



# The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom

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## *Life Is for You*

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Adapted from [\*What's in the Way Is the Way\*](#)

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Throughout my latest book, *What's In the Way Is the Way*, I invite you to explore a radical shift of perception: the healing you long for doesn't come from changing anything. It comes from the ability to see and be with what is, for who you are is awareness. You are the space in which everything in Life is happening and you are most especially the space in which your storyteller – which is comprised of those thoughts in your head that create stories about Life rather than actually being present for it – functions. As awareness you can see, without wanting them to be any different than what they are, the spells, feelings, and sensations that pass through you all day long rather than being lost in the stories your storyteller generates about them.

When you learn how to be curious about what is going on inside of you, you discover the ability to meet whatever you are experiencing without turning it into a problem. You can then give the energy that was bound up in your struggles the attention and the spaciousness it needs in order to let go. This brings you back to the free-flowing aliveness that you truly are – the field of your being.

In order to be curious about what is going on rather than always trying to control it, it is important to know that your life is *for you*. Life is not just a random series of events that happen because you did it right or you did it wrong. Instead, it is an intelligent unfolding that is revealing itself to you all day long, bringing you step-by-step from unconsciousness to consciousness. Or as Eckhart Tolle says in his book *A New Earth*, “Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at the moment.”

Take a moment now to feel how different that is from perceiving Life as something happening to you that needs to be controlled, fixed and changed. Imagine what it would be like to let go of the whole game of resisting Life and instead to trust it. In this trust, you could then open to Life, listen to it, and grow from every encounter.

At a retreat I led on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, the core focus was “All Is Welcome Here.” On the second day, one of the participants said that whenever that phrase was spoken, she heard “All is well. Come here!” When you learn how to stop trying to make your life be what you want it to be and show up for it instead (“All is welcome here”), you discover that all is well (the field of being is always with you and Life knows what it is



doing) and it is safe to come here. You can show up for the life that Life is giving you! When neurosurgeon Eben Alexander, author of *Proof of Heaven*, woke up from his seven-day coma, the first thing he said to his sister was, “All is well!”

In order to open to “All is well,” it is important to recognize that the evolution that is unfolding on Earth includes human beings. Everything is a part of this evolution, including you. You are Life evolving from unconsciousness to consciousness. Your life is not a random series of events. It is an intelligent and mysterious process that is *for* Life.

I like to call this unfolding the flawless, methodical mystery. It is flawless because each and every experience of your life is tailor-made to wake you out of your unconsciousness. Also, the unfolding is truly methodical. There are basic steps we all go through on our journey out of the clouds in our minds back into recognition of the field of our being. And it is truly mysterious. Without fully understanding it, we can open to it, rediscovering what Joseph Campbell describes as “the rapture of being alive.”

## ***The Six Phases of Consciousness***

Your life is a journey from unconsciousness to consciousness. Michael Bernard Beckwith, founder and spiritual director of the Agape International Spiritual Center, describes this evolution in four phases. I have added two more, “Life happens in you” and “Life happens for you,” and call them the six phases of consciousness.

- Life happens to you.
- Life happens by you.
- Life happens in you.
- Life happens for you.
- Life happens through you.
- Life is you.

Let us take a few minutes to explore each one. As you read, I invite you to keep on checking in with yourself. You are being given important information in this chapter. Remember that the most powerful thing you can do for your healing is to bring together your attention and your experience, even as you are reading this book and no matter what the information brings up for you.

## *Life Happens To You*

For a good deal of your life you have probably lived like most human beings, feeling that Life is happening *to you*. Life is so big and if you are honest with yourself, you never really know what is going to happen next. You wake up one morning and your heart is light and happy, but the next day you're unsettled. Bosses fire you, the flu debilitates you, people you love reject you, every day you get a little older and death is always lurking around the corner.

It is understandable that the more unconscious you are, the more often you feel like a victim of Life. When you live in the belief that Life is happening to you, you often view Life as a possible threat. So you stay caught in your head, finding yourself lost in your clouds of struggle and listening to a storyteller that resists, reacts, defends and explains, hoping to figure everything out. It generally does absolutely anything except be open to Life, right here, right now.

