it can upset our entire day, or our month, or it might upset us for all time.... I.e., someone is ill, or recently separated from the one they loved, or didn't get the job they wanted. We try to help. We try to prevent the outcome. But outcomes sometimes are not the outcomes we want. It disturbs our peace of mind when we fail, or they fail, or die, and we can't change it.

But if this is the way our mind thinks about important relationships, the mind is doomed to suffer.

It will be a very rare day indeed when every part of the mosaic is doing well and emitting full light into our world.

Of course, it would be a rare and wonderful summer day to bask in, but can it last? Life being what it is, at some point, one or more parts of the mosaic will fall into shadow, and you will find yourself in shadow *because they are*.

I have an alternative way of interacting with the mosaic of those people you care about.

It's called *Extending Sunrays Outward*.

Rather than depending on them to give you peace of mind, and sunlight to feel warm in, instead *you* be the supplier of sunlight to them -- extend sun rays of love and good wishes out to them (and to yourself) when thinking about them-- while expecting nothing in return.

What will be will be. Who they are, or who they become, is who they are, or will be.

Of course, you would offer to help them if they want you to, and if you can. And if you agree how to help.

But do not get attached to outcomes, or attached to *them* supplying *you* with a better outcome.

And what do you get by being the creator of your own light when you think about them?

First, here is what you don't get: You don't get depressed when your hopes and expectations don't pan out. Because you are no longer going to expect their life, even with your help, to turn out as you hope.

What you *do* get is the fantastic feeling that comes with putting out sun ray energy to those you love, while expecting nothing in return.

Because the fact is, being the sun's rays and lighting up the mosaic yourself is so much easier, and so much more empowering, than expecting others to supply you with the expectations you've set up for them.

And don't forget to give out sunray energy to yourself, and to the world in general. The truth is, it feels better and better the more people you shine on. Do it for free, for no reason, as much as possible.

Your future will be brighter just by giving this gift to yourself.

19. No One Checks All the Boxes

"Nobody perfect"
~ E nuk Shem

I used to eat at this great natural food Chinese restaurant in Berkeley called, Shem's Palace. It was a very small, rather dingy, very un-palace-like restaurant, whose owner, E nuk Shem was very old. He and his wife cooked the most amazing food I had ever tasted. I went there a number of times a week. He would calculate the check at the end of the meal using an abacus!

I would sometimes go in at 5pm, the earliest time they opened, because I had a gig that night in the city. I wanted to eat at my favorite restaurant first. Usually, I would be the only one there at that hour.

Sometimes I would hear Mr. Shem and his wife arguing with each other in Chinese while I was eating my dinner. No one else was around. They considered me a regular and thought nothing of it.

On the night of his retirement, I went up to the counter to pay my check. My long-time friend, Linda, was with me. She often accompanied me to Shems on weekends.

He looked at me and said, "You nice man. You come many times, you read your book, never make any trouble."

I said thank you and wished him luck in his retirement.

Then he looked at Linda, "This your girlfriend?"

I said, "Well... uh...."

Linda blushed.

He said, "She nice girl. You get married."

I began to laugh.

Linda's cheeks turned a shade redder.

Then he glanced inside the kitchen to make sure his wife wasn't listening, and lowered his voice to a whisper and said, "*Nobody perfect!*"

I think of Mr. Shem's words ALL THE TIME!

This also fits in quite well with the poet's secret during his interview, which enables him to write one poem every day, 365 days a year: Lowered expectations.

Because when it comes to people you love, or friends you care about, the fact is, nobody perfect.

Most likely, 'you not perfect' either, in their eyes.

Yet the fact is, the more we expect perfection from others, or expect anything at all beyond a certain amount of care and civility, the more disappointed we are bound to become in that person.

I look at it this way: Imagine an empty piece of graph paper with each square on the graph being a need or expectation: No one can possibly check all of the boxes.

Whether it's a parent, a child, a friend, or a lover, it's up to us to recognize what we should, and should not, realistically expect from them.

I have some very special people in my life that check so many boxes! But none of them check every single box -- not my wife, or my children, or my best friends. Nobody.

So, it's best to remember the words of Eruk Shem, and the poet who wrote a poem a day, in your personal relationships. *How do you maintain, and grow, the relationships you care about over time?* Lowered expectations. Nobody perfect!

20. Walking Through the Open Door

When it comes to worries, potential solutions, potential obstacles or opportunities, it is extraordinarily important to understand whether that door you want to walk through is opened or closed.

If you try to walk through a door (attempting a potential solution, or wanting a particular thing to happen) and it doesn't seem to open and lead you to a better place, STOP.

