

The Power of Zen

A Guide to Zen Living



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Introduction

A Zen lifestyle means a simpler and more elegant life. To do so effectively you will need to engage a set of new habits that minimize and simplify your everyday life. By incorporating Zen practices into your everyday routine, you can learn to focus on what's meaningful in life. At the same time, you will also hone in your skills to remove many distractions. The goal of a Zen lifestyle is to lead a simpler and yet purposeful and fulfilling life.

This book will help you get started with Zen fundamentals and how to implement these habits into your life.

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CHAPTER 1

The Zen Lifestyle



Chapter 1

The Zen Lifestyle

Zen implies simple, tranquil, peaceful, mindful, and elegant. In essence, Zen seeks to understand and experience life without external distractions or analytical thinking.

Today almost everyone's life is consumed with distractions, many of which increase stress in relationships, economically, and emotionally.

For many, analytical thinking and multitasking dominate their lives which creates worry, tension, and stress. This makes it somewhat challenging to adapt to a Zen lifestyle.

The Origins of Zen

Historically, Zen has been practiced for centuries in monasteries with various names. For instance, the Chinese refer to it as *Ch'an*, the Vietnamese as *Thien* and the Koreans as *Seon*. But it is the Japanese rendering of this aspect of Buddhism that is known as Zen.

Zen Buddhism was brought to China by the Indian monk, Bodhidharma sometime in the 6th century. Then, it became known as Ch'an and then spread to Korea and Japan. Under the sixth Chinese patriarch, Huineng, Zen shed many of its inherent Indian aspects becoming more Chinese. It also became more of the Zen that we now think of.

However, it was not until the middle of the 20th century that Zen became popular in the West.

Zen, as we know it today is a way of living where people find happiness and peace within themselves. They learn to be more aware of their surroundings and live in the present moment rather than being distracted by a busy life with endless distractions and the need for more. Zen teaches that to lead a more disciplined and simple life is more fulfilling and satisfying than pursuing more in the external world.

Zen Basics

One of the fundamentals that Zen teaches is to be fully aware and live in each moment. This means you have a single-pointed awareness.

For instance, if you're cleaning, then you're fully present for the act of cleaning alone. If you're spending time with family, they are your only focus and nothing else. Or if you're relaxing at home, then you're not thinking about the day's events or worrying about tomorrow.

Keeping things simple and focused also enables you to understand that less is more. So you're actually giving your full attention, and the result is more effectiveness, efficiency, and fulfillment.

Keeping things minimal will also help you to determine what's truly important and unimportant in your life. In a way, it's decluttering and simplifying your life. But decluttering here doesn't only refer to your physical life as in dealing with everyday activities and chores, but also decluttering your thoughts.



Often times, you get caught up in conflicting or confusing thoughts which can really affect your state of mind. As such, you become distracted, absent-minded, and even distraught and possibly making you fearful, troubled and preoccupied.

Then there is your attachment to your goals and dreams. Now, this is not a bad thing as long as you work towards it positively. But if you reach a point where you convince yourself that you can't be happy without it, then you're in trouble.

This kind of attachment is not healthy at all. Unfortunately, many people fall victim to this mentality. To enter the Zen zone in your life, you need to answer a few questions first.

Ask yourself why you're pursuing your goal. Is it because you believe you'll find happiness? Or is it something that will let you help others? Perhaps, you consider it worth spending your time on?

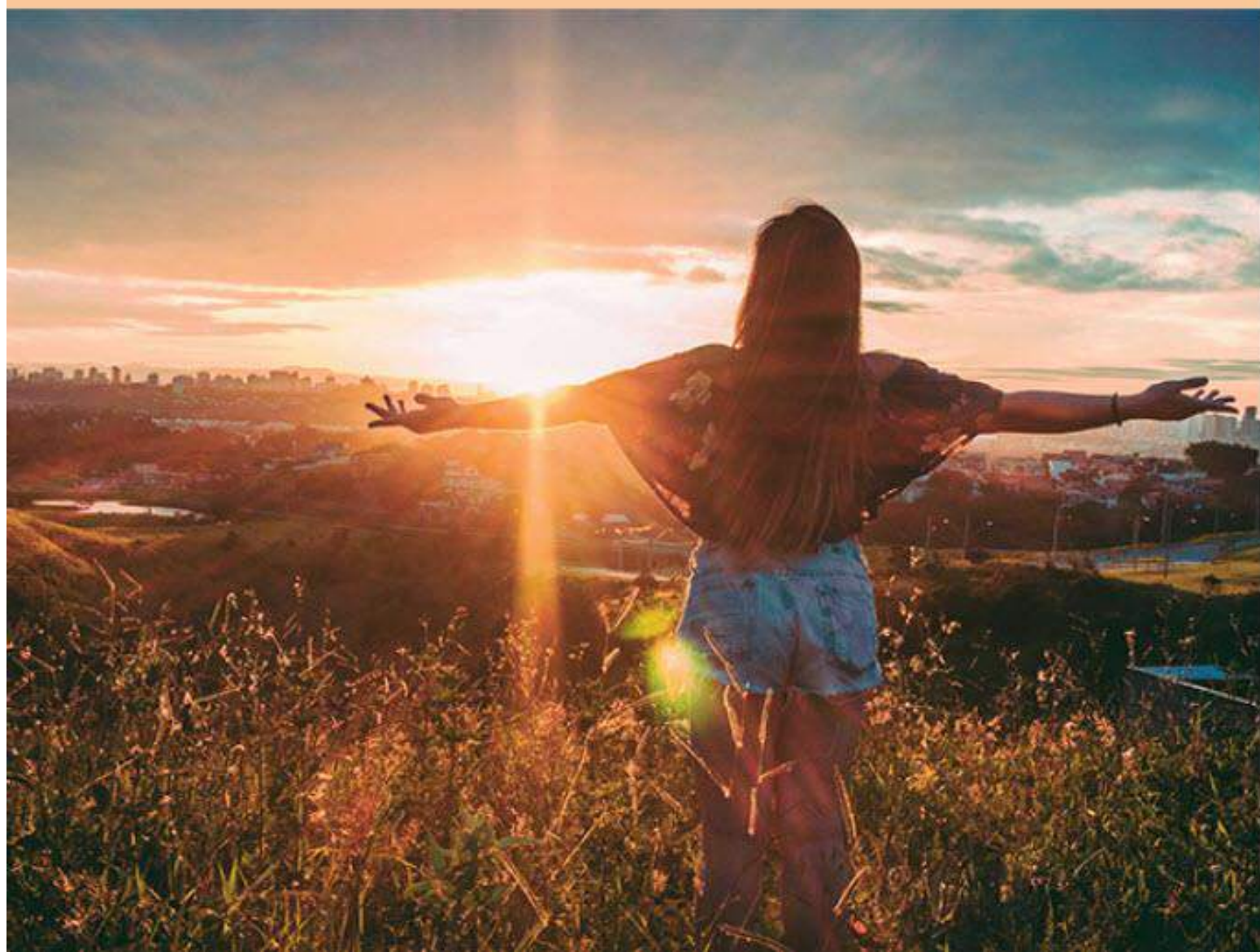
Now look on the flip side and see what this pursuit is costing you in terms of your own wellbeing or the wellbeing of others. If you find telling yourself that you'll be happy when... (you achieve your goal), that itself is stopping you from enjoying the moment.

Anything that stops you from living in the moment also holds you back from realizing happiness and peace in that very same moment. As you eliminate mental distractions you will automatically find yourself living a Zen life.

So to truly experience a Zen life, you need to work on your body, mind, and emotions. Practices like deep connected breathing, smiling more, eating mindfully, and meditation practices can all help calm the chaos and conflict while stabilizing you spiritually.

CHAPTER 2

Mindful Breathing



Chapter 2

Mindful Breathing

I know, you're thinking, "I've been breathing my whole life. What is this mindful breathing all about?"

This is a method of breathing I learned when I took voice lessons in college. I had an amazing voice teacher who was coaching me to sing operatically which requires tremendous breath control. When you are learning an aria you have to be very mindful of your breathing to sync it with the phrases you are singing. I found it had other benefits.

My voice teacher made me very mindful of every breath and helped me develop a form of automatic deep diaphragmatic breathing. After having done that for years I realized that I did not breathe like most people. You see most people take between 10-16 breaths per minute whereas I usually only require 5 or 6. Why the difference? Because I automatically breathe very deeply which utilizes the full lungs. What difference does that make?

Everyone holds a lot of stress and tension in their physical body. In most cases, they are so used to it they aren't even aware of it. Contraction and tightness is a natural reaction to stressful situations and that energy is held not only in the muscles, but also in the joints, tissues, and organs. When your breathing is shallow it requires a faster rate which actually tightens the life force energy in the body.

This is often experienced as anxiety, pressure, headaches, nervousness, and agitation. In times of emotional stress, your nervous system gets the better of you. This leads to an increase in heart rate and tense muscles. Your breathing becomes rapid and impacts your body overall.

However, not many people are aware of the healing qualities that breathing holds. Your breath can be used to deal with these fluctuations. This, in turn, results in muscle relaxation and less pressure on the nervous system.