## *Life Happens By You*

When it becomes too uncomfortable to live with this much powerlessness, you evolve into the belief that Life is happening *by you*. Rather than being a victim to Life, you believe you can control it. There can be a great feeling of personal power in this level of consciousness. It is a necessary step in moving out of the victimhood of the first phase, but people get caught there. Men try to control women and vice versa. Religions try to control the masses. Countries try to control other countries. The majority of people try to control others



## Greetings

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[Rick Hanson, PhD](#), edits the *Bulletin*. [Michelle Keane](#) is its managing editor, and it's designed and laid out by the design team at [Content Strategy Online](#).

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who are not like them - those who are gay, have a different skin color, or who follow dissimilar religions, for example. Most of all, we try to control ourselves, hoping to make ourselves be what we think we should be.

There is an enormous amount of effort in this level of consciousness. The storyteller believes that in order for anything good to happen it has to make it happen. So it loves to set goals and feels very ashamed when it doesn't follow through (just think of New Year's resolutions). The storyteller eventually evolves into intentions. Goals are where you use your mind to try to make things be the way you want them. With intentions, you work with feeling what you want to generate. None of this is bad or wrong. These are important tools to use on the path of awakening and sometimes they actually work. But what would happen if you recognized that rather than trying to make things happen, simply opening into Life will bring you what you most deeply long for?

There is a popular school of thought that teaches that you can control your reality. When you subscribe to this belief, the storyteller says that if you think the right thoughts, you can make your life be the way you want it. The main difficulty with this is that, in the long run, it doesn't work. To think you can control Life is like being a cork in the ocean believing it can direct the movement of the ocean. Yes, the cork's belief may change the movement of the water right where it is, but it can't influence all the other powerful forces that make up the ocean.

To stay caught in this phase of consciousness is to be cut off from the creative flow of Life. Believing that you are in charge of Life, you are mainly identified with your conceptual world, trying to create a reality rather than showing up for Reality.

When you have lived in this phase of consciousness long enough, you see the downside of

it. First, you find yourself becoming fearful of your thoughts: “I shouldn’t be thinking this way because I will manifest this in my world.” Second, it can also bring forth shame, for when this belief doesn’t work the way the self-help books promise, you think this is because you haven’t done it right enough or well enough. Author and speaker Carolyn Myss used to have a thread in her teachings that said you could manifest what you want if you just think right. By the time she gave a talk in Seattle in the 1990’s, she had evolved beyond this phase. A friend who went to her talk told me that Myss asked the audience of six hundred to raise their hands if they had been able to create the reality they wanted. Not one person did.

## ***Life Happens In You***

You eventually begin to see that all of your reacting and controlling hasn’t brought you the ease and joy you long for. Instead of being the victim or needing to make your life be any particular way, which is the endless game of struggle, you begin to get an inkling that Life is something to be listened to, opened to. This is where you start evolving into the next phase of consciousness: Life is happening *in you*.

At this level of consciousness you begin to realize something startling: rather than experiencing Life, most of the time you think about it, seeing only the thoughts in your head.

When you experience Life through your thoughts, you stop experiencing it as it is. Or, as the well-known French author *Anaïs Nin* said in her 1961 work *Seduction of the Minotaur*, “We don’t see things as they are.

We see them as we are.” You project your spells onto yourself and others rather than really seeing what is.

When was the last time you truly saw a loved one’s face? If you are honest with yourself, it has probably been a long time.



It is in this phase that you also realize that your suffering doesn't come from the experiences of your life. Instead it comes from your stories about what is happening. It comes from inside of you. There could be a gray day and you're just fine. Then on another gray day you could be miserable. You may say it is because the day is gray, but it comes from your story about the day, not the day itself.

This is where you begin to live what I call the "*you-turn*." You become less interested in being a victim of your life or even trying to make it be any different than it is. You realize that the healing you long for comes when you turn your attention within. When you get to know the spells that are the source of your suffering, you can unhook from them and come back to Life.

## ***Life Happens for You***

The more you become curious about what is happening rather than reacting and controlling, the more you come to a wonderful realization that your life is *for* you. Life is not a random series of events. It is a highly intelligent unfolding that is putting you in the exact situations you need in order to see and unhook from the spells that keep you separate from its flow. No matter what is happening in your life, you finally understand that Life knows what it is doing.