Some things do take tremendous effort. Grace and grit. Never surrender!

But other things -- like applying for a certain job, or trying to get someone to like you, or love you, *or come back to you* -- it's important to understand this:

You can't fight the tidal wave. My friend Gina said that to me years ago when I was trying to repair a broken romance. Her advice hit home.

What does that mean? It means don't fight destiny. Don't fight what the universe is saying. Don't fight time.

In other words, some things simply are not meant to be, at least not right now.

When you fight the tidal wave, or try to stop it, or change it, or try to move it in the opposite direction, you eventually drown.

When you find that a door is closed to you, and nothing you do seems to get you in the flow, instead of pounding your metaphorical fist against it, find some other open door to walk through.

But along your journey, remember *The Maybe Story*. (Chapter 11.)

21. Fearlessness and The Oceanic Feeling

I once heard this story, told by an Indian woman, a great teacher and humanitarian, and a true mentor of mine, who I will refer to again in a later chapter:

A taxi driver was zipping in and out of two lanes of a busy city street, barely missing cars by inches as he drove sixty miles an hour to the passenger's destination.

When they finally arrived the frightened but admiring passenger said, "You are the bravest driver I have ever seen. How do you find that kind of fearlessness?"

"It's quite simple," the driver said. "Whenever I get close to crashing, I close my eyes."

Most fearlessness is of this variety. It's not conscious fearlessness. It's fearlessness regardless of the consequences.

But to find true fearlessness, or true happiness, we would have to shift our focus to another reality entirely.

True fearlessness is about the ability to accept life as it presents itself. And that takes having your eyes wide open. It takes a fearless attitude.

We do not have a choice of what happens to us, but we do have a choice to define what is happening to us. This internal choice becomes our *karma*.

For instance, maybe just before bed we become fearless enough to forgive all the things that were done to us or said

about us by others, which made us feel badly about ourselves.

Then maybe we forgive the thoughts and feelings we have told *ourselves* that made us feel upset or jealous: I wish had more money, more love, better health, a nicer car.

What if we became fearless enough to change the channel at the moment thoughts and feelings like that arise?

For example, maybe we notice that the shadow the nightlight makes on the wall looks like a small house with an inviting doorway. But if suddenly the shadow begins to look like a ghost on the wall, shift your thought again until the image becomes something that makes you smile or feel protected, or peaceful. Control the Rorschach test. This leads to nothing but a better life, but it takes courage and determination to do it consistently and make it part of your daily thinking.

Fearlessness would also include moments of thinking beyond our single life, and all our goals and worries....

For instance, while walking on a beach at sunset, we focus our attention on the pure visual beauty, allowing the waves to crash over our thoughts, our memories, our plans, our pain.

This "oceanic feeling"* -- a feeling of oneness with the world, and a peaceful wordless sense of being in the present moment -- can be very healing.

It can allow us to soar above suffering, and all the confusion that our minds love to saddle us with.

Of course, the oceanic feeling can happen while driving your car, or lying in bed, or kissing someone you love....

But the world puts so many obstacles in front of us. Many of them crash into us without us ever seeing them coming.

Of course, we must deal with those things. Dealing with them head-on, and accepting the reality we are given with grace and integrity is another form of fearlessness.

But fearlessness also means we become disciplined enough, imaginative enough, optimistic enough, and courageous enough to find that "oceanic" feeling as often as possible, while letting everything else roll out with the tide.

Many believe the oceanic feeling is (theoretically) accessible to the human mind at all times.

Some believe that state of existence is more representative of reality than the reality we are perceiving right now.

When the body and mind are emptied of everything except for that oceanic feeling, there may come a moment... one wild clear moment... when *everything* somehow makes sense.

The task from that time on, is to *not forget to remember*, as much as possible.

*In a 1927 letter to Sigmund Freud, Romain Rolland coined the phrase "oceanic feeling" to refer to "a sensation of 'eternity,'" a feeling of "being one with the external world as a whole."

22. Deep Fun

Work, making money, spending money, interacting with other people, having expectations of them -- partners, friends, family -- after decades of this life we lead, we might one day stop and ask ourselves -- is there really any point to all this, other than survival, ego, needs, hopes, and competition?

But day-to-day, there *is* a solution. I call it prioritizing *Deep Fun*.

This is a goal to aim for every day, for as many moments of each day as possible.

Let's start with some definitions. A typical definition of fun can include purely impulsive fun, without thinking of consequences, (the type that has no real point, like watching hours of TV, playing hours of video games, drinking and partying, recreational drugs, loveless or meaningless sex). This type of fun will too often lead to a feeling of emptiness, and even depression. Most of us know this from our own past experiences.