On the other hand, when your breathing is calm and controlled, it helps slow down and quiet your mind. Here is how controlled breathing can help you achieve a Zen life.

Breathing for Relaxation

Have you ever tried taking a really deep breath? Some people find it difficult to take a really full and deep breath, but try it and go as full and deeply as you can, and then exhale; you will feel more relaxed and less anxious right away.

One approach is to do measured breathing for just two or three minutes. What that means is you inhale slowly for the count of 5 and then exhale slowly as you count to 5. You'll find this automatically slows you down.

I remember a counselling session I was doing years ago with a young man who was having an anxiety attack during the session because he had taken cocaine. I led him through measured breathing for 3 minutes and even with the drug in his system he was able to calm down. That's how powerful measured breathing can be.

So doing measured breathing at the beginning of your meditations can be very helpful in calming your body and quieting your mind. Plus, it will help develop a habit of more mindful breathing.

The other technique my voice teacher taught me was to inhale a full breath to fill my lungs completely. Once you have a full inhalation you then hold your breath while you pull in your abdominal muscles and hold the breath for five seconds. You repeat this several times each day. In the beginning you may be a little light headed so don't hold the breath as long if that happens, and only do it two or three seconds. After a few weeks you'll be able to hold it longer and do more repetitions.

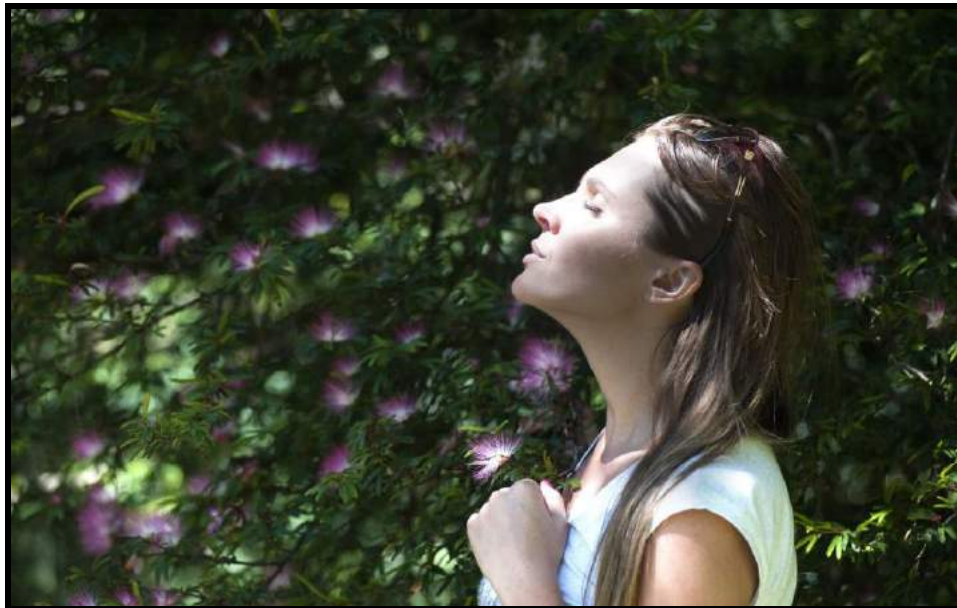
That is the technique, along with a lot of singing, that conditioned me to automatically breathe slowly and deeply resulting in not holding stress or tension in by body and keeping the life force freely flowing through me.

Making breathing exercises part of your life can bring about significant improvement not only in your quality of breath, but also the quality of life. You will feel increased vibrancy and clarity that you may have been missing out on for years.



Deep diaphragmatic breathing involves breathing slowly and is very effective at reducing physical symptoms such as stress, tension, and anxiety. This is a therapy that can be practiced anywhere, anytime. When you breathe deeply you'll actually teach yourself stress management.

Deep breathing has long been a method of calming the mind in yoga and meditation. And now it's being used to quell anxiety and curb panic attacks in medical and psychiatric practices.



Breathing Benefits

Deep breathing holds massive benefits. There are many on a physical level such as detoxification. Deep exhalations release carbon dioxide which also helps rid the body of emotional, energetic, and some physical toxins. As this constant state of detoxification takes place, your mind also clears and you feel clearer and more positive.

In another area, deep breathing acts as a masseuse for your organs. The stomach, liver, pancreas, and intestines all receive "massage therapy" when you breathe deeply. The continuous movements of the diaphragm and abdomen during breathing allows circulation to improve and life force energy to flow freely.

Proper oxygen supply also helps reduce the burden on the heart. When you breathe properly you make your lungs efficient. The lungs start receiving more oxygen which benefits the heart. This reduces pressure on the heart to deliver oxygen to the tissues.

Deep breathing helps reduce tension, relax the mind, and it can elevate your mood.

When you're in a state of anger, resentment, worry, or fear your body tightens and tenses and your breathing becomes shallow. As this happens, the supply of oxygen to the body diminishes. But learning to breathe deeply allows the oxygen to properly reach all parts of the body helping to calm you.

When your mind is at ease you are less likely to become emotionally triggered. In this way, breathing helps reduce emotional stress and the uneasy feelings that come with it. With a content state of mind, there is a sense of inner strength and empowerment.

You know by now that when your mind is in tranquil state, your body will respond likewise. So here are a few techniques to relax your mind and body.

Zen Breathing Techniques

1. The Complete Yogi Breath

The principle behind this technique is to fill up your entire abdomen and chest with air. Fresh air should enter your body like a new life force and renew it. This internal process also stretches your spine, tones internal organs, and improves circulation throughout the body.

To do this, exhale completely so that everything hollows out. Following a short pause, inhale deeply. As you inhale feel your belly expand outward. Next, move your focus to your lower back and sides, filling them with air.

Once you've filled these with air, shift your focus to your ribcage filling. Allow your ribs to puff out.

Finally, fill your upper chest area all the way to your collarbones. This should also lift your shoulders as you come into a tall posture. This entire inhale may be done in a few seconds or stretched to an extended period of 15 or so seconds.

For the exhale, keep your chest lifted and your posture tall. Starting with the belly first, exhale and empty the belly. Then move toward your spine and empty the midsection. Round off the exhale with emptying the chest. Ideally, your exhale should be longer than your inhale or at least of equal length.

2. Bellows Breath

Inspired by yoga and other meditation techniques, this method can help improve alertness, clarify your mind and make you energetic. If you feel lazy, hazy, or as if you're moving in slow motion, try this technique.

Sitting up tall, relax your shoulders and take a few deep breaths in and out from your nose. Begin the bellows breath by exhaling through your nose. Follow by inhaling through the nose once again.

This practice should ensure that your breath comes from your diaphragm. As you breathe in and out, make sure to keep your head, neck, shoulders and chest absolutely still.

Complete one cycle of 10 breaths followed by a 15-30 second break. Start the next round with 20 breaths. Break and then do a final round of 30 bellows breaths.

This practice is best done first thing in the morning when you need to start your day off right. You can also do this during your mid-day slump or right before a workout session.

3. Variation on Breath Counting

This is a simple technique used in Zen practices to calm an active mind.

Start with abdominal inhales and exhales. At the end of the first exhale, make a mental note saying “one”. Inhale, exhale, and mentally count “two”. Continue until you reach “ten”.

Next start counting backwards until you reach “one”. The point here is to keep track of the numbers so that your attention stays put and doesn’t detract.

This exercise is a strength building one for the mind. It removes distracting thoughts and builds concentration power. So if you’ve never given much thought to your breathing, now’s the time to get started.

4. Belly Laughing

This process is good for relaxing the entire body. Keep your hands over your belly and start to laugh from your belly. You should feel your stomach vibrate as belly laughing releases the diaphragm and lets you breathe from your belly.

If you practice belly laughing it will eventually enable you to Belly Breathe more easily. Many people tense their throat when they speak and breathe with their chest, but below the neck is your heart which holds your ability to love and be loved. If you stay in your head you can lose touch with your heart, emotions, and sensuality. Belly breathing is a way of correcting this problem. This is an ancient Chinese Taoist breathing exercise which gives you more vitality. The Taoists believe that people who regularly practice breathing exercises live longer, look younger, and feel better.

5. Deep Belly Breathing

Sit on a chair with your back straight and feet touching the floor. Put hand on your navel and relax your shoulders. Inhale to the count of 5 through your nose and send the breath to your lower abdomen. Feel the lower abdomen expand at your navel so that it bulges out and expands. Your diaphragm will also move lower. Keep your chest relaxed but exhale to the count of 5 with some force so that it pulls your abdomen back in as the air is released. It will feel as if you are pulling your navel back toward your spine.

6. Circulating Energy with your Breathing

This is a method for moving energy throughout your body and it also gives you energy, relaxes you, and bathes you with the refreshing energy shower.

(a) To get the energy moving in a circular manner imagine the breath with golden light coming in through your left hand, going up your arm to the top of your shoulders and the base of your neck and then as you breath out the energy goes down your right arm and out your right hand and fingers. Use soft golden light and hold the intension that it gather stress and tension energy. Most people carry responsibilities on their shoulders and this method helps release this energy. Do this five times and then reverse direction.