Rather than Life being something you have to mold and shape into what you want it to be, you begin to show up for Life exactly as it is. Yes, the flow of Life includes pain, loss and death. But resisting the pains of Life only turn them into suffering, and the suffering that comes from resistance is always much greater than directly experiencing your pain. Instead of tightening around your experiences and turning away from them, which only thickens your clouds of struggle, you bring your attention to your experience, whatever it is.

Even little moments of curiosity sprinkled throughout your day are powerful. Every time you respond rather than react to what is going on inside of you, what was formerly bound up begins to loosen. Remember, your natural state is free-flowing aliveness. When that aliveness gets trapped in the spells, your energy and joy dim. When the spells receive the light of your attentiveness, they let go and the trapped energy flows freely, bringing with it the bliss of openness. This is all encapsulated in: Life is set up to bring up what has been bound up, so it can open up to be freed up, and you can show up for Life.



## ***Life Happens Through You***

The “Life happens for you” phase shows you that there is no such thing as an ordinary moment in your life and helps you to see that Life is speaking to you at all moments. By becoming curious about what you are experiencing and giving it the light of compassionate attention so it can let go, you evolve into the next phase of allowing Life to move *through* you. This is where you recognize that Life is trustable. It is not always likable, but it knows what it is doing.

Imagine a life where you trust Life implicitly. Every morning you wake up with a sense of adventure. Your belly is soft, your mind is curious and your heart is open. Rather than struggling with Life, you open to it, even when you are facing deep challenges. If you find yourself caught in reaction, you give your reaction the attention it needs to let go.

Just as when you unkink a hose, the vibrant flow of energy that is Life can now move freely through you, and this flow brings forth the joy and aliveness you so deeply long for. Creativity that you could never imagine on your own becomes clear to you, blessing you and everyone you meet with the wisdom of Life.

You experience deep gratitude for absolutely everything. You see that your life is dependent on every ounce of creativity that has ever happened in the universe. You also see that everything that has happened to you, even the difficult parts, has been a part of your journey back into Life. Step-by-step, Life is bringing you into consciousness, into the ability to be fully here for Life. Now you can relax and show up for the adventure. As Cynthia



Bourgeault so beautifully says in her book *Mystical Hope*, “You find your way by being sensitively and sensually connected to exactly where you are, by letting ‘here’ reach out and lead you.”

## *Life Is You*

The more you allow Life to move through you, rather than reacting to it or trying to control it, the more you glimpse the sixth phase, in which you see that Life *is* you. You are no longer a separate being. Instead, you merge completely into the creative flow of Life, understanding that everything – every rock, person, cloud, molecule and ladybug – is you. You are Life! In the 2013 New World Library video “What Is the Divine Purpose of the Universe?” Eckhart Tolle said, “You’re not *in* the Universe, you are the universe, expressing itself through countless life forms... and with every experience, the universe is experiencing itself as your life...it wants to realize its own essence through you.”

As you look closely at the six phases of consciousness, you will see that the first two are about fixing, changing, resisting and trying to control Life (Life is happening to you and by you). These phases are the world of your storyteller, which doesn’t want what is here (doesn’t know how to open to Life) and wants what is *not* here (“I can have what I want if I just think right”). Throughout both of these phases, there is a veil between you and the living experience of Life, because neither phase is about showing up for the creative flow of Life.

The next two phases of consciousness are about using your mind to be curious about what is happening rather than resisting and controlling. In the phase “Life is happening *in* you,” you recognize that the storyteller inside you separates you from Life. So rather than trying to change anything, you become interested in what you are experiencing in any given moment. The more you are here for Life – the easy and the difficult, the joyous and the sorrowful – and the more you unhook from your spells, the clearer it becomes that Life knows what it is doing and that everything it is doing is *for* you.

The final two phases of consciousness are all about coming home to the field of your being. The more you live the truth that Life is *for* you, the more you relax into the flow, which brings you to the joy of Life moving *through* you. As your clouds dissipate, you recognize the field of being again, and you also realize that you *are* being itself. Life is you and you are Life.