Deep Fun is the kind of fun that leads to a feeling of inner fulfillment.

Many deep fun ventures, or adventures, often take great effort. Some require a lifetime of learning, like learning an art form. Or teaching an art form. Putting great effort into fulfilling work that helps people, or the world in some way.

The effort itself can be deep fun if you learn how to

approach it in a conscious and connected way. But deep fun goes much further than that.

The goal is to seek out ways to have this kind of fun fill up your days and nights for as many hours of the day as possible.

Deep fun could be something creative, it can often be selflessly serving others. It could also be finding a connection to nature, exercising, playing a sport, or working with your inner self in a way that brings you peace of mind.

Deep fun can -- in its simplest form-- be the attempt to play the Change the Channel game. But doing it with humor and forgiveness when (*not if*) things go terribly wrong inside the game!

Whatever it is, this kind of fun will always feel very right to pursue.

This is what work and money, and life itself, should be for: To give you the free time, and the means, to explore and enjoy deep fun on a daily basis.

Walk through the open doors that you think will lead you there.

Avoid desires or opportunities that make you feel worse about your life, or yourself.

With enough "right effort" as Buddha called it, life can be beautiful, sometimes for no reason at all.

PART III

Stories From the Overworld

~ Things I've Thought About While
Changing the Channel
From the Major Networks

23. Hangnails

Have you ever had a perfect day? A day where you wake up and your body feels perfectly healthy? All your family and friends are happy and doing well. You are having enormous fun, and have accomplished all of your life goals. All your thoughts and feelings are gleaming with joy and love and peace! And even the headlines in the news are not particularly disturbing -- world peace has arrived; the climate is changing... for the better.

Ever had a day like that?

Me neither!

But I almost did, once.

The first few hours were quite lovely, if not a little disarming. My mind had nothing to worry about. All my friends and family were doing well. Many of them were visiting at the time. All my writing projects were going well. But then, sometime before lunch, I noticed I had a hangnail. Literally, a tiny hangnail on my left index finger. It went in and out of my consciousness until I noticed myself picking at it while laughing and horsing around with my adoring friends. (On this perfect day, they all seemed to adore me too, and no one seemed to have a care in the world -- except, there was this hangnail)....

Almost unconsciously, I pulled and yanked at it during lunch until the hangnail was pulled off and I was left with a slightly bleeding cuticle the size of a paper cut. For the rest of the day my mind continued to come back to the annoying pain I felt from the cut. Should I put a band aide on it? Would my friends laugh at me and call me a wimp if I did, and might that ruin their adoration of me? After all, I was

supposed to be strong in mind and body. Putting a band aide on my finger for a hangnail would look quite lame. I felt embarrassed.

My perfect day was constantly being colored by the attention that I (and *only* I) was giving to my hangnail.

Let's compare this to a story about a Swami I met on a very sad day for him. Someone close to him had passed away. His heart became heavy. He couldn't stop thinking about his dear friend. He missed him terribly. He told stories about his friend that evening. A few of the stories he told were quite funny. Others were very beautiful.

But then morning came. He busied himself with his typical chores. Usually, he spent some of his day answering spiritual questions from the hundreds of people around him that considered him wise.

But on this sad day, and for the next many days, he took no questions. He went into the big storage room at the ashram where he lived, where free medical supplies were donated. They were then re-packaged and shipped to a hospital overseas to treat the poor and infirmed for free.

He sat down with other volunteers and carefully weighed, labeled, and taped up each box. He addressed each box by hand, using his best handwriting for each label.

He then cooked lunch for the work crew and served them, thanking them for volunteering their time for such an important cause.

He worked tirelessly day and night, continuing to focus his thoughts on the people who would be helped by these medical supplies, and verbalizing the admiration he had for the rest of the crew, one by one, each by name, until after

many days, he felt the darkness of his friend's death begin to lift from him.

Only then did he let others around him know he was once again available to answer their questions as best as he could.

The mind, under normal circumstances will focus on every hangnail. No ant will go unnoticed during life's very complicated picnic.

But we do have a choice of how to think about things if we stay awake and curious and conscious. And we have a choice of what to do next; how to move on.

There will always be numerous excellent reasons to worry, feel misery or anger, or sadness, or fear, and become too emotionally involved to play the mind game of changing the channel, which is sometimes the only way out of the tunnel we've dug for ourselves.

Of course, I am one of those people! I'm not a Swami. I am still trying to play the game under circumstances that oftentimes overwhelm me.