(b) Next, switch your attention to your left foot and leg and inhale earth energy up this leg to the base of your spine and then exhale down your right leg and out your right foot. Do this five times and then reverse direction.

(c) Next, inhale and bring the earth energy up your grounding column which you attach to the base of your spine and down to the center of the Earth. Then bring it up your spine to your head and as you exhale let the energy flow down across your face, throat, chest, stomach and sexual organs. Let it flow like a waterfall down into the earth. Do this 5X

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CHAPTER 3

Adjust Your Perceptions & Outlook



Chapter 3

Adjust Your Perceptions & Outlook

Oftentimes, people feel that their life is not under their control. You may have felt that way yourself. But the truth is that what you focus on is what creates your experience. The problem is that it is not what you are thinking consciously that is in charge of your destiny. You have many unconscious assumptions and beliefs that map out your life.

The simple truth is that your happiness depends on the way you think and how you respond to the environment you live in, even though you are influenced or even controlled by your past and your beliefs. Your perceptions and perspectives have big roles to play when it comes to your mastery of your destiny and your happiness.

Have you ever felt disillusionment about your life? Maybe you thought you weren't reaching your goals or had more problems than solutions.

You may have said, "If I have a positive destiny and if I'm being led, it sure doesn't feel like it. In fact, if anything, there is a feeling of being guided to one struggle after another."

All the things I just mentioned are based on perceptions. That is they are points of view, opinions, conclusions, and judgments. In fact, suffering, in general, is formed out your perceptions. This is not to say there are not uncomfortable or even painful conditions, of course there

are, but the way you view them, interpret them and react to them is due to the filters you create through your perceptions.

When you become human besides a body you get a mechanism designed to help you survive here through the 5 major senses, and the main instrument is the mind. One of the main tools of the mind is a perceiving mechanism.

The perceiver is the creator of everything you experience, because the perceiver is a filtering device that views everything from numerous beliefs and perspectives, and from each perspective it creates an identity or sub-personality which it projects on people and situations. It uses these identities to create your life experiences.

The perceiver is similar to having a group of people living inside of you. It's as if they are alive and have a consciousness and life of their own, and yet all they do is create and generate points of view and then warehouse them. So the perceiver gives birth to these identities which are then energized and run like programs in a computer. We call these programs identities or sub-personalities.

The part of you that was saying that "If I have a destiny and if I'm being led, it sure doesn't feel like it," was one of the perceiving identities which are components of the ego. The ego is the defensive survival mechanism that uses the 5 major senses to help you live your life without being connected with your soul. The ego and its perceivers are created things.

The ego creates perceptions to help it know if something is dangerous or not. The ego will grab anything it can to strengthen its security.

In addition, there is a part of you that lives beyond all the perceivers and sees them for what they are—that they are all created points of view.

But when you are engaged in the perceptions, they feel as though they are the correct perspective of what is true. The truth has been hijacked by the perceivers. Yet, they are merely mechanisms observing, judging, and forming more conclusions and beliefs.

What is so subtle about it all, is that even your awareness of this fact does not prevent you from slipping into believing the perceptions are real or creating more of illusions. That is the power perception has over you.

The reason for this is that the perceiving mechanism is there waiting to interpret any sensory input and incorporate it into its experience as reality. Remember it is a survival mechanism that was created to help the ego survive in a physical reality.

And what is so amazing is that it is cleverly constructed to do all of it's work subtly, behind the scenes, totally out of your day-to-day awareness, so you don't even realize it is happening.

Furthermore, it will draw conclusions with incomplete information and treat them as if they are fact.

So before you know it you are caught with fear, anger, or depression through its construction of perceptions, stories, and myths.

What may also seem incredible is that many perceptions are not based on anything which actually exists. For example, any form of worry is a perception of something that does not yet exist, but there is a fear reaction that it might exist and it may drive you to take certain action.

Sales people, governments, and manipulative people use this for their own purposes all the time. They tell you what they want you to hear so you will make decisions that support their positions and they often use various forms of fear to undermine your feelings of security. Fear is a powerful motivator that causes people to make choices and decisions that are not often in their best interests.

Another way this mechanism works is in relationships. People project their perceptions on the other person based on what they want the other person to be or what they imagine the person is intending, thinking or will do. People ascribe motives to others all the time which may not be true.

The perceiver doesn't really care if something is true or not because its job is to anticipate possible threats to getting what you want or don't want. So the perceiver creates the idea there is something there when it is only a shadow or picture in imagination.

But the perceiver goes one step further and imbues that shadow with the sense of it being real and then it triggers a reaction through an emotion, words said, a position strongly held, or some action taken.

For instance, haven't you ever gotten upset about something only to find out it wasn't true? Haven't you ever believed something you later found out wasn't true, but you may have strongly defended the belief? We all have.

All of those examples are a result of the perceiver.

People often take measures to protect themselves from a future possible threat. People react to the perception of a threat in every way as if it were real when there is really nothing there. It is only the imagination that perceives there is something there, and the way you perceive it determines what your experience with it is.

The perceiver interfaces with every phase of life, and all perceptions are not wrong. Perception does not preclude common sense. I'm not talking about not doing sensible things to keep things running smoothly. What I mean is that it may be a perception that you are running low on groceries if you are at the store and don't remember what is in your refrigerator, so you buy some items. That would be common sense to make sure you have something at home for breakfast in the morning.

What governments like to do is announce things you can't do anything about such as warning you about a coming epidemic, economic

downturn, natural disaster, or terrorist attack. They create a perception in your mind that cause you to react by doing things that will not really save you from the catastrophe. But that is certainly a good fear-based way to get the public supporting political positions.

Every way you react is due to taking a position based on perceptions which are really interpretations and opinions. If you take the position that something is real, you imbue it with reality, and react as if it were real. This is why people are so passionate about their points of view... they are convinced they are true and real, when in many, if not most cases, they are actually arbitrary opinions based on self-determined beliefs of right and wrong, safe or unsafe, good or bad.

What if you took a position that whatever you are dealing with today is just a perception or projection you are actually dealing with?

If everything is a perception then what? What does that mean? If you are in a movie theater and involved with a movie are you really experiencing what the movie is about? Only in your mind. If you turn on the lights you are sitting in an empty room with a screen. There is nothing there. It was all a perception which the mind may have interpreted as real. Why else would people get frightened during a horror movie?

In terms of the way we deal with life it is similar. You project all sorts of stories in the theater of your life. Something inside of you is creating the perception there is something there, and you react appropriately.

There is a perception that what is being perceived is real, but what we have is an illusion, that is the perceiver, creating an illusion out of the perceptions! The illusion is a story composed of imagined consequences and actions which are then projected on other people and actions are taken.

You can say everything we sense with our 5 major senses has a perception attached to it. But is there actually a reality to the perceptions? The truth is that all perceptions are false. That doesn't mean that some of what the perceptions are based on are not factual, of course, they could be.

But the problem is the mind will have a hard time proving what is true. The mind can only operate on what it acquires through the senses which are then run through the perceiver mechanism and a conclusion is reached and a reaction engaged.

I think we can call these conclusions myths. According to Webster's dictionary, a myth is a person or event without a determinable basis of fact. Any invented story, idea, or concept. An imaginary or fictitious person or thing. An unproved belief accepted uncritically and used to justify an action.

Can you see how life is composed of myths derived from perceptions. And can you see how this can lead to trouble? It wrecks relationships between citizens and their governments; between husbands and wives; between employer and employees; between friends, and not to exclude those who are thought to be enemies.

Here's the razor's edge. You are either conscious or unconscious of this process and you probably slip between the two many times through the day. And, you are either unconsciously creating and expressing your experiences, or you are conscious that an unconscious part of you is creating things in your life.

The third option is that you are completely conscious of everything going on in your life and you are fully aware of what makes it so. There would be very few in that category, but that is what the Zen practice of being mindful offers you.

Most of your life is driven by unconsciousness forces. It is like you are being run on autopilot. You can identify some of the unconscious factors as attitudes and beliefs held in the subconscious which cause you to make certain choices. You can go deeper and uncover karmic contracts, agreements and obligations, or promises and commitments from past lives, but the result is the same.

Basically, life is going from one story to another all day long, playing the part and reacting to the script of the story, not realizing where the story is coming from...and as long as you are in a story, you are in an illusion and that means you are asleep or at least partially unconscious.

Even if you are awake and understand this, what about all the other people who aren't? When you are around people who are in a story it is easy to fall into their story yourself.

I'm defining unconsciousness as being in a story and thinking it is real. Not being aware of what is causing the circumstances; mindlessly going through life being victimized by your own story. You are at the effect rather than the cause of what is running your life.

Oftentimes others pull you into their illusions and perceptions, and once you are caught you become subject to the laws of the universe of their illusions.

You may also be pulled into all the karmic influences of that universe. You fall into a true deep sleep of unconsciousness where you don't even realize what is happening. You perceive their perceptions to be real.

