

Conscious Awareness



PART III:

The Mind

Chapter 11.

Empty Mind

outside world ✓
inner world
(Thoughts & Emotions)

As a conscious being, you are aware of the world coming in through your senses. But your awareness is not limited to that outside world. You also have inner experiences. Sometimes when the world comes in, it makes you feel good. Other times, it makes you feel bad. Since the outside world is really just structures of atoms, why does it have that inner effect on you? How could a bunch of atoms get you all jumbled up inside? What's going on?

You are capable of experiencing three distinct things: the outside world, the mind, and the emotions. Now that we have deeply examined the nature of the outside world, let's start our journey into understanding the second object of consciousness: the mind. What is mind? We all know what mind is. We're in here, and we experience it every day of our lives. In the simplest sense, mind is a place in which thoughts exist. We have thoughts all the time: "Why is he driving so slow? I'm going to be late. Now what am I going to do?" Undoubtedly these are thoughts, but where do they exist? They certainly don't exist in the outside world. Scientists are not able to read your thoughts, as hard as they have tried. But you can. There's not a machine they've ever made, even for billions of dollars, that can read your thoughts. Yet you can, effortlessly. That's a pretty amazing power you have.

Take a moment to digest that fact. Your consciousness has the ability to be aware of things that machines can't detect: thoughts and emotions. These objects of consciousness surely exist, but not in what we define as the "physical" world. Our scientists have shown us that the whole universe comes down to energy. Thoughts and emotions are simply energy vibrating at such high rates that machines can't detect them. Someday they might be able to. Machines couldn't detect gamma rays, X-rays, or even infrared light until we made machines that could pick up those subtler vibrations. Scientist

didn't then classify these higher-vibration objects as something alien to our world. They simply expanded the definition of the electromagnetic spectrum to include them. It's not that the higher vibrations hadn't always been there, we simply hadn't been able to detect them.

Likewise, your thoughts are there and have always been there. What if a scientist told you, "No, your thoughts are not there. I can't detect them, so they don't exist." You'd walk away and laugh. You know your thoughts are there. You, the same conscious awareness we've been discussing, have the ability to pay attention to, or not pay attention to, the thoughts being created at this higher vibration of energy. Through the years, people have called this higher range of vibrations the *mental plane*.

Many questions come up regarding the topic of mind. For example, what are thoughts and where do they come from? Since scientists don't have direct access to your thoughts, only you can answer these questions. You're in there, and you have the ability to look at your mind. You even use the terms "my mind" and "my thoughts." You say, "I had a terrible thought the other day. My thoughts are really bothering me lately." How do you know you had a terrible thought? How do you know that your thoughts are bothering you? You are in there, so you know what it's like to be in there experiencing thoughts. You can think of mind as a very high-vibration field of energy in which thoughts can be created. Mind is not the thoughts. Mind is the field of energy in which thoughts are capable of existing. Just as clouds are not the sky, but they exist in the sky and are formed out of the substance of the sky, so thoughts are not the mind, but they exist in the mind and are formed out of the substance of mind.

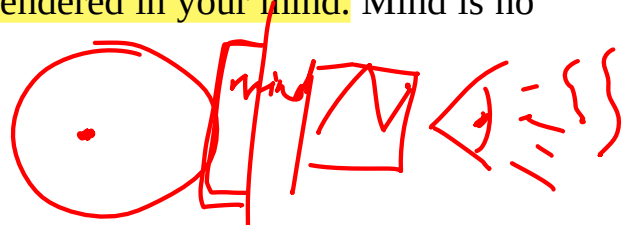
Buddhists talk about *empty mind*. In the purest sense, that is what we are referring to when we use the term "mind." It is a field of energy with nothing in it. There are no thoughts. There's just an absolutely still, formless field of energy we call "mind." This not conceptual; you can go there. Meditators who have gone deep understand this. You just rest in void, in empty mind. You're there, but there are no thoughts. It's just completely quiet, completely empty. It's like a powerful computer that has no software on it. The computer has great potential, but it doesn't do anything. That is what empty mind is. It's not stupid; in fact, its latent capabilities are enormous. It is simply still, not creating thoughts. Basically, that is what Buddhists mean by empty mind, and it is our starting point for understanding mind.