Do not blame yourself, or label yourself as a failure, during those difficult times. No one can play the game flawlessly. No one.

Instead, remind yourself of the immense courage and mental muscle it takes to play this game.

I consider it the most powerful and difficult game the human mind has ever conjured up. It is a game played only by the wise and fearless. Occasionally, that can include each of us.

24. Is Cosmological Science, Fiction?

Further Proof that Not Asking the Question is the Answer

How did life begin? How could non-organic matter have ever created organic matter, and eventually birthed living organisms? We have never observed that happening anywhere, even once.

What happens after the end of the universe? What is beyond the known universe? What happened before the Big Bang? Or is "before" an illusion, along with the passage of time?

If we are going to answer science with science, then... we have no clue.

Scientifically, bringing in conversations about God is, of course, a non-starter. There is zero scientific proof of God. Not just THE God. *Any* God, ever. Not even one in all of history.

There have been thousands of very popular, very powerful religions throughout time, each firmly believing in, and naming, their particular God, each with various characteristics and morals. But not one God has ever revealed him or her Self in any scientifically provable way.

But, following this scientific thread, being an atheist is equally unscientific, since there is no way to "know for sure," or not know, anything about the questions above.

Being an atheist is as non-scientific as being a "true believer." Both camps are just believing or disbelieving with no objective proof.

Both rely only on faith that arises from the mind -- they "know" they are right because... they know.

Nihilists are equally stuck in their belief that there is no meaning to life. Nihilists are living in an alternate illusion. We simply don't have enough scientific data to know if there is meaning or not.

Negating all things non-science (like faith, love, intuition, and instinct) is pre-supposing you have a *scientific reason* to negate them, or, to value them less than science itself, when it comes to understanding reality.

And let's face it, science-lovers, even science keeps changing its mind, redefining the rules of reality each decade, each year, as reality stubbornly reveals itself in drips and drabs, sometimes posing more questions than answers, sometimes leading to the opposite conclusion than the answer it came up with a decade before.

So how scientifically valid is science while it's attempting to reveal the ultimate micro and macro levels of reality?

Can science ever really answer that question?

Here is the way I see it, after giving consideration to the intersecting perspectives of science, religion, and history:

Faith or belief without humility and an overriding compassion for others, can become a stepping stone into the worlds of superstition, hatred and prejudice.

.... But none of those things would EVER be sanctioned by a sane and all-powerful God.

Similarly, let's not waste our time kneeling and praying at the altar of the church of science.

My suggestion:

Leave the building! Breathe in the clear crisp air of not knowing.

And try to enjoy your very short walk through time, without having to figure out what time is.

25 But Then, How Are We Supposed to Have Faith? In Anything?

One of my favorite spiritual discussions with my favorite spiritual guide ended with a comment so profoundly true and logical, it literally left me speechless.

I said, "If after all my searching I can't honestly be sure there is a God, or no God, or existence beyond this current existence, then how can I have anything resembling faith?"

He said, "What makes you think you have to believe in God to have faith?"

I said, "???"

He said, "If you wake up most mornings optimistic enough to try to be a good person, you have faith. In fact, you have more faith than someone who goes to church or temple and prays and believes, and then spanks his child for spilling ice cream on his new suit. The father just spanked God...."

"The fact is, faith is action. Faith reveals itself in acts of kindness, to others, and kindness to ourselves.

"Faith is not some concept you talk yourself into. Act in good faith, in accordance to what, or who, you have faith in, or you have no faith at all."

26. A Pragmatic Definition of Karma*

I don't believe (or have no way to know for sure) that karma is what is destined to happen to you from a past life.

But I believe karma could also be defined as --how we react, and the conclusions we come to, when things (even random things) happen to us. Karma is also, on a pragmatic level, what happens after we react to that random thing -- what we reap from what we've sown.

This cycle of reacting to random events, and then what happens as a result of our reaction, is exemplified in the story below. It's a story I heard about a young boy who saw a young girl playing on the grass with a bunch of silver coins she had been given.

The boy as he passed by became desirous of the coins and offered her two small pieces of chocolate as a trade for all her coins, keeping the biggest piece of chocolate hidden in his pocket.

She happily gave him all the coins, and after dinner enjoyed the chocolate to the fullest. It tasted amazing. She was grateful the boy traded with her.

She slept peacefully that night and had beautiful dreams about a chocolate house and a wonderful boy that lived there.

The boy, on the other hand, ate his big piece of chocolate on the way home without thinking much about it. He held onto the coins, which he knew he'd basically stolen from her, even as he got into bed.

