

"A beautifully personal sharing of the impact of knowing who you are and how perfectly well you are made." -Michael Neill,
author of *The Inside-Out Revolution* and *The Space Within*

you are the
blue sky

Sarah Kostin

Understanding who you are
beyond your thinking.

Part One: Understanding

If the only thing that people learned was not to be afraid of their experience, that alone would change the world.

— Sydney Banks

Burned Out by Busy

I stood on the lawn near the outdoor patio bar, watching the fading summer sunlight sparkle on the nearby river. It was Happy Hour, and live guitar music was playing in the background. I was chatting with a dear friend who was visiting our mountain town after having taught for several years in India and Europe.

I told her about my life at the time, juggling a full-time job running the children’s department at my public library, teaching four or five yoga classes per week, coaching a handful of clients for almost free, practicing yoga, meditating every day and hitting the mountain bike trails as much as possible. Not to mention trying to squeeze in time with the hubby, dog, friends, and the necessary errands that compose a life.

With a gentle tilt of her head and a smirk, she asked me in that I’m-only-saying-this-because-I-love-you tone, “Do you find it ironic that you’re a life coach and are the busiest person I know?”

“Hmmm” I replied. I hadn’t really considered that. “That’s just my normal.”

“Exactly.”

She was pointing, but I really didn’t see. True, there was not much white space in my calendar, but my time was completely consumed with things that I enjoyed doing. It’s not like I was slogging away at a corporate job in a city that I hated just so I could buy me some Louis Vuitton shoes that I would never wear. I was living the ideal mountain-style life to the fullest, seizing the day, and squeezing every last drop out of it.

That said, my wise friend was right: I was happy, but I was also exhausted.

Back then, I erroneously believed that I had to work at happiness. I thought that if I got the formula just right and had my circumstances aligned in the correct order, then I would feel happy and content. This is the way that most of us are taught. Our culture of consumerism and hustle continues to reinforce this lesson throughout our lives.

And this method does work for a while – until it doesn’t.

Not long after that Happy Hour conversation, I stumbled upon an understanding of the mind that would change my life forever. It flipped everything I believed right on its head.

This understanding pointed to a spiritual truth: that our true nature is one of happiness, contentment, and peace. Because human beings are spiritual beings, our spirit can never be broken, contaminated or destroyed. It is the bit of us that is infinitely resilient and aware.

We don’t have to work hard for happiness at all. We are made of it.

The reason this spiritual truth is elusive is because of one very

important gift that we possess: the gift of thought. It turns out that instead of feeling the beauty of our true nature, most of the time we are feeling our thinking about our personal lives.

And let's face it, most of our thinking about ourselves feels anything but peaceful, content or ease-filled.

Rather, it's kind of like walking around wearing an itchy sweater all day and thinking that that's the way our body naturally feels. When we finally take off the sweater, our naked skin feels soft and luxurious. It is who we really are underneath.

When we finally set down our agitated thinking, we reconnect with our true self.

Floating in the Ocean

Imagine that you are floating in the ocean.

Sidenote: I once used this metaphor with a coaching client who told me afterwards that she was terrified of the ocean. She did not find it relaxing at all. So if this is you, please replace “ocean” with “desert,” “mountains,” “shopping at *TJ Maxx*”—whatever helps you feel relaxed—and adjust accordingly below.

Ahem... Imagine that you are floating in the ocean.

The ocean represents your innate well-being.

Everything is flowing, you feel connected with all of life. You are both in and of the ocean. Your mind is clear and quiet. The ocean feels like home.

While you are floating, a few thoughts drift through your awareness:

This is nice.

I wish I could stay here forever.

Did I pack my beach towel?

The water feels so silky.

These are low-level thoughts; they float in and out of your awareness. You don't focus too heavily on them because you are

immersed in the good feeling of the ocean. You are relaxed, calm and completely at ease.

Suddenly, a new thought comes into your awareness:

What if there are sharks in this ocean?

This thought seems more important than the other thoughts. This thought has meaning. This thought could save your life. So, somewhere in the background of your mind, your consciousness lights up this seemingly meaningful thought about sharks.

In a flash, you are no longer experiencing the feeling of floating peacefully in the ocean. You are now experiencing shark-infested water, and you feel that your life is in danger.

Your thoughts spin and grow louder in volume. You panic.

I'm all alone.

I'm not the strongest swimmer.

Did I tell anyone where I was going?

Did I turn off the stove?

How long have I been out here?

You swim to the shore, grab your flip flops, and scuttle home like a scared little crab.

Were there really sharks in the water?

Who knows?

The external circumstance does not matter. It was the *thought* of sharks that completely changed your experience. You *felt* the thought of the potential of sharks as if the sharks were really chomping at your perfectly pedicured feet.

One moment you were in a blissful feeling floating in the ocean, as if you were starring in the Disney film *Moana*. The next you were running to the shore, breathless and scared, playing the role of an extra in the movie *Jaws*.

Now how did that happen?

It was an example of the Three Principles in action.