Most people live in the first two phases, “Life happens to you” and “Life happens by you,” without knowing that right in the middle of these beliefs is a doorway into the last four. Life is waking you up from the contraction of the first two phases and into the openness of the last four. This is for your own healing and also for the healing of all beings, because as you see through your clouds of struggle, you become a healing presence in the world.

There is a paradoxical truth that is important to acknowledge. Human beings are evolving from the first phase to the sixth: “Life *is* you.” It is also true that most days you will experience a number of these phases. It is not about getting rid of any particular phase or making one better than the other. They are all part of Life, and as you evolve, you will recognize and embrace them all.

When you realize that Life is smarter than you, Life becomes very interesting. Rather than being lost in your storyteller, you realize something very extraordinary is happening here: there are no ordinary moments in your life. You become much more alert to what is happening, both outside and inside of you. If one’s life is like an iceberg, most people just pay attention to the part above the water while what is really going on is happening underneath the ‘water level’ of their everyday awareness.

So the invitation is to show up for your life, not how you want it to be, but how it really is, allowing it, step by step, to bring you home to this moment, home to Life.

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**Mary O'Malley** is an author, counselor and awakening mentor in Kirkland, Washington. In the early 1970's, a powerful awakening led Mary to begin changing her relationship with her challenges, freeing her from a lifelong struggle with self-judgment and despair. Mary's latest book, *What's in the Way Is the Way*, provides a revolutionary approach for healing your fears, anxieties, shame, and confusion, so you can live from a place of ease and well-being.

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# *The Price of Protection*

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*I don't need you – or anyone. Why should I?*

*I am strong, smart, and competent.*

*Dare to be less, voices murmur, and I will die.*

I am bound.

Encrusted shell constricts.

Long have I borne its weight embedded in my skin.

How strange that strength is also armor

To shield me from eyes that peer inside

And see the quivering uncertain core.

How to shed my carapace?

Can I learn to release it freely -

or must I bleed?

Perhaps you, too, have tugged at your beloved prison bonds

Till fingers shred

Dreaming, dreaming of a dawn when love has melted harsh weight into —

Wings

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**Karen Kristjanson**, M.Sc., PCC is a writer, mother, and coach who is all about learning, both her own and others'. Her upcoming book, *Co-Parenting Stories: Harvest of Hope* will support those navigating the co-parent path. Follow her at <https://karenkristjanson.wordpress.com> and on twitter [@CoParentAuthor](https://twitter.com/CoParentAuthor).



# *Healthy Meditation Practice*

© Richard Shankman

Excerpted from [\*The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation\*](#)  
(2015) by Richard Shankman

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Meditation aims us toward a more reliable way to find happiness, in which our well-being is not left to chance and life's uncertainties. Meditation is learning to let go of our obsessive tendencies of grasping for things we want and pushing away those we do not like, and to begin to look for happiness in how we relate to what is happening. We can find peace in any circumstance just by letting go of craving and clinging, and by changing how we relate to whatever life brings us.

The concept of letting go and non-clinging is simple, but we soon find out that what sounds so simple - letting go of our suffering - is hard to do. To actualize this, we need to train our minds to more thoroughly learn how to let go. Our reactive patterns are strong and it is so easy for us to get caught over and over in our daily lives. If we say, "Do not cling to things or push anything away," perhaps you can do it in a given moment, but as soon as the right experience finds us, the particular causes and conditions arise, we are caught once again in our habitual reactive patterns. This is the place for meditation.

There are many meditation practices and they all aim to develop the key qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, concentration, and insight. You should not expect to be an expert meditator in a single day. Do not be surprised, and do not be hard on yourself, if you find it is not easy to sit quietly with yourself. When learning anything new, it can take patience and perseverance to see results. Through repetition, and some degree of trial and error, we go from those clumsy first steps to a sense of proficiency and ease.

I am often asked how much time you should devote to meditation. The answer is however much you are inclined to do and your life circumstances will allow. Many people find that beginning with fifteen to twenty minutes a day is a good way to start. Once you have gained some experience, try sitting a little longer, perhaps half an hour. See how that works for you. Some people work their way up to forty-five minutes or an hour, or more, or sit more than once a day. In general, as with anything you wish to develop, the more time you give to meditation, the more you will get out of it. Just do the best you can. Any amount of time spent sitting quietly will be of benefit.