That night he tossed and turned, with the shiny silver coins beside him, and thought to himself, "I bet she kept the most valuable coins for herself. I bet she hid them from me.

Why didn't I force her to empty her pockets before making the trade?"

The boy and the girl created their own very different realities from their transaction, each one entering doorways of thought, with gradients from dark to light that matched their perception of the world. They created their own karma, as do we all.

Karma in this regard is deeply affected by our ability to change the channel. By allowing ourselves to throw aside our initial base instincts of fear and greed, and changing the channel to match our deepest internal values, we can often avoid falling into selfish or unkind situations.

When we do, our dreams will very likely brighten over time. Eventually, the channel tends to turn to a better station on its own.

* Richard Gombrich was a Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford from 1976 to 2004. And the Founder-President of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. According to Gombrich: The [Buddha](#) defined karma as intention; whether the intention manifested itself in physical, vocal or mental form, it was the intention alone which had a moral character: good, bad or neutral [...] The focus of interest shifted from physical action, involving people and objects in the real world, to psychological process.

Gombrich notes, this was a great innovation, which overturns brahmanical, caste-bound ethics. It is a rejection of caste-bound differences, giving the same possibility to reach liberation to all people, not just Brahmanins: Not by birth is one a brahmin or an outcaste, but by deeds (kamma).

How this emphasis on intention was to be interpreted became a matter of debate in and between the various Buddhist schools.

Another kind of Karma: Self-created

~ Whatever you focus on expands.

In the Jewish religion, gossip -- disparaging someone's character without them being present to defend themselves - is considered a sin.

It also creates negative thoughts in the one gossiping that inevitably creates the kind of bad karma discussed in the previous chapter.

Therefore, gossip becomes a sin, and simultaneously its own punishment. Just like so many bad karmic decisions do.

It's difficult to control your reaction to outside events.

It may be less difficult to control the things we ourselves initiate.

Self-awareness sometimes leads to things as simple as being polite, avoiding saying negative things to others, stepping away from the negative conversation of others, and not being rude.

27. Life extension

Conclusions from the book called *The Blue Zone* -- state that exercise, eating healthy food like the Mediterranean diet, having a loving family, developing a spiritual perspective, and having a supportive community to share life with, are keys to a healthier, longer life.

The scientific data is clear that these things help extend life span, and allows the average person a better chance to live a healthier, more active life for a longer period of time. Sometimes living a healthy life into one's nineties and even early one hundreds.

Careful use of food-based supplements may also provide help if you know what your body is specifically lacking.

Of course, eventually....

Ray Kurzweil is a scientist, futurist, and inventor who believes we will eventually have a choice to live for hundreds or thousands of years, or even longer, as medical science continues to evolve.

The road to this kind of chosen immortality could begin as early as 2050.

The interviewer asked, "You mean humans could theoretically live forever?"

Kurzweil replied, "No. But indefinitely, yes."

Forever implies we could outlive the cosmos, and the evolution of the earth and sun and stars.

It also implies that evil tendencies within the human mind wouldn't find a way to destroy life on our planet before the planet dies.

But indefinitely... that might be long enough.

If regardless of science, death is inevitable, then the question becomes, why care at all... about anything?

Why not just become nihilistic -- take without giving? Live for today with no moral filters?

The reason is obvious to anyone willing to rationally assess the outcome.

Whatever we do to hurt ourselves or someone else ends up darkening our dreams, and perverting our waking thoughts, until we become someone we don't want to be around. We don't like the thoughts we think. We end up not respecting, or trusting ourselves. Or caring at some point whether we live or die.

That would be our karma.

Living that life, dealing with that karma -- self-created as it so often is -- ends up being a worse life than the life of someone trying to be kind, and giving for no reason whatsoever.

Seva -- selfless giving -- literally feels better than, let's say, taking someone's coins for a couple of pieces of chocolate.

It's a simple psychological fact that the innocent girl with a few pieces of chocolate ends up happier than the boy with all the coins.

But then what *finally* happens, in the end... whenever that may come? ... Because, come it will....

My suggestion once again is: Don't ask that question.
(To put it another way -- if you are asking it, stop asking it!)

Just stay in the present,
live with right intention, as Buddha suggests,
do what you can to keep your body and mind healthy,
and think joyful thoughts, as much as possible.

To do this, changing the channel becomes an important tool to have at our constant disposal.

But we have to develop the ability to find that *initial spark of will* to grab the remote control.

28. The Complex Concept of "Selfless" Service:

Concentric Circles

In the words of Desmond Tutu, "Joy is the reward for seeking to give joy to others."