For example, you can get pulled into the fear or anger universe of another, and be pulled into their myths about it. These stories or myths can cause you to join crusades, take political positions, buy things you don't need, move to another location, join religious organizations, or other social activist organizations. Not that there is necessarily anything wrong with any of those choices as long as they are done consciously and not because you are caught in a myth.

Life in the realm of perceptions and illusions is like being asleep and living in a dream. Lucid dreaming is becoming conscious while you are dreaming.

Enlightenment is becoming conscious of your unconsciousness.

Enlightenment is seeing what is behind the perceptions. The more awake you are the more freedom and control you have of your life.

The process of becoming enlightened is developing the habit of staying awake and being aware. When you feel fear, struggle, anger, or suffering, you know you have slipped into the universe of illusion and unconsciousness.

Jesus said to his followers, "You are in the world, but not of the world." Another way of saying that is when you are going through life awake to all the perceptions and illusions around you, you are in the physical world, but not of the consciousness of the world.

But when you get pulled into the universe of perceptions and myths, you are then not only in the world, but of the world. That is, partaking of the operating system that emanates from darkness and separation which leads to struggle and suffering.

So how do you train your mind to be awake and stay more focused on what is really true, how can you reprogram your perspectives? Here are some steps you can take to do so.

Stay with One Thing at a Time

Many people engage in doing too many things at the same time. When you demand your attention to jump from one thing to another, you will have a busy, fractured, and unfocused day. This causes you to be caught in the illusions of the outer world of perceptions and stories.

Switching tasks frequently requires a high level of functioning, meaning that you have to use a lot of brain power and energy even before you start a task. No wonder it ends up draining your effectiveness.

Zen teaches you to do the exact opposite. With Zen habits in your life you will choose a task that needs doing and then stick with it while being mindfully focused on each element of the task. A good starting point may be to ask why this particular task is important for you. If you can give yourself a good enough reason why this task means more than others, then that's where you need to be.

As you start your task, shift all your attention to it. Shut out distractions and clear your mind. Don't think about or start doing something else until you have finished what you started. Train yourself to focus on the task at hand and resist the urge to look elsewhere.

This practice will keep you steadily grounded in the present and let you give your best to whatever task you choose to do.

This rule is applicable to even the most simplest of things. For instance, when you eat, just mindfully eat. When you pour water, just do that. In instances where you may have to move onto something else, just put away the unfinished task to return to later.

Taking it slow in this way doesn't mean you're being lazy. What it does mean is that you're doing it right.



Focus on the Process

Changing perspective requires your focus. You can't adopt a positive life if you are constantly distracted and loose focus on important matters. Focusing on the process and how things should be dealt with will make you wiser.

But when you focus on how to get things done, you are better able to put all of your creativity and skills on the task. You'll be putting all of your attention where it needs to be to insure the process is done most effectively. As you work your way through something, you realize the pitfalls and also discover ways to remediate the problems. Plus, focusing on the process also lets you enjoy the moment. You become more engaged in the present and at what you're doing.

Another perk of focusing on the process rather than the outcome is that you get more control over what you're doing.

In other words, you don't have control over the outcome but you do have control over the process. When you give something your focus, the outcome is more likely to be good as well.

If anything, focusing on the process will make you more confident in learning new skills. These skills will make you better at decision making. You will have fewer worries about the future, and you'll find you develop a more relaxed trust in the process and outcome.

To better focus on the process, engage in only one thing at a time. Do the work slowly and deliberately. (This doesn't mean lazily, only that you need to take your time and move purposefully).

When doing so, make your actions deliberate. Try not to schedule things too close together but leave some gaps in between. This will give you a more relaxed structure to work with. It will also provide some wiggle room if one task takes longer than expected.

The whole point of Zen is to enjoy what you're doing, so try not to rush through your life.

Don't Rationalize

Rationalization is defined as something where you apparently come up with rational explanations for certain behaviors. The point of rationalization is to make that behavior seem optimal even when it's

not. However, that could also be the act of making excuses. A Zen lifestyle includes not making excuses.

As you've seen earlier, Zen does require a certain degree of discipline. So while missing one day of meditation won't derail your progress much, making it a habit certainly can. You can find yourself making rationalizations and excuses not to adhere to your practice. The biggest problem with skip-days like these is that they eventually lead to quitting or giving up. The one-time exception then becomes the rule.

Getting off track can make it very difficult to get back on track. That's why Zen encourages establishing a daily routine as we will see in an upcoming chapter.

You use rationalization when you try to justify less than optimal behavior or feelings. So what you're doing is finding a way to distort facts to make things appear better than they actually are.

Here's an example...

You decide you're going to follow a diet plan but you find that only lasts the first week. Or you have every intention of going to the gym, since you got a membership, but only do it for a month.

So what happens here? A few possibilities could be that you aren't serious about it, you forget why it's important or it becomes too difficult. You may also give up in disappointment or you start to rationalize.

When something becomes difficult, your mind rationalizes telling you it's okay if you skip something once, or it's okay to have just one more (since you worked so hard for it). While this may all sound reasonable, it starts to sabotage your plans. And once you start believing these rationalizations, sticking to anything becomes next to impossible.

CHAPTER 4

**SIMPLIFY
YOUR LIFE**



Chapter 4

Simplify your Life

The world you live in today exposes you to many complications. At times you end up complicating life because of over-thinking. Otherwise, you end up overspending, overworking or even over-committing.

All in all, it's an effort to get too many things done in a short amount of time. Overdoing anything also complicates things while Zen tries to teach you how to keep life simple.

If you want to have a happy life you have to learn the art of simplification. Going back to its original philosophy, this simply means keeping only the important things part of your life and removing the rest.

If you think about your material possessions, getting rid of unwanted or unused stuff will certainly clear your space. This will give you peace of mind and make you happy to have a clean and open house to live in. (Try not to fill it in with more unnecessary stuff, for that just kills the idea of simplification).

But when you take the same idea to another level, simplifying life can also help you get through dark times. When you clear your mind of negativity, and unruly thoughts that don't matter, you also provide

space to your mind. This space will help you absorb things that are actually important. Clear out your mind by taking in only what keeps it fresh.

Say, if you're a book collector and keep on stocking books endlessly, there will come a time when you'll run out of space. You'll either have to stop buying new books or chuck out some old ones. I speak from experience on that one. I now have a policy if I acquire a new book, I have to give one away. In the town where I live there is a used book store and I have taken boxes of books there over the years.

Similarly, if you keep on adding unnecessary stress and things to your life there will also come a time when you'll collapse. On the other hand, if you choose to select only what is important you'll feel weightless and happier.

Here's another example to consider. Suppose you keep holding on to a grudge and dislike for someone. In the end, you'll only be wasting your time and energy dwelling over possible scenarios that might never take place. The only way you can overcome all this is to simplify your life by letting go of things that don't matter.

Prioritize

Once again, let's start off with a reminder of what's most important to you. Make this your unequivocal priority and stick to it.

Ideally, the structure of your daily life should be a reflection of your priorities. If you say that family is your priority, then make a

commitment to spend a designated time with your spouse and kids. If you say health is a priority, then you should be doing everything you can for a healthier you. Are you truly staying away from bad/tempting foods and getting your daily dose of exercise? Or are your other commitments getting in the way?

When you prioritize, you need to be honest with yourself. What do you truly desire and what is standing your way? If you can honestly answer these two questions, you can start simplifying your life fairly easily.

As you prioritize, you'll also be filtering out a lot of excess baggage. In other words, you'll be simplifying your life.

It can become a process where you rearrange so your life so that it closely reflects your priorities. If you long to spend more quality time with your kids and other significant half, then streamline your emails, put away your phone or even cut back on your work hours.

If you really want to paint, then clear out your room and make a studio space for yourself. Once you have prioritized your concerns, move on to the next step.

Declutter

When you think “declutter,” you’re thinking about your physical space as well as your mental space.

This is a process of purging where you get rid of everything that is meaningless in life or no longer offers a utility. I recently went through my storage room and found shelves of "stuff" I haven't used or even looked at in over 20 years. I boxed it all up and hauled it all off...and it really felt good.

You can start small by allotting just 15 minutes of your day to decluttering a chosen corner of your house. It could be a shelf or a cabinet. Stop after 15 minutes and come back to it the next day.

Or you could assign one entire morning to clean out your closet and get it over with in one day. Go with whichever method works best for you.

As you purge, assign three boxes labelled “trash”, “keep” and “maybe”. The first two should be simple enough if you follow this advice: anything that you haven’t used in the last 5 years you can probably let go. Chances are you won’t use it in the next year either. Keep it if you use it all the time and it still has some years left in it.

The “maybe” stash can be a bit tricky, but don’t let it overwhelm you. This is for things about which you’re on the fence. Keep the box out of sight, and if you don’t use it in the next six months, toss it out or give it away as well. The key to success in decluttering is to be merciless.

The less stuff you have, the fewer distractions there will be and the simpler your life. You’ll see that one of the things that give you true peace of mind is a clean, simple house.

De-Clutter Your Mind

When you talk about decluttering your mind, you'll notice that overthinking exposes your mind to blockages. Because of overload at times, you are unable to think clearly and can even be confused. You need to deal with this as it won't allow you to be happy or fulfilled.