As you begin, take some time to reflect on your aspirations and intentions for undertaking these ancient practices. You would not be drawn to meditation and Buddhist teachings if you did not want to live with more clarity, calmness, wisdom, and compassion, in a way that creates less suffering and more well-being for yourself and others.

Keeping your good intentions in mind will be a great support through all the ups and downs of a meditative life as you begin this journey of awakening, following in the Buddha's footsteps.

**So what does a healthy meditation practice consist of?**



## Ease and Relaxation

It can feel especially demanding when first starting out if you are restless and it is hard to sit still, or if you keep falling asleep, or your body is not used to the sitting posture and hurts. Perhaps you can only manage one or two mindful breaths before becoming so deeply lost in thought that you completely forget about being with the breath for the next ten minutes. The typical untrained mind is out of control and just at the time when we are the least settled, calm, or peaceful, and when we could use a lot of concentration and stability to help us be present with all these difficulties, we have these qualities the least.

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Recognize that it takes practice and training for the mind to begin to settle and, just as with any art or skill, we are not going to become expert meditators in a single day. Proficiency and ability develop over time, yet many of us sit down to meditate and expect our minds to be quiet and peaceful right away. It should not surprise us that meditation can be challenging in

the beginning. Our minds are not trained. Reflect on how much time you have spent on automatic pilot, led around by your likes and dislikes with a distracted mind. That is a lot of time training your mind to be scattered and not present.

Ajahn Chah, the great Thai meditation master, compared meditation practice with growing a chili bush. He said our job is to prepare the soil, plant the seed, water it, and protect it from insects. That is our whole job. We do our part and after that how fast or in what manner it grows is not our business. You cannot pull on the leaves and expect them to grow. Yet in meditation we expect to grow, flower, and produce chilies in one day.

All you can do is aim yourself in the right direction. How meditation unfolds, how quickly and in what way, is not within your control. Here is where the quality of patience will serve to support you very well. Your job is to practice the best you can, connecting with whatever experience the breath, body, and mind are giving you. You do not have to be better at meditation than you are, and that includes your capacity to let the process unfold and reveal itself in its own way. Patience and the wisdom to not suffer are among the skills you are cultivating by doing your best to let go of struggle and relax into your experience.



Ease and relaxation are foundational to meditation practice. We cannot even begin to settle if we are struggling. Consciously beginning by bringing in a sense of relaxation and ease, just the best you can, will help you let go of constriction and tension and take the striving out of the process.

## ***Opening to the Present Moment***

Meditation practice is an exploration, a process of recognizing and fostering what is skillful and learning to let go of what is unskillful. If our practice is about learning, then we are not afraid of anything that might happen. We need not worry because whatever happens is teaching us. If we regard every experience as our teacher, we can apply ourselves with an attitude of experiment and inquiry, not judging our meditation in terms of how concentrated we are, as so many of us do, but with interest to find out what is real and true.

We can be curious, doing the best we can to meet our experience with inquisitiveness and look to see if what we are doing is helpful or unhelpful. What we learn we can apply to



### **Perspectives on Self-Care**

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this *Bulletin*), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

the next situation. Even falling into struggle is an opportunity for learning, helping you to realize that you are unable to be equanimous in this situation. Instead of floundering in self-judgment or criticism, merely look to see what happened. Any time you discover an edge—those things, situations, and experiences you cannot be with—important areas for growth are revealed. Whatever happened is teaching you, giving you information, informing you how to move forward.

A big shift came in my own practice when I got just as interested in my suffering as I was in my bliss. As my mind became less distracted, I could see more and more clearly every time something unpleasant or painful would arise and how my

mind responded. I began to stop worrying about whether or not I was getting what I wanted and turned to my experience with an attitude of interest and investigation.