Amma, the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and so many others who live a truly spiritual life, say we should actively try to devote ourselves to selfless service. True joy and connection come from compassionate acts.

But those two words -- selfless service -- are tricky because the mind loves to serve its ego first and foremost.

This story came from one of Amma's Q and A's:

A woman stood up and asked Amma how she could stop her husband from being jealous about all the selfless service she was doing. The woman said, "I do selfless service all over the world. In fact, I just came back from Africa. I am going to India next month. My husband only works part-time. All I ask him to do while I'm gone is take care of our six-year-old son. But he is angry with me. He says he doesn't want me to go and serve the poor anymore, and he's threatening our marriage. How can I convince him not to be so angry?"

Amma shook her finger at the woman and said, "What you are doing is not selfless service. It's serving your ego. That is because selfless service is like concentric circles. Like the circles on a dartboard. To selflessly serve you first must start at the bullseye -- and selflessly serve your mind and

body until you gain some control over the whims and demands of the mind. Otherwise, you will lose control to your ego.

"If you have any energy left over after dealing with your own mind, then selflessly serve your child and spouse and family. If you still have more time and energy then give to your friends, then your neighbors, then your community. Having more energy to selflessly serve further is rare, but if you do, then you can serve the rest of the world."

This story changed my life. It focused my goals and intentions to selflessly serve in the proper order, so we don't harm or ignore those we love along the way.

29. Stop Helping Those Who Refuse to Be Helped

Should we ever stop trying to love someone who does not seem capable of being helped?

Amma surprisingly warned the person who asked her this question to stay away from people who did not accept their help.

Amma said they needed to learn to help themselves by learning how to access their own discriminating power and by avoiding impatience and greed.

Her explanation went like this:

"What if there was a traveler who came past your house and asked you which was the best path at the crossroads to take to town.

You reply that one is a short-cut, but the road is steep and dangerous. The other path is longer but very safe.

The traveler thanks you and immediately takes the short-cut, and comes back hours later bleeding, limping, and needing someone to bring him back to health. So you do.

But as soon as he's better, despite your repeated warnings, he takes the short-cut again.

This person should no longer be helped if he comes back injured yet another time."

In fact, if you continue to help the stranger every time he comes back wounded, you might eventually kill him with your kindness! He may think he will always be protected from the danger he is constantly putting himself in, and never learn to take responsibility for, or learn from, his repeated mistakes.

Each of us must define for ourselves what helping and charity and selfless service really means.

30. The Oft Discussed, and Occasionally Cliché
Neurological Truth About...
Gratitude and Gratitude Lists

Being grateful, feeling grateful, and/or making a gratitude list, can help keep you in an inspired mood, much like changing the channel can.

Gratitude is expressing appreciation for the people in your life, and for all good things that you can remember from the day, the previous day, and even during your entire lifetime. Gratitude is an excellent *channel* to switch to during times of negative thinking or worry. Many people like to start their day with a five-minute gratitude meditation. I personally simply try to become conscious of something I'm grateful for during random times of the day.

Here are excerpts from the lyrics of two songs I wrote in the past few years:

*Choose your memories very carefully,
they're the crossbeams of the world you're living in.
They frame and form who you're bound to be.*

*Walk away from memories
if they don't build bridges
to where you want to be.*

I'm grateful these two lyric lines eventually inspired me to write this book.

31. How About a Happiness List Too?

Many people have a list of goals, dreams to fulfill, some people even have a list of accomplishments they are proud of. But what about getting to the main point, and the reason for all these other lists, including gratitude lists? Maybe, if you are prone to making lists, you should create a happiness list. I guess it could also be called a Deep Fun list. Because this list has to really hit the bullseye. It can't include anything that could negatively affect your health, including your mental health, or potentially harm someone else. See... it gets harder!

This list should also not include ways you can, or "should" sacrifice your time or needs to help someone else. This is all about you. Maybe we should call it, The Healthy Selfish List. Or the Lovable Narcissist List.

Here is a sample list:

- ~ Play a musical instrument you've learned, paint a water color.
- ~ Go for a walk in a place that makes you feel good.
- ~ Write a poem or story
- ~ Read a good novel
- ~ Listen to music you love
- ~ Play your favorite sport
- ~ Go on a mini-vacation -- even for a few hours
- ~ Set up something fun and healthy to do with friends
- ~ Watch great comedians that make you laugh out loud
- ~ Watch your favorite sports team on TV, or go to a game
- ~ Work in a garden
- ~ Organize your room or desk
- ~ Read something profound that uplifts you
- ~ Watch a great movie
- ~ Add things to your happiness list!