A blocked, confused, and cluttered mind becomes less aware of anything happening around it. The stream of clutter you've accumulated will turn your mental space into a chaotic mess. And soon enough, just like your closets and your cabinets, your mind needs tidying up as well.

If you're not sure about what kind of mental clutter is holding you back, just think about these things:

- Worrying about the future
- Ruminating about the past
- Thinking of everyday routines
- Complaints, grudges, blame
- Regrets
- Commitments
- Other people's opinions
- Having a list of projects that seems overwhelming

If thoughts about these things are constantly on your mind, you are in need of cleaning out some headspace.

For starters, not everything needs attention. What's happened in the past is done and can't be undone. What the future holds is not entirely in your hands so cross that bridge when you come to it.

Any negative thoughts that you may be harboring need to go as well for these will always hold you back or divert you from a positive course.

Build a Positive Skillset

You need to do more than just exist; you need to live. Most people think that existing is enough simply because they have too much going on with not enough time to get it done in. It keeps them so busy that they can't really bother with things like simplification.

The problem with this scenario is that they miss out on the essence of life. To simplify means to indulge in a little bit of management.

Manage your time and your life wisely so you develop a skillset of lifelong habits, organization, and punctuality.

As you simplify things when starting or stopping a habit, it can make execution a lot easier. For example, if you want to join a gym, choose one that is close to home. This will make it more convenient for you to go there every day easily. If you choose one that's far away, not only will you spend a lot of time getting there, you may stop sooner than you planned.

Likewise, keeping things simple can also teach you to become more organized and efficient. This reduces waste and you not only learn how to save on costs but also how to improve your overall living standards.

And finally, when you complicate things, you also waste a lot of time. You over-think things that don't require attention and complicate them further.

Simplifying such matters teaches you punctuality and the importance of time. By keeping things simple you learn how to get them done well and on time.

CHAPTER 5

BE MINDFUL OF THE PRESENT



Chapter 5

Be Mindful of the Present

Mindfulness is an ability that helps you recognize the happiness already present in your life. You don't have to wait years to find happiness. It is already here; you just have to attune to it.

Being mindful makes you at peace with the present moment as it arrives. It may not be what you expected or wanted, but you feel inner peace, contentment, and completion.

This is perhaps one of the most important habits you'll need to infuse in your life, because it enables you to be content with who you are and what you have, it can easily be the happiest, most empowered, and safest place to be.

Plus, being mindful provides you hope that you can do so much more with life. By far it is the one solution that'll allow you to enjoy life to the fullest.

Most people have their minds stuck elsewhere. They simply move through the day without actually living it. This state is called forgetfulness. People stuck in this state can't develop focus or stay in the present. They are either busy thinking about the past or stuck planning or worrying about the future.



Mindfulness is the exact opposite of forgetfulness. Mindfulness means being there and living in the moment. A mindful state is one where you are conscious and aware. Your attention, awareness, and your body are in one place and this allows you to be present with everyone and everything right where you are. Here's how you can learn to be more mindful:

Slow Down

Rushing into things isn't usually the perfect solution. In fact, patiently taking time produces better outcomes on all levels. Planning the future and sorting out activities is a good thing but proceeding slowly and mindfully leads to more favorable and fulfilling outcomes.

Our modern lives seem to be constructed with the need for speed. People want quick solutions, fast delivery, and immediate relief.

You may want to be quicker, more efficient, and more productive, and you want it now. You just want everything to be faster and easier.

Complicating the Zen approach is a society that rewards speed in career promotions, praise from peers, and your belief that you're doing really well. Yet, despite rushing through projects and even life itself you get more entangled in tasks, missing what is most valuable in life.

And to top it all, rushing doesn't usually help you perform any better. Instead, it will increase your stress levels, make you more disagreeable, and can negatively impact your health.

Zen is a different approach. Not that accelerated outcomes are undesirable, but making it the priority overlooks the value of each moment. So take a moment and slow down. You'll notice that you enjoy life more. Things will seem more interesting and you'll have less to worry about. You'll probably find you enjoy life more and your health benefits.

Enjoy the Moment

Not everyone has the ability to enjoy moments especially when you don't get what you expect. Say, you get stuck in a traffic jam, the price of gas skyrockets, or you get an angry look from someone. All these experiences are disconcerting and some unnerving at best. So what do you do?

Most likely you compare the present moment with what you expect to happen. A traffic jam will get you late to work. The price of gas will upset your budget, and you could spend the rest of your day wondering what you did wrong to deserve that angry look.

Life is unpredictable. No one knows what the future will be whether it is the next minute or next week, which is why it is important to live in the moment.

Why complicate your life by focusing on things that don't really matter or are beyond your control? Sometimes you have to give yourself room to breathe.

One effective way to broaden your perspective when something triggers you is to say, "So," or "So What." You'll find this gives you a refreshing perspective.

Most things have a way of working out, even if you can't see how in the moment. Sometimes it helps to say to yourself, "Everything is O.K."

This helps you ease up on yourself and have a more peaceful day.

At times life exposes you to surprises that can turn out to be good or bad. To deal with these surprises you have to go with the flow by being a neutral observer of how circumstances in your life unfold.

Allowing yourself to peacefully go with the flow will let you engage in the reality of life more fully. It's a Zen approach that lets you face what

comes your way. You say O.K., and make a choice or decision from a more centered and peaceful place.

Positive and negative things happen in life all the time and you usually don't know why. Much seems to be beyond your control, and the Zen way is to accept them as they come.

This way, you enable yourself to make the most of the moment despite any setbacks.

Another way of looking at this is that it lets you get past your failures. Accepting that you had a failure means that you face the reality of the situation. And based on that reality, you make choices to move forward. Accepting what is doesn't mean not doing anything to better a situation.

Have Positive Expectancy but No Expectations

Expectations can lead to disappointment if things don't go the way you want them to. In this way, expectations can be extremely damaging to your happiness and contribute to having a bad mood.

Not to say that you shouldn't have positive expectancy. The positive mindset helps create an attractor field in your energy field that attracts and creates positive outcomes.

Expectations, on the other hand, are a form of attempted control through will power, and sometimes it does work, but more often than not it leads to unexpected consequences that are not what you want.

That said, having a positive expectancy allows you to be in a positive creative flow. It enables you to accept the shortcomings of people, while maintaining a positive outlook.

You may have expectations of what you project on others as well as yourself. For instance, you may expect that when you work out and eat right, you'll get a more perfect body. Or when you put in the extra hours and effort, you'll get a reward or promotion.

But when things don't pan out as you expected, you become frustrated, disappointed, and angry with yourself and others.

Being free from expectations lets you accept reality as it is. It also teaches you that your life can still be good without so expectations. It is a humbling lesson that your life can be perfect as is without expecting it to be different.

Being free from expectations will stop you from mood swings up or down based on whether good or bad things happen. Instead, you will just take things as they come. This means more contentment for you and less disappointment.

When you stop judging things as good or bad, you'll feel lighter and have more freedom.

CHAPTER 6

Maintain a Meditation Practice



Chapter 6

Maintain a Meditation Practice

While Zen monks have known it for years, now science also backs up meditation as one of the most effective ways of dealing with stress, but there are far more benefits than that.

You can meditate for a number of different reasons. You can do so to develop concentration, clarity, or emotional tranquility, not to mention coming to deep realizations of the forces at work in your life, and transformations of consciousness.

There are some things you will never know unless you meditate.

Meditation is a way of bypassing the thinking mind, to discover your "True Self" that lies beneath it.

I think of meditation as a means to an end, and not the end in and of itself. What do I mean by that? Well, in its various forms the end goal is the same...

Meditation is the way to connect with the divine and the field and consciousness of creation. It is the only way to effectively attune to the "still small voice" which emanates from the infinite.

With each meditative experience you deepen into surrender which gives you greater access to the subtle and more refined realms.

Through meditation you come to realize that you and the rest of creation are not what you always assumed they were, and neither does life work the way you assumed it did.

The only way to know what I'm talking about is by direct experience through meditation. It is not known by reading, thinking, analyzing, or listening to others explain it to you, or for any of the other normal ways you have come to know anything.

Self-Discovery

It is sometimes said that you already have the enlightenment you seek. This seemingly contradictory statement refers to the core truth of the soul and spirit within that is already in the state of consciousness that spiritual seekers are pursuing.

This means you are not striving to attain something you are not. The difficulty most have with this teaching is that we are so used to working to acquire everything we want in life, we naturally think we must do the same in spiritual matters. However, the spiritual journey is not like learning brain surgery. It is self-discovery.

Your spiritual journey reveals the deepest truths of who and what you are, and as the realizations unfold you'll find a profound simplicity. This does not mean that they are necessarily quick or easy to attain, since you have formed habits of thinking and coping with life rooted in deep beliefs that take time to uncover and release. In general, once you come to a realization of how this works life does become easier.

This whole process accelerates through the use of meditation practices that attune us to the subtleties of how you have entrapped yourself.