The outside world exists independent of this field of mind. Whether the mind is still or the mind is noisy, the planet continues to spin on its axis and all the galaxies continue to float through space. The energy that makes up the physical plane is at a grosser vibration rate than the energy that makes up the mental plane. From your own personal experience, you know that consciousness is capable of being aware of both the physical plane and the mental plane at the same time.

Now that we've examined the concept of empty mind, let's begin the process of forming objects in the field of mind. In order for you in there, consciousness, to be aware of the physical plane, you were given a physical body to house the five senses that pick up sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. This body is a gift that the stars gave you and that evolution perfected. Because of the senses, the vibrations from the outside world come in. They pass through the sensory receptors, up the sensory nerves, into the brain, and then manifest in the mind where you experience them. This rendering of the outside world is one of the most basic functions of mind. It's very much like watching a ball game being played in California while you're in Florida. The actual physical light and sound vibrations are picked up by the cameras at the game. They are then digitized and transmitted to a receiver at your home. The received signals are then rendered onto your flat-screen TV. It seems like you are looking at the game, but you are not. You are looking at the rendering of the transmitted signals that the cameras picked up.

It's amazing how much this parallels what is happening when you "see" the world around you. Your senses pick up the different vibrations from the outside world, just like a camera's sensors do. In the case of your senses, however, you can pick up five different vibration rates, not just sight and sound. Your senses convert the different vibrations into electrical nerve impulses and transmit them to the brain. The signals are then rendered in the mind's energy field to as closely as possible replicate the original physical source. You become aware of what is going on in front of you by being aware of its mental image rendered in your mind. Just like you become aware of the ball game in California by being aware of what is rendered on your TV screen in Florida.

You're not out there in the world. You're inside. You're way back inside. Though the world is happening everywhere, you only experience the part that is picked up by your senses and rendered in your mind. Mind is no



longer empty—it has formed its energy into the exact image of what is within the scope of your senses. As we discussed, you are not looking out into the world. The outside is being reproduced in your mind, and you are looking at that mental image. It's really not that different from when you are dreaming. In the dream state, images are being created in the mind, and you are looking at them. The waking state is the same, except that the mental images are being generated by the senses instead of by the mind itself. These mental images that form in the mind are like the images that form on your flat-screen TV. The screen was blank, but now it has taken the form of the ball game in California. Your mind was empty, but now it has taken the form of the outside world around you.

Your mind is so brilliant. Your flat-screen TV has a digital signal processor that takes the received digital signal, decodes it, and renders it onto the screen and through the speakers. Your mind takes the encoded nerve impulses and reproduces the entire scene in front of you, including depth perception, as well as adding touch, smell, and taste. It renders all this detail made out of the higher energy vibration of the mind. This exact rendering of the outside world is one of the primary functions of your mind. It allows you in there to experience the outside world. The mind is such an amazing gift. It is naturally formless, yet it can create forms that are more brilliant than those made by the most powerful computer. Mind is really the first personal computer. In fact, it is so personal that it doesn't need any external form. Its display screen is inside, its computing and graphics capability are inside, and you don't need a keyboard, mouse, or voice recognition to communicate with it. It is so close to you that it responds to your will and the slightest impulse from your heart.

We have now gone from empty mind to a mind that renders the outside world so you can experience your surroundings. Experience is the nectar of life. You're in there, and you're capable of experiencing because of the rendering capability of your mind. Of what meaning is life if you don't experience it? We spent a lot of time discussing how the outside world was created—billions of years of stellar activity resulting in what appears around you. You saw how it was created; now you see how consciousness, which does not belong to the world of form, can experience it—through the miracle of mind.

In truth, consciousness is the most profound miracle. An essence that knows that it knows that it knows. Everything else is something you're



conscious of—the true magic is consciousness itself. When consciousness is simply experiencing reality as imaged in the mind, that is what we call *being in the present moment*. At this point in our discussion, there is nowhere else to be. The real world is outside, it is being reflected in your mind, and you are aware of the image right in front of you. In this very simple state, you are experiencing what you were meant to experience: the gift of the moment that's being given to you. It comes in, and you learn from it simply because you experienced it. There are no distractions; there is just total oneness with the moment in front of you.