Let your experience of the moment be your teacher. See if you can turn directly to meet whatever is happening, even if it is painful. That does not mean you have to stay with it, making yourself plunge into something difficult, scary, or distressing, if it is too much for you. You have to look and see what is needed, letting however much skill, experience, and wisdom you have show you the way. It may be that you choose to stay right in the fire of an uncomfortable feeling, emotion, or memory, or you may back away, bringing down the intensity to get some relief in order to give you the rest and resources you need.

If you are judging yourself or your experience, try your best to stop. Do not make a struggle to stop struggling, but try to let it go as best you can. Sometimes it is not so easy, in which case you are learning something about conditioned patterns of tension and stress that may be deeply habituated. You may need to inquire and investigate what is fueling the tendency to hold on to some painful reaction even when you see that it is creating more suffering.

Relaxation, ease, and patience will be your allies as you learn to let go of struggle and begin to meet yourself with kindness, compassion, and a sense of exploration and

experimentation. Your practice is to study and learn about yourself, and nothing need be excluded. Everything is an opportunity for learning.

We tend to judge our meditation by how pleasant or unpleasant it is. When the practice is to our liking, when it feels good and we are getting what we want, we call that a good meditation. When the present moment is not how we have decided it should be, when it seems to go badly or fall apart, check to see what you found out about yourself, about how your mind works and about the places you get stuck. See if there is something you can let go of that is unhelpful. How can you build on what you have learned? If you can let go of judgment and contention, shifting your attitude from always seeking what you want and avoiding what you do not want, you can begin looking at what happens with interest, discerning what you can cultivate that is skillful and what is unskillful that you can let go.

In beginning any practice it is helpful to try to let go of expectations. Of course, we would not take up a practice if we did not expect some results. But results come more quickly, and with less suffering, if you can practice in a way that allows you to be at peace and happy where you are, even as you aim toward a goal. Be as happy and relaxed as you can. Find the freedom in the moment while practicing in a way that heads in a skillful direction.

In this practice we are trying both to get somewhere and to go nowhere at all, doing two apparently contradictory things at the same time. Sometimes dharma practice is talked



about in terms of “going nowhere” or “nothing to gain,” so it can seem confusing when we speak of cultivating or attaining meditative states of concentration and insight. These two aspects of practice, progressing along a path and going nowhere, appear to be at odds.

You would not undertake anything if you did not want to get something from it. Of course we want to be more concentrated, more peaceful, more quiet and clear. It’s okay to want that, and in fact the Buddha said that the pleasure of concentration should be pursued, developed, and cultivated.

This seeming contradiction resolves itself when we understand that we are actually doing only one thing, aiming ourselves in a wholesome direction and at the same time, at each step along the path, resting aware of and present with whatever is happening. We are moving along a path of practice by cultivating and strengthening meditative states and wholesome qualities of our mind and heart, and we do it simply by staying present with and connecting mindfully with whatever is happening, moment by moment. Getting somewhere and going nowhere are both true at the same time.

All the parts of yourself and all the patterns at work in your life come with you as you begin to meditate. Just as we are liable to suffer when we do not get what we want in the course of daily life, even with the most sincere intentions we can fall into worry, stress, or fear as the meditation process develops. This is all part of the learning process as we get to see how our minds work. You do not have to be free from patterns of negativity in order to begin meditation, but you do need the tools to work with whatever meditation presents.

## **Self-Compassion**

I remember my beginning days as a meditator, wondering what it was going to be like if something ever started to happen. I was young, naïve, and idealistic, and looking around the meditation hall, seeing everyone sitting so still, looking like perfect Buddhas, I thought, *Look at them all. Everybody is blissed out but me.* I imagined everyone in transcendent states of ecstasy as I grappled with knee pain, a mind that could not stay on the breath, and thoughts of inadequacy. It is so easy to fall into judging ourselves and comparing with others, and we can end up creating a lot of unnecessary suffering along this path whose purpose is to take us to the end of suffering.

It is often taught that morality is the foundation for beginning any meditation practice.



Morality entails speaking, thinking, and acting in wholesome ways that decrease stress and increase well-being in ourselves and others. A standard Buddhist model to guide us in this way is the five precepts: nonharming, not stealing or not taking that which does not belong to us, care not to cause harm around sexuality, wise and careful speech, and abstaining from intoxication that leads to heedlessness. There is no doubt of the critical importance a moral basis has in creating a healthy and supportive environment for our meditation to flourish.