The ego will always reveal to you what the next thing is that you need to address, so you have only to look at what is happening in your life for the clues of what to explore and surrender. Over time as you become clearer of emotional baggage and karmic burdens you will find yourself awakening to the inner guidance and revelations that you want and need. This will lead to a life unfolding around you that is inspirational and filled with a deep level of beauty, love and trust.

Sometimes the ideas and inner guidance that will come to you do not make conscious logical sense in that moment. This is because your conscious mind does not have access to as large a view as your soul, and information which is out of range of your five senses can only be accessed by your soul and the higher aspects of your consciousness. As you receive insights and guidance and you practice trust you will find that the goals you have been seeking through meditation begin to emerge. As a tree doesn't spring up overnight neither do all of the spiritual qualities you shall unfold.

In time you will become more attuned to your higher soul guidance and your life will begin to flow with greater ease. You will discover the qualities you have long admired begin to naturally emerge from within you. It takes patience and dedication to a daily meditation practice until you undergo the transformations in consciousness, but rest assured they shall come.

HOW TO MEDITATE

There are many approaches to meditation. The following describes a simple process that works well for beginners and more advanced practitioners. You will need to set aside at least 20 minutes at a time to begin this process. If you can do 30 minutes or more at a time so much the better.

Select a comfortable location where you won't be disturbed or distracted by phones, animals, or other people. Settle into a peaceful place and in a comfortable position which you can hold for the duration of your practice. It is generally more advisable to be sitting rather than lying down, as many people find they are more likely to drift off to sleep if they are reclining. The Zen style of meditation is to sit upright with the spine straight, but I'll be deviating from strict Zen methods in my suggestions. Think of your meditation practice as having several important phases.



Phase 1: Start With Being Grounded

The first phase of your meditation is to center and ground yourself. This helps you settle your energies, quiet your mind, and begin tuning to your inner realms. To effectively meditate you want to relax physically, emotionally, and mentally, so let go of any outside concerns and focus your attention on the present moment.

Generally, some form of controlled breathing is helpful at this point. For instance, measured breathing works well to settle your energies by inhaling and exhaling to the same slow count of from one to five, but any form of slow connected breaths will achieve bringing you into the state of stillness from which clarity will emerge.

You may want to spend five to ten minutes just in this phase of your session, as sometimes it takes a little time to quiet the mind from the distractions of the day, and turn your focus to your spiritual work. You may want to accompany your breathing with a soothing visual image such as a quiet and restful natural setting near some calm water. Sometimes it is helpful to play a nature recording of a mountain stream, or gentle ocean.



The process of grounding yourself can be enhanced by directing your intention to form a connection from the base of your spine to the center of the earth. The visual image that I find that works most easily for this is to imagine you are sitting on a tree stump three feet in diameter and the trunk of the tree and its roots go deeply into the earth all the way to the core. It is important to keep the diameter of your grounding connection the same all the way to the center of the earth. The first chakra happens to be located at the base of the spine and its energies move downward into the column of energy you have created with your intent and it has a wonderful stabilizing effect on your whole being.

You will find that when you are well grounded that your thinking and memory improve, you are more focused, you feel more empowered, you have more ownership of your space and are therefore not as affected by others, and you will feel more stable and balanced. The grounding does two other important things. It helps to keep you in the

present moment (the "now"), and it gives a place for anything distracting to be released. We tend to pick up energies from other people, organizations, and even places we have been, and these subtle energies have effects on our feelings, ideas and reactions which all interfere with clear inner guidance.

Once you establish good grounding hold the intention that it stay in place at all times. You will find it helps you all through the day. In fact, if you turn your attention to it a few times throughout the day you will always be in a grounded state. Then when you are in your meditation practice it will only take a few seconds for you to turn your attention to your grounding and hold the intention that it remove and clear from you any energy that isn't yours or which doesn't fully support you.

Think of your grounding connections function something like a drain in a shower or bathtub; it gives what you are washing off of you a place to go. You can imagine what a shower would be like if there were no drain. Now imagine that you have no outlet for the energies that you have accumulated. If they have no easy escape, they will condense and settle into your tissue, organs and systems of your body or stay resident in your aura and energy system. This simple grounding process which only takes a few seconds a day can be of immense value to you.



Phase 2: Center Your Awareness in Your Heart

The second phase of your practice after settling in, relaxing and grounding yourself is to center yourself in a place where you can begin your connection with your soul. Everyone's consciousness has a point of focus. If you pay attention to yourself right now and scan yourself you can become aware of where your awareness is focused. It is usually focused on an area that is holding your attention. So if you have a pain in your shoulder, you are likely to find at least part of your awareness focused somewhere near your shoulder.

If your mind is active it is probably somewhere in or around your head. In some cases it can even be in front of your head. If you are feeling stressed or tense it may be in your abdomen near your solar plexus.

Haven't you heard the expression, "What does your gut tell you that you should do about your situations?" When you are tuned into your gut, you will find your awareness focused somewhere around your abdomen.

The third likely area where your attention can usually be found is in your chest or heart area. Some people carry grief, sadness, emotional pain, love or compassion in the chest area. The chest area has another value in the meditative practice and that is the soul is most easily accessed through the heart center.

So for our purposes here, put your attention on your heart center in the upper center part of your chest and reverently say to yourself, "I ask my soul to emerge in my heart, and rise to the surface." Sit quietly with that for a minute or so to allow yourself to connect with the words and the soul presence. You can repeat that request several times and each time deepening your connections with what the words represent.

Connect with your Higher Self

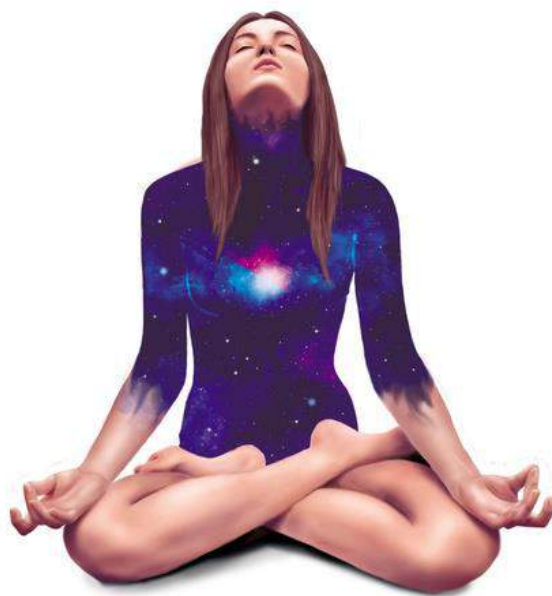
Begin to sense and feel the awareness of the presence of your Higher Self or soul in response to your requests. At first you may just feel a quietness come over you, but in time there will be more of a presence that emerges. You may also find it helpful to repeat other statements in a mantra like process. Some suggestions are: "I feel my soul. I feel Divine love in my heart." Some people like to repeat a name of God or a mantra.

The idea is to repeat something that helps you feel like you are making an inner connection with your divine essence. As you repeat these statements for several minutes you will find yourself connecting more

and more deeply each time you repeat the words. You will sink more and more deeply into your experience of discovering your true nature which is an expression of the infinite love and light of God.

This is an ever-improving skill the more you do it. In time, you will find that you are in tune with your inner guidance nearly all the time. It can become a continuous inner communion and walking with God throughout your day.

You will begin to feel a harmony and congruity as you align yourself with your inner guidance, and you will feel “off-track” when you are not. Step-by-step the ego relinquishes control as it realizes you are safe and guided through an inner direction that brings a healing to the parts of you that have lived in separation. Soon you will hear only the voice of God as the other voices become quiet and no longer draw your attention. Listen to the inner voice. Observe everything you can about it. What does it sound like? How does it feel? What does it ask of you?



Phase 3: Attuning to Inner Guidance

After you have gotten in touch with your spiritual presence in this manner, you are ready for **phase three** which is attuning to God through the repetition of a name of God. You may have noticed that there are many sacred names of God that usually have an “ah” sound in them which helps open and expand the heart center. Some examples are, Yeshua, Buddha, Krishna, Rama, Yahweh, Allah, Abba, Amma, Baba, Adonai, Allelula, and many others. Repeat the name you have chosen slowly, reverently and quietly about every 5 or 10 seconds intending to deepen the connection each time.

Call to the light of God and your soul to embrace you and merge into you. After a number of minutes you will notice that a shift takes place within you. This can take anywhere from a few minutes to as much as 30 minutes or more. In the first few weeks (or possibly even months) you may not feel much happening, but if you stay with the practice you will feel supported, comforted, and spiritually healed. At this point compare how you are feeling with what you were feeling and experiencing before the meditation.

The meditation itself will guide you in where and how to explore next. You will be taught from within. Once you feel you have reached a nice state for the meditation through the repetition then practice sitting in peaceful stillness and attune yourself to the subtle impulses that arise. Be willing to stay out of judgment to allow the new awareness to arise.

Phase 4: Integration

The fourth phase of the practice is integrating your experience before you begin to bring yourself back into your normal day-to-day world. In this phase you relax your mind, let go of the questions, and become still. Sense and feel the peacefulness and expansion. You will want to rest in this phase for at least 5 minutes, or probably longer. Give yourself permission to fully surrender yourself and merge into your deepest truth. You may rest in this phase for a little while or a long while. You will know when it is time to integrate the total experience into your everyday consciousness in your daily life.