32. The Power of Open Heartedness

A Swami devoted to Amma told this story at a retreat in June of 2011:

Once there was an angry old man. He'd been angry all his life and could not control it. He even asked people he knew for help, but the anger came whenever it wanted to.

He didn't realize that only by accessing the heart and learning its language can we control our emotions.

The heart wants to be inspired. Inspiration and a deep understanding of compassion is the way the heart gains power over the mind.

This is what spiritual practice is all about – finding the path to the heart instead of getting lost in the maze of the mind.

Once the heart gains power over the mind, the mind cannot destroy it, or you.

This brings us back to the angry old man and the lesson he was about to learn.

He was sitting on a park bench reading the newspaper, and though his goal was to peacefully sit and breathe in some fresh air, the world news was of course very disturbing. He was angry about how stupid and heartless people were as he read the various articles.

Just then, a man and his son approached him. His son was 25 years old. He ran over to a tree near the old man and called out, "This is a tree, right father? And the color of the trunk is brown, isn't it?"

The father patiently replied, "Yes, that's correct."

"And," said the son running over to a flower, "this flower is yellow, isn't it? And this one over here is red!"

"Yes, that's right, son," the father called back to him.

By now, the old man was getting irritated. The father and son were speaking so loudly. And the son seemed more like a 2-year-old than a 25-year-old.

"And father," the son continued, running over to the other side of the walkway, "this is grass, and it's green, right?"

"Yes," said the father.

The old man had had it. He stood up and grabbed the father by the arm and said, "Your son obviously belongs in a mental institution. He's got the mind of a baby, asking all these stupid questions, and it's disturbing my peace! I'm trying to read the newspaper."

The father said, "I'm so sorry, sir. My son was blind since birth, but he had an operation yesterday and this is the first day he can see. He's heard of all these colors, but now he can truly see and understand them. But we will move to the other side of the park. I'm sorry."

The old man felt intense shame and apologized to the father. His heart awakened for the first time in a long time. He went over to the son and took him by the arm and said, "Son, let me show you all the beauty I have seen during the fifty years I have walked through this park. "

The old man's heart had turned his anger into an enlightened state in an instant, just by accessing the compassion that had been dead for so many years. He saw so many beautiful things in the park that day as if it were for the first time.

Amma says without compassion for yourself and others, all attempts to steer your own thoughts to a lighter doorway will likely fail.

The paradox is, seeing beautiful things as if it was the first time develops more wisdom and a sense of gratitude than someone who has experienced that same beauty for a hundred years.

33. Love Without Need or Attachment

The story of the old man in Chapter 31 is one we might see through the lens of "love without need or attachment."

But how can you find someone to love, and "become one" with, and then feel love *without* need or attachment?

Or, what about love of parents or siblings, or a close friend, or even your own child? What if they were to pass away unexpectedly? How can you not feel attachment, and the pain and loneliness of living life without them?

First of all, "non-attachment" or "love without need" is not the same as having a closed heart, or feeling a lack of care or commitment. When you are with a person you love the last thing you would ever want you to do is feel closed hearted, or not extend all the love you can find within yourself.

I wrote a novel about this called *Orbiting Chaos*.

It's the story of a man who started life in an orphanage. When he was finally adopted, his parents gave him what he needed but they were not particularly effusive. No hugs at night. No laughter. When he went to high school he fell in love with the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. She invited him on a walk in the forest. She kissed him, and one thing led to another. The next day he was sure he wanted to marry her, but as it turns out she was interested in other boys as well. She ignored his offers to see him again outside of school. His heart was shattered and he promised himself he would never open his heart to anyone again.

Many years later, after casually dating a number of women with no promises of commitment he met someone special and unforgettable. Her name was Laney. He tried to

ignore his feelings for her, but every time he was around this girl his promise to never open his heart again felt impossible to keep. Eventually, he trusted Laney enough, and he fell in love.

After many years of joy and happiness Laney decided to move to India to study meditation. He didn't want to make a commitment like that, and she didn't want him to. She felt this was an individual journey; not something to share with another.

His heart broke again, and the pain he experienced when she left was unconquerable. It washed over him by the hour, by the minute.

A year passed. Occasionally, he would receive a letter from her telling him she still loved him, and would always love him, but that she was very happy living alone at the ashram she now called home.

This made no sense to him. With each letter the pain and loneliness and betrayal he felt increased. He thought about writing to her and asking her not to write him letters anymore.

But one night while looking up at the stars from his bedroom window, he had a memory of an event in his childhood, followed by a revelation about love:

"A childhood memory flashed by -- a young boy lost at a carnival that was closing down and getting ready to move on to the next town.