But even more fundamental than morality is self-compassion. Self-compassion understands that we each have our own suffering, that each of us is a unique blend of strengths and weaknesses, and it allows us to be present with our suffering without adding negative self-judgment or blame.

We see how simple the instructions for beginning meditation are. Make yourself as comfortable as possible. Sit any way you wish that will allow you to remain relatively still in a relaxed way (you can even lie down). You do not have to make anything happen, but just be mindful of whatever *is* happening. Yet we soon discover how difficult this simple process can be.

Some amount of physical and mental discomfort inevitably comes when we set aside our usual distractions and concerns to just sit quietly and be present with ourselves. Our bodies ache or our feelings of unworthiness, shame, fear, guilt, trying to please others, or any of the many other psychological and emotional difficulties so many of us contend with, can come roaring up at any time.

We can be quite critical or judgmental, thinking that we really are not doing any of this very well and falling into adversarial relationships with our experience and ourselves. When difficulties arise we tend to think something is going wrong, or that we are not trying hard enough or are not doing it the right way. But if you could meditate better you would. If you could concentrate better you would. If you could be less distracted or meditate more often, then you would.

Self-compassion allows us relax more, to understand that we are trying our best (even though it may not feel that way to us), that the forces that distract us or pull us to waste time are very real, and that sometimes, despite our best efforts, we do not get the results we want.

We do not have to know how to have self-compassion; we just have to be open to the possibility of self-compassion, learning to stay present to our experience with an open heart without judgment or blame. Even in the beginning we can start to bring equanimity toward our experience and our self.

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# *Skillful Means*

[Your Skillful Means](#), sponsored by the Wellspring Institute, is designed to be a comprehensive resource for people interested in personal growth, overcoming inner obstacles, being helpful to others, and expanding consciousness. It includes instructions in everything from common psychological tools for dealing with negative self talk, to physical exercises for opening the body and clearing the mind, to meditation techniques for clarifying inner experience and connecting to deeper aspects of awareness, and much more.

## **Three Good Things Exercise (aka The Three Blessings)**

### **Purpose/Effects**

The Three Good Things exercise is intended to increase happiness and a sense of wellbeing.

It does this by a simple method of redirecting attention towards positive thoughts and away from negative thoughts. Human beings have evolved to spend much more time thinking about negative experiences than positive ones. We spend a lot of time thinking about what has gone wrong and how to fix it, or how to do it differently next time. In the past there may have been an evolutionary advantage to this way of thinking, since it seems to be innate. However, for modern humans this negative bias is the source of a lot of anxiety, depression, and general lack of wellbeing.

Luckily, by re-directing our thoughts on purpose towards positive events, we can do a lot to correct this negative bias.

In [this video](#), Martin Seligman describes the purpose and effects of this exercise. Here he uses the alternate name, the “Three Blessings.”

## Method

### Summary

Each night before you go to sleep:

1. Think of three good things that happened today.
2. Write them down.
3. Reflect on why they happened.

### Long Version

This exercise is to be done each night before going to sleep.

- Step 1: Think about anything good that happened to you today. It can be anything at all that seems positive to you. It need not be anything big or important. For example, you might recall the fact that you enjoyed the oatmeal you had for breakfast. On the other hand, you might also recall that your child took its first step today. Anything from the most mundane to the most exalted works, as long as it seems to you like a good, positive, happy thing.
- Step 2: Write down these three positive things.
- Step 3: Reflect on why each good thing happened. Determining the “why” of the event is the most important part of the exercise. For example, you might say that your oatmeal tasted really good this morning because your partner took the time to go shopping at the local farmer’s market, where they have fresh, organic oatmeal. Or you might say that your child took its first step today because God was pouring blessings down upon your family, or because it really wanted to get to some cookies on the table. You get to decide reasons for each event that make sense to you.

## History

This method was created by psychologist, [Martin Seligman](#). He is considered to be an expert on depression and happiness, has been called the “father of Positive Psychology,” and is one of the preeminent psychologists of the 20th century. He is also the director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

## *Fare Well*

*May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.*