Phase 5: Gratitude is a Door Opener to Higher Awareness

The **fifth phase** is to express gratitude for your session regardless of your perception of its nature or quality. Gratitude is a form of surrender that opens you a little more each time you express and feel it. Reconnect your awareness to your five senses and begin to notice what you are sensing. Notice sounds, feelings, sensations, and smells. Take several deep breaths before opening your eyes and savor the smells in the air you breathe and the feelings in your body. Relish the way you feel as you begin to stretch your body. Be mindful of not contracting or tensing at the thought of returning to your normal day. Hold the shifted space of your meditation awareness.

Returning to Your Everyday Activities

As you return to your normal activities you may think you are losing what you experienced in the meditation, but know that your awareness has stretched from where it was to a new experience of yourself and your spiritual connections.

As the day goes on you may find that you “pop” in and out of the awareness gained in the meditation. This indicates that you are, in fact, changing. Notice how the new insights live in the back of your mind throughout the day and give you a fresh experience of whatever is before you.

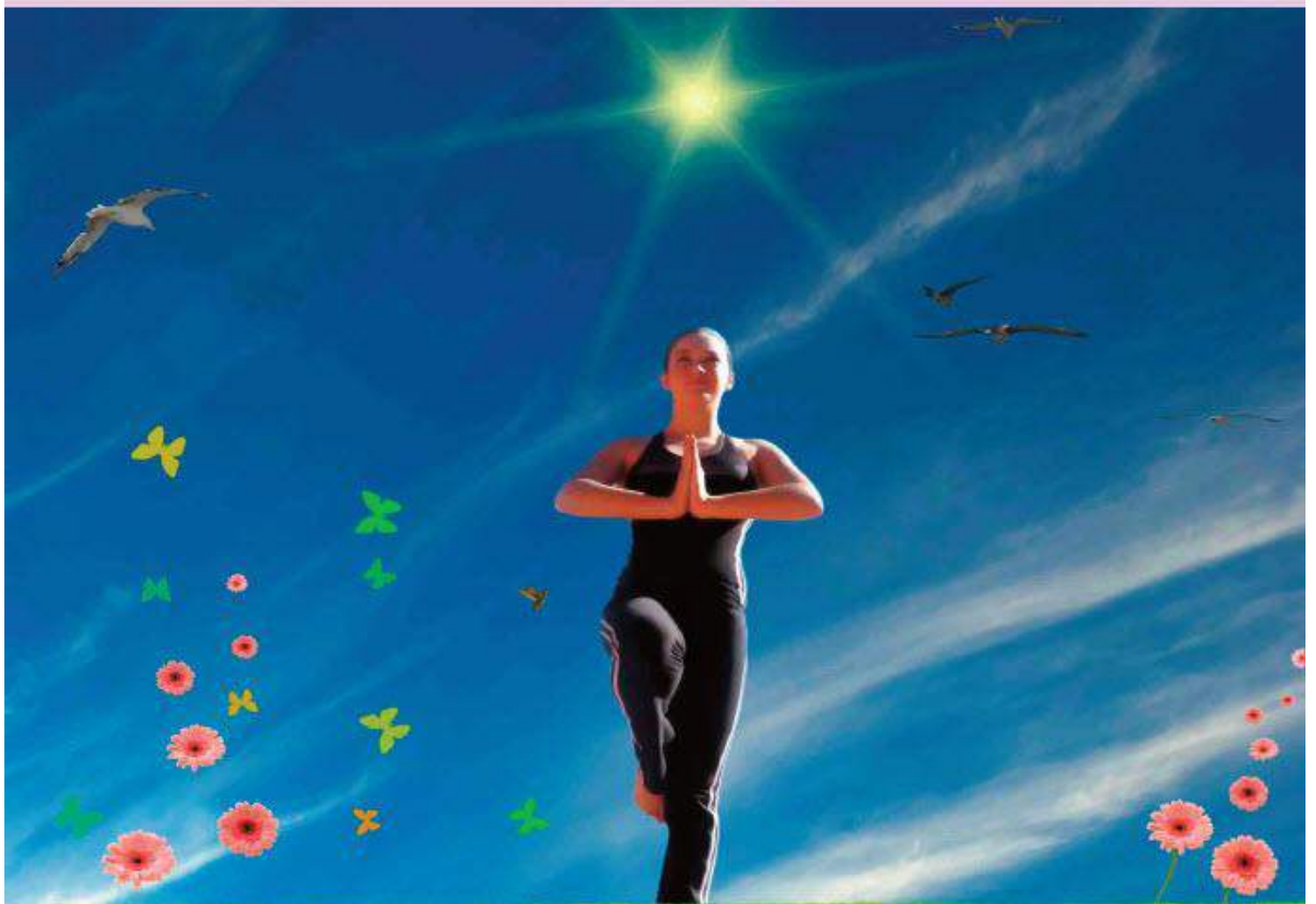
The more you meditate and connect with the inner you, the more you realize that your outer perceptions have been limiting and confining you, and the inner truths of love and light begin to emerge from within you. Your awareness gradually awakens to reveal your inner core essence of love, light and beauty.

In the early stages of this practice you may not be seeing, feeling or hearing much of anything and assume you are either doing it wrong, or there is something wrong with you that prevents you from success. Neither of these conclusions are true.

Going into judgment about yourself, becoming impatient with yourself or other self-doubts that arise will only keep your opening away. Continue with your daily practice, for no matter how long it takes to open your receptivity, you will succeed if you persist, and the rewards are well worth everything you put into your practice.

CHAPTER 7

Establish a Routine and Balance



Chapter 7

Establish a Daily Routine & Balance

Having a daily routine is discipline. And discipline is what Zen habits are all about.

When you have a set routine to follow, you can get more things done and in less of a time span. Routine adds structure to your day and gives it a more ordered and calm feeling.

As you move through your day, you know exactly what to do and this simplifies your work day and personal life. With a time slot allotted to different tasks, you can better manage your day without crowding it too much.

But perhaps the biggest benefit of having structure is that it puts you in charge. You decide what's important and needs attention first.

To make things easier you can divide up your routines into daily and weekly tasks. If you're able to stick with these for at least one month, they'll become lifelong habits.

It's not only planning your daily and weekly chores that need attention, but also how you take care of yourself during this time. You also need to establish healthy habits as part of your routine so you can take care of your body and mind in order to keep up with your planned schedules.

How do you do that? You pay attention to balancing these aspects of your daily life.

Eating Well

You know that you have to eat healthy but do you also know how to do it? You may question what the connection between a set routine and eating is. Your eating habits are part of your lifestyle. If you eat clean and healthy you will have a better life and improved health. When you eat healthy you can function better and become more energetic.

Your starting point for eating well should be meal preparation. You should build your meals around a healthy balance of foods with an emphasis on fruit and vegetables. Of course, you can have some wiggle room for slight indulgences, but the core of your eating plan should be based on a balance of freshly prepared foods.

Mind your portion size as you eat. If you're eating healthy, nutritious foods, then you won't have to go in for seconds and thirds. What you eat in one serving should be enough to last you till your next meal.

Eat mindfully. When you eat you should not be doing anything else. That means no TV or computers. That also means sitting down and eating slowly. A good suggestion is to chew each portion at least a dozen times before swallowing.

Exercise

When establishing a daily routine it is important that you make exercise a part of your routine. Exercise not only keeps you fit but also keeps you happy and has a mind calming effect. It can even act as therapy in some cases. In general, people who exercise tend to be more active and happier than those who don't.

Choose an exercise style that is fun, otherwise you are not likely to stick with it for more than a few weeks. Some people choose several forms of exercise and rotate them so they don't feel like it is a chore and they are in a rut.

Oftentimes, people start out exercising with a lot of energy and enthusiasm. They tell themselves, they'll run for 30 minutes every day or that they'll hit the gym daily. But the problem with this is that such a goal becomes too hard to sustain for long. You may be able to do it for a short time but then it becomes burdensome, you burnout, and the whole thing becomes a drag.

What works in making exercise a regular part of your day by scheduling it so you know where you are supposed to be and what you are supposed to be doing.

Another suggestion that will help you stick with your routine is to have a workout partner. You can do this with a friend or contact a local recreation department for suggestions. Classes and clinics are also very helpful. They are fun and help keep you to a schedule.

If you haven't been exercising recently then start off gently. It is also a good idea to have a health check up before you begin on a new program, and then start off with a 15-20 minute session and stick with it for at least two weeks. As your body gets used to exercising, you can then start prolonging your sessions and adding more intensity. Don't be in a rush and don't up the duration and the intensity at the same time. You may want to consult a trainer to establish a program that is based on your health and goals.

Remember that recovery is an important part of exercise. You may not need to have a rest day if you're only working out lightly for 20 minutes or so. But as you progress towards more advanced sessions, make sure to add in rest days to give your body a chance to recover.