Tents were being dismantled. Rides were being folded into their banged-up metal beds. Night was coming; the breeze was turning into a chilly wind.

The boy was looking for his adopted parents. They were lost in conversation with a couple they knew. He had

wandered off unnoticed. He half-hoped they would forget about him and leave him there, cold and lonely as he may have been. He was ready to break away from them, even then. He had no true mother to connect him to warmth, or compassion, and no true father to teach him about the world outside. He would have to teach himself those things.

As he returned from this reverie, his eyes refocused.

He looked out and upwards and felt the immensity of a million stars blazing -- they seemed to have crept closer to his window ledge.

He took a deep breath. His mind slowed down. He felt Laney's presence deepen his mood. An intense warmth awoke in him. He saw her face so clearly, and felt in that one moment all the love they had shared. They were connected through time and starlight all the way to this place.

He felt compassion for her life, her choices -- she was his orphaned other.

He forced himself to keep his heart connected to her image now, seeking more, beyond the pain and irreconcilable emptiness.

What unfolded was a surety -- that the love was real. She loved him. Even now.

How did he get to this starlit place from the empty run-down carnival's end where he had existed for so long?

Through her.

He imagined seeing far out into space, far beyond his present vision: a universe of stars appeared, shaped like a bird with its wings spread. It was flying away, uncaged, expanding at the speed of light."

* * *

Most relational love comes with attachment, need, fear, hope, and usually, unreasonable expectations. It's not unconditional. It can switch to aversion, or even hatred, as soon as that person you "love" doesn't meet one's needs or high standards.

Love in its purest form is, from a spiritual perspective, beyond need or ego or expectations.

Of course, this is a very lofty view of love, as is attempting to find some semblance of peace or happiness during times of tragedy, or letting go of a powerful worry that has no solution.

But when we can see love, or tragedy, or worry, from that window ledge, it can set free within us the vast potential to access deep compassion -- for the world, and for ourselves. True love; true peace of mind.

Those rare moments from that metaphorical window ledge, that *oceanic feeling*, may be the closest we ever come to "understanding" true conscious awareness.

34. Metta Meditation

"Metta" means positive energy and kindness toward others. The practice is also known as loving-kindness meditation. The goal of Metta meditation is to cultivate kindness for all beings, including yourself

Metta meditation is one of the most powerful meditations I have ever experienced. Whether you do it every day, or once a week, or once a month I think you will feel very good after it's over.

Sit for 5 minutes with your eyes closed. Think of an event in your life, or a person in your life, or in history, that requires forgiveness.

Try not to stay on any one opportunity to forgive for too long. This forgiveness should be both a mental and physical-emotional feeling, a complete letting go, perhaps using a long outbreath to help you let go and fully resolve any lingering resentment or doubt.

Perhaps for 30 seconds each:

Forgive your past.

Forgive your fate.

Forgive yourself for not treating yourself with love and compassion.

Forgive yourself for the times you have not played, or have not successfully played, The Change the Channel Game.

Forgive yourself for anyone you did not treat with love and compassion in the distant past.

Forgive yourself for anyone you did not treat with love and compassion in the recent past.

Forgive others, especially family members or friends, who have hurt or disappointed you.

Forgive people for being the way they are (including yourself).

Forgive the world for being the way it is.

Forgive people or events that have caused harm to you, or others.

Forgive those who don't believe what you believe.

Forgive your enemies.

Forgive evil.

Forgive people in the past and present you consider evil.

Of course, you can add to this forgiveness list. There are no shortages of things, and people, and thoughts, that need forgiving.

When you deeply forgive, and stop finding fault, the outcome is, you're free. You are no longer carrying the woman across the river, hours or even years after it already happened.

35. The End of All Endings

Some believe that when the body dies, that is the end.

This could certainly be true. Or not true.

Others believe when consciousness ends, that is the end.

This could certainly be true. Or not true.

Apparently, the universe itself will end, and nothing will be left. Our ultimate fate is infinite nothingness.

This could certainly be true. Or not true.

Still others believe consciousness never ends. And we are only understanding a sense-limited and brain-limited fraction of reality. This could certainly be true. Or not true.

Some believe the present moment never ends,
whether we are capable of being present for it, or not.
Whether the universe is there to experience it or not.....
The present moment will always be.

This

Is

True.

Therefore, I hope you enjoy *what is* in the present moment as much as possible, with as much gratefulness and grace as you can. And that you remember to change the channel when you feel the need to experience something that feels better than the thought you're living in.

I'll try to remember to do the same.

The End ~ GM