The Most Important Understanding You've Never Heard Of

Imagine it's 1973. There is a Scottish man in his early forties who works as a welder in a pulp mill in Canada. He has a thin frame and kind eyes. He clocks in at the mill every day, does his job and goes home to his family. He's an average guy, with only a ninth-grade education. He's not particularly a spiritual seeker, but he's curious.

His name is Sydney Banks.

One day, while attending a marriage seminar with his wife, a therapist he is chatting with makes an innocent comment to him, something to the effect of, "Syd, you're not insecure – you just think you are." That simple statement sparked something inside of Syd, and he experienced what many now call his "enlightenment experience."

Through this experience, an understanding was revealed to him of how our awareness, the gift of thought, and the universal intelligence of life are all interconnected. Less than a year after his experience, Banks left his job at the mill and spent the rest of his life (he died in 2009) speaking and teaching this understanding – which

he later named the Three Principles – to all who would listen.

The concept of the Three Principles has acquired many other names, such as the “Inside-Out Understanding,” “Insight Principles,” the “New Paradigm,” or simply, “The Owner’s Manual.” It points to the same truth that has been told for thousands of years, just framed in a new way that feels more accessible to our modern times.

This understanding is now shared by a passionate and growing community of teachers, speakers, coaches, and counselors, and it’s helping thousands of people understand where their feelings of insecurity, doubt, worry, anxiety, and sadness come from. Through realizing this understanding, more and more people are finding greater contentment, ease, and joy.

So how does it work?

In the example from the previous chapter, the ocean represents our true nature and innate well-being, a state of calm and ease. This is referred to as the principle of Universal Mind, or for the sake of brevity, Mind. It is quite different from what we typically think of as our mind, and it is not our brain.

According to Banks, Mind is the creative power and intelligence behind all life. Mind is the energy source that is operating behind the scenes for us and for all life on this planet, all of the time.

When we discover Mind within ourselves, we begin to realize the connectedness between human beings. We become aware of the flow of universal intelligence moving through us. Mind gives us the freedom and power that comes with feeling a part of something bigger than ourselves. We no longer have to strive so hard to fix, figure out or plan our life, because the universe really does have our back. Mind is the sense of inner knowing and wisdom that has helped guide us throughout our entire life.

In the previous metaphor when we were floating in the ocean of Mind, many thoughts drifted in and out of our awareness – and we temporarily focused on one particular thought about sharks.

The principle of Universal Thought refers to the creative energy that brings words and images into our heads out of thin air. Thought is the language of Mind. Thought is the filter through which we view our external circumstances, and it gives our present moment experience its quality and texture of feeling. The external world is actually neutral, but it rarely feels that way. We are always feeling our thoughts about the outside world.

In the ocean vision, the principle of Universal Consciousness came into play. Consciousness selected the thought, *What if there are sharks in the ocean?* This attention brought that thought to life, which resulted in feeling the very “real” experience of sharks.

Consciousness is not only our awareness, but also the special effects department of our mind. Consciousness simultaneously lights up our thoughts through our attention and brings life to our thoughts via the senses. This explains why thought doesn’t look like thought, but rather like an independent, freestanding reality. In other words, it describes why our thoughts appear like real life.

Before grasping what Sydney Banks is describing, it is easy to believe that our experience of life comes from forces outside of ourselves, such as life circumstances and events. Most of us operate under the assumption that our jobs stress us out, our partners make us crazy, and money – when we have a lot of it – brings us happiness. It turns out that our perception and experience of life is created via the interplay of Mind, Thought and Consciousness – from the inside out, not the other way around.

This is not a prescription for how to live life, but instead a description of how life is lived. Through the filter of us. By

understanding that we are fully supported no matter what we are feeling in the moment, we are able to see through the limitations we place on ourselves through thought. We uncage our spirit and learn to navigate by joy instead of by worry or fear.

From the Inside Out

Confused? Skeptical? Don't worry, that's totally normal. In fact, if you overthink it and run this understanding through your intellect, you'll miss it entirely. Which is why most of us have not realized this simple and universal truth for most of our lives.

In a nutshell, our entire experience of life is created from the inside out. We move through life feeling our thinking about the outside world. And, it feels like real life.

When I say our entire experience, I mean everything — from our job satisfaction, to our relationships, to our views on failure and success. That old adage that money can't buy happiness? Well it's true! And neither can the perfect partner, a dream job, the flawless presentation, or the fanciest mountain bike.

Because nothing from the outside world can give us happiness.

But our *thinking* about those things can. Which is why that feeling of happiness is so fleeting.

When you feel any feeling at all, no matter how much it seems to be caused by an external circumstance, it is **always coming from you**. More specifically, it's coming from your thoughts *about* the circumstance.

The mind only works in one direction, from the inside-out.

This is counter to everything we've ever been taught. In general, we are raised and taught from an outside-in model. That our outside world creates how we feel inside. Not only are we taught that this is the way it works, it also really looks to us like our feelings are caused by circumstance. Someone says something mean to you, you feel hurt. You lose something or someone, you feel sad. You get a promotion, you feel excited.