On your rest days, indulge in some very light exercise such as going out for a walk. The point is to never actually skip a day as this makes creating a habit more difficult. Do something that keeps you moving, even though very slightly. This will keep your habit formation going.

Lower Stress

While a stress free life is really not possible, you can try and lower your stress levels considerably.

For most people stress stems from things like meeting deadlines, dealing with difficult people, job uncertainty, competition, conflicts, not enough time and an overall sense of being swamped by too much. When things get out of control you start to stress out.

If you want to lower stress levels from your life then you need to have some sort of a method to do so. For instance, you need to recognize the signs of stress and what is causing it. When you feel the stress coming on, pause and take notice.

Whatever the signs, you need to stop and slow down. Re-evaluate how and where you are spending your time and identify what is creating the stress. Narrow your scope to bring things in perspective and renegotiate your commitments.

If people bring you stress, shy away from them and stay with others who make you feel good.

If things get in the way, seclude yourself and meditate, stretch, massage or get some fresh air until you are ready to face the challenges again. Take breaks from stressful situations. Doing a short meditation can compose you and relax you. I call these mini-vacations because you enter your inner space and visualize a peaceful and tranquil setting while allowing your body to relax.

CHAPTER 8

Appreciate Life &
Shift Into Higher
Consciousness



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Appreciate Life & Shift Into Higher Consciousness

People who are able to find happiness in small things are those who live a happy life.

For others, it's easy to forget what they have since they're so busy looking for what they don't have. It's funny how the mind works thinking that what you could have will be more valuable than what you do have. But just how do you measure happiness this way?

There are people who have a lot of money but aren't happy and then there those who have little money but are happy. This difference exists because of their state of mind. Those who appreciate life find happiness no matter what. Those who are the happiest may not necessarily *have* the best of everything, but they *make* the best of everything.

If your happiness is associated only with achieving certain goals or acquiring certain things, then rest assured that the search for happiness will be a lifelong pursuit. This is because once you reach these goals or acquire desired items, you look forward to meeting more goals and more acquisitions which you think will make you happier. In other words, your happiness is always placed on goals and things somewhere in the future.

Actually, happy people are always happy in the present. Their happiness is right here and now with who they are, what they have, and what they're doing. They appreciate life as it and don't give a thought to what is missing.

If you want to lead a happier life, try including these Zen habits to appreciate life better.



Learn To Let Go

This is the grand secret to life and your evolution. You do not move on until you let go of what is current.

Learning to let go releases you from where you are, and opens the doors to your next evolutionary phase. What complicates the process of letting go is it is the opposite of the nature of the ego that wants to hold on to everything even if it is painful and self-defeating.

One thing is for certain and that is change. Nothing is permanent and nothing stays the same indefinitely. So becoming comfortable with letting go to allow change is the ultimate secret.

Perhaps the most difficult part about letting go is moving out of your comfort zone and into new territory. But remember that change happens for a reason even if you don't know what the reason is, and you should be ready to embrace it. Quite often you only understand why things happen from the perspective of months or years down the line.

Holding onto pain or unpleasant memories doesn't fix anything, yet the mind holds on. Holding on holds you back.

It could be a loss or another difficulty leaving you pining for what could've been. You yearn for what should've been or what you feel you were entitled to.

It could also be a dream, a desire, a hope or a wish. Something that you may have wanted for years but never actualized.

It becomes very important to let go because all this is dead weight. And the longer you hold onto it, the longer it takes for you to move forward.

The same also stops you from investing in your present and being happy at the moment. Learn to let go of things and let more life in.

Be sure to look into this more deeply with my *Secret of Letting Go* audio program. [www.letgosecret.com]

Turn More to Nature

There is no denying the fact that everyone feels happier when they are in nature. Mother Nature never disappoints and always provides inner peace. Being in nature helps reduce stress levels and if you notice, time also slows down when you're in nature.

The sense of urgency and rush that you experience in your daily life seems to come to a standstill when you turn to nature. Instead it's replaced by a healthier pace of life. Things in nature happen according to their natural rhythm instead of being dictated by clock time.



When you spend more time in nature, you stop to enjoy the scenery and learn to appreciate more. You learn to breathe slowly and relax and get relief from the daily grind.

How to Shift Into High Consciousness

1. Surrender

One way or another to evolve you'll need to let go of where you are. This includes your beliefs and emotional reactions. In the context of spiritual evolution this is referred to as *Surrender*. If you are aligned with the process being worked out through you as you evolve and you surrender, your ride will be smoother than if you resist and are dragged through your experiences.

You might think it is easier to ignore your negative experiences hoping they will go away by themselves and while sometimes they may seem to, they will return again and again. You will be under pressure to let go and it is your choice to do it through surrender, or you'll be pressured by your patterns resurfacing until you do let go.

Surrender is more than saying you accept all events and circumstances although that is the result of surrender. Surrender is a process of letting go of the causes for everything you experience. That is done in an accelerated way when you take active participation. That is what my program *The Secret of Letting Go* [<https://www.letgosecret.com/offer/>] was designed to address.

2. Become a Neutral Observer

It seems pretty normal to react, be defensive, retreat, judge, project blame, get angry, criticize, be afraid, and otherwise be anything other than neutral. That's because you have programs running that impel you to be that way, but you don't have to.

My audio program ***Subtle-Energy Neutralizer*** gives you pro-active methods of addressing the patterns that cause you to react. If you are persistent in using those tools, you'll find you automatically become more peaceful and objective. You'll be able to participate as much as ever, but you'll have much less negative reactions and eventually they'll go away completely. [www.JonathanParkerProducts.com]

Once again you are dealing with subtle energies that cause you to react and you can clear those energy patterns. If you take the typically suggested ways to deal with your reactions of passively accepting them, they'll continue to plague you and keep cycling back into your life.

What are the usual ways people suggest you deal with your reactions? Just watch them, accept responsibility, and don't judge yourself. Do deep breathing, take walks, do gardening, put up post-it notes reminding you to remain cool. If you've tried those you already know they are not effective because they do not directly address the energy patterns causing the reactions.

If you do react negatively either with judgments, criticism, or blame, or negative emotions such as anger or getting depressed, you are transmitting an energy that only perpetuates the problems.

So to effectively become a neutral observer you need to let go and clear away the causes.

Have you ever noticed that many approach their spiritual path through intellectual means? They are in search of a missing ingredient that will free them, or some secret formula that triggers miracles, or needing just one more piece of information that gives the answers they are seeking. It probably includes building a library of books in search of something.

The biggest problem with that approach is it is looking in the outer areas for answers that aren't located there. Even if the book purports to explain about the inner realms, it is intellectualized through words and does not lead to spiritual realizations.

There's only one main way to do that and that is through meditative explorations. The intellect and analytical mind are the tools of the ego which is incapable of freeing itself from itself. The answer? Shift into the heart.

3. Live From Your Heart

Your heart offers unique access to your spiritual nature. Yes, you can connect spiritually any number of ways, but the easiest is through the deep heart. By that I mean the heart-center which is not the physical heart but rather the entire chest area where it is most easy to access spiritual dimensions.

As you connect with the deep heart you'll discover a sublime radiance that transcends time and opens a deep peace beyond what you have known before.

You'll also notice a "lightness of being" and an expansiveness and spaciousness. If you continue to deepen into that, you'll arrive at Unity Consciousness where you feel and experience being at one with all creation.

If you attune to that deeper you'll eventually float in a vast called "non-duality" that transcends all thoughts and judgments. I go into this with some detail in a Stillpoint discussion and meditation to help you arrive there in my *Quest for Enlightenment* program.

4. Raise Your Vibrations

To effectively raise your vibrations requires a multi-pronged approach that includes meditations that attune you to higher frequencies, a lifestyle that promotes harmony and balance, a diet that includes foods that are free of toxins and is mostly fruit and vegetable based, and a clear mind that doesn't react with anger or fear, and doesn't judge, complain, or blame.

In other words, to sustain higher vibrations requires a wholistic approach that supports peace, tranquility, love, and harmony. So that requires taking a good look at your life and your environment and making adjustments that foster living a higher life.

5. Commit to Regular Spiritual Practices

For the most part this means some frequent quiet time of contemplation and meditation. This also includes a respect and reverence for all life and living in harmony with nature. It also implies living mindfully and from your heart which also means being forgiving, kind, and a healing presence to all.

As you apply these 5 aspects to attaining and sustaining higher consciousness everything and everyone in your life is re-contextualized. You'll be living a happier and more fulfilled life and you'll be in tune with the frequency shifts the whole planet is moving through in our unique time of history.

We are all evolving and as you sustain love and light in your everyday experience you'll be in the right place at the right time for whatever the future may bring.

Conclusion

Happiness Is Closer Than You Think

Happiness isn't something that you can get from anything external but it is a by-product of living a balanced and spiritually-centered life. It is also not something that happens to you but something that you make happen by shifting your consciousness and taking action.

A Zen lifestyle means you have to eliminate, and edit a lot of habits, possessions, mindsets, and perspectives from your life. All this is to simplify and minimize your life to make it a more purposeful and focused existence.

You slow down the pace of your daily life, remove all that isn't necessary and enjoy life as it comes your way.

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