You may think, *But wait a second! There are lots of times where my circumstance changed and the way I felt changed at the same time.* You might say for example, "I used to be worried about money all of the time. Then, I got a raise or inherited some money, and now I'm not worried about it."

That may be true, but when you look closer, you see that it wasn't the actual money that gave you more contentment. *It was the fact that you were no longer thinking worried thoughts about the money.* You had been living in the feeling of concern about money through your concerned thoughts. Then, circumstances changed and you were no longer thinking those concerned thoughts. And, voila! The feeling of concern disappeared.

You can tell this is true because someone with a lot more money than you might still be thinking worried thoughts about money. This explains why there are so many depressed and unhappy billionaires in the world. And, why there may be just as many joyful people living below the poverty line.

External circumstances are actually neutral. What we *think* about a given circumstance determines what we feel, and this looks like reality to us. Thought is the invisible middleman between circumstance and experience that shapes and molds your perception of your life.

My Missing Cat

Gryphon is a Maine Coon cat, a long-haired, tufted eared, mouse-killing, couch-cuddling, wet-food-devouring machine. Gryphon's summertime routine is to bound out of the house for his daily outdoor romp in the Enchanted Kitty Forest – the wooded hillside behind our house. If my husband or I pop home for lunch, Gryphon magically appears at home, too. He returns every evening for dinner and tuna treats, followed by lap snuggles.

One summer day, Gryphon bounded out of the house and didn't return. For two weeks, my husband and I went out every evening, shaking the canister of dried tuna treats and calling his name. We plastered flyers all over town, stalked the animal shelter, and snuck around people's yards looking in garages and sheds for our missing cat.

Then, three weeks passed and we stopped looking every night. We talked about him every evening, expressing our grief. Our conversations became more tinted with closure, with us saying things like, "He was the greatest cat", "I hope he didn't suffer" and "He lived a good life." In our way, we were saying goodbye to our best buddy of thirteen years.

Then, exactly twenty-eight days after he disappeared, I was drinking coffee in my living room on a Sunday morning. I heard a familiar “meow” outside our glass doors. I couldn’t believe it. Gryphon had returned. He was skinny and starving and purring like a motorcycle. I’m pretty sure I woke all of my neighbors with my shocked exclamations of, “Oh my f*cking God!”

During the time that Gryphon was missing, I noticed something very interesting about my thinking. My thoughts were drunk with angst and worry about whether he was suffering or if he had met some violent demise by way of a hungry fox. When I was caught up in thinking about my missing cat, I was completely heavy with grief and sadness.

At other times, when I was caught up in thinking about other things, I was perfectly happy. I only felt sad when I was in the midst of thinking sad thoughts. The formula wasn’t “missing cat = sadness.” I saw very clearly how the invisible piece of thought played a role: “missing cat + thoughts about missing cat = sadness.”

This might seem very subtle at first glance. But once this idea starts to sink in, it’s revolutionary. Life-changing.

We are always experiencing our thinking about a circumstance, and not the circumstance itself.

This doesn’t mean I will never feel sadness again. But realizing it gives me an understanding of where my thoughts and feelings come from. And when I know that my sadness is coming from my thoughts, I actually feel freed up to feel my sadness more. I’m liberated by knowing the source of it.

It’s similar to understanding the Earth’s natural cycle of changing seasons. If I didn’t know that winter follows autumn, I would freak out every fall when the leaves withered and fell to the ground. “All the trees are dying! It’s a blight! Save yourselves!”

Having an understanding of how fall operates allows me to enjoy the beauty of the dying leaves.

Similarly, knowing where our feelings come from allows us to feel them even more deeply. When we don't realize that our experience is coming from thought, then it can seem that our feelings will last for as long as the circumstance lasts.

However, all thought is temporary and transient. Therefore, all feelings pass, regardless of how intense they feel. This gives me more permission to truly feel my feelings without fear. When Gryphon was missing, I allowed myself to dwell in the sadness. I wasn't fearful that I would always be sad or that the sadness would overwhelm me. My understanding helped me to be with my experience instead of resisting it.

Of course, I was thrilled when he returned. And yes, that is just my thinking too. But I'm totally okay with that.

This is a free preview of the book *You Are the Blue Sky: Understanding who you are beyond your thinking*, by Sarah Kostin.

The book (print, ebook, and audiobook formats) will be available on Amazon.com on July 16, 2021.



Sarah Kostin is a Certified Transformative Coach and author. A former Children's Librarian, yoga teacher, web designer, and ultra-marathon runner, Sarah's love for learning, reading, and personal growth led her to an understanding of our true nature that changed her life completely. In her book, *You are the Blue Sky: Understanding who you are beyond your thinking*, Sarah shares about the simple and profound ways in which understanding the truth of our experience transformed her feelings of hustling, striving, seeking, and people-pleasing to feeling more creativity, clarity, lightness, and joy. When not coaching or writing, Sarah enjoys spending time outside playing in the mountains where she lives with Team Colorado: comprised of her husband, dog, and cat. Sign up for her weekly newsletter full of articles and inspiration on how to write the next chapter of the story of your life. Learn more on her website sarahkostin.com.