↳ Everyone has had some rare moments like this. Perhaps it took a beautiful sunset to bring you to such a state of one-pointed consciousness. You were driving around a corner and, all of a sudden, the sun was setting with beautiful purple, orange, and magenta. It was the most beautiful thing you had ever seen, and it completely blew your mind. What does that mean, “It blew your mind”? It means there was nothing left in your mind but that image of the sunset. Not the mortgage, not the problem with the boyfriend, not the worries from the past. The only experience you were having was this beautiful sunset coming in through your eyes, rendering in your mind, and merging with your entire being. Your entire consciousness was centered and focused on the experience you were having, instead of being scattered all over the place. It was truly a spiritual experience.

That is what *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* describes as the experienter and the experience becoming one. You have allowed a merger between subject and object. There's nothing distracting your consciousness from what is happening right in front of you. This is the yogic state of *dharana*—one-pointed concentration.

You've had other experiences that approach this state of one-pointed absorption. Sometimes in intimate moments with someone you love, when everything is just right, you lose yourself in the moment. All of a sudden, total beauty and peace come over you. When consciousness merges with the object of consciousness, you can feel the presence of God. In yogic philosophy, the Self is called *sat-chit-ananda*, eternal-conscious-bliss. When Self focuses one-pointedly on a single object, one experiences the nature of Self—total peace, contentment, and overwhelming bliss. This is available to us at any time if we can just learn to enter the undistracted state of one-pointed consciousness.

Chapter 12.

Birth of the Personal Mind



Why don't we live in an ecstatic state of one-pointed consciousness all the time? What went wrong? What caused the fall from this proverbial garden?

It's very simple: The world comes in and it's beautiful. The very act of experiencing it is tremendously moving when it comes all the way back into you. However, that does not mean it all feels the same. Heat feels different from cold—because it is different. That doesn't mean one is better than the other. They just feel different. Somebody gently touches you, and that feels very different than if they bump into you. Different things are experienced in different ways. The Buddhists say everything has its nature. A coiled rattlesnake comes into the mind as a very different experience than a butterfly landing on your arm. That rattlesnake is giving off its nature—emanating its particular vibration. That vibration is awesome in its own way, but it certainly doesn't create the same inner experience as the butterfly. There's nothing wrong with this. It's very real. What's wrong with having a variety of experiences? If a butterfly landed on you every moment, it would become so normal that it would be nothing. God knew how to create a world that would always be exciting.

Your consciousness actually expands because of the knowledge that flows into it. You are learning and growing through the experiences you are having. This learning through life is true spiritual growth. It is the evolution of the soul. Just like everything you learn makes you smarter, every experience you have makes you wiser. When the presence of a rattlesnake comes into your mind, true, it's not a comfortable inner experience. It doesn't feel the same as a butterfly, but it is just as rich. It is just as important. If you're willing to be open at this level, you're still in the idyllic garden. There are no problems; there are just learning experiences. No matter what happens, you are becoming greater.

Unfortunately, that is not how we live. Something went very wrong. Let's take this fall from the garden in slow motion. First, something comes in; let's start with the rattlesnake. It's not a particularly comfortable experience. In fact, a hissing rattlesnake is meant to be an uncomfortable experience—it may even generate discomfort at a survival level. That would be a strong inner reaction to the outer experience.

But this uncomfortable inner reaction isn't bad, per se—it's just a different vibration. Just like some colors are soothing and others are harsh. Colors aren't bad or good; they are just different vibration rates of the electromagnetic spectrum. You can learn how to be comfortable with these different vibrations. A rattlesnake is not going to stay there rattling your whole life. It's going to come, and it's going to go—and its uncomfortable vibrations are going to go with it. Then something else will happen. You live in a happening place filled with growthful experiences. You are simply in there experiencing creation as it comes in and passes through you.

You don't practice that level of acceptance, however. You in there who is experiencing what's rendering in your mind—you have the ability to resist what is not comfortable to you. You were given free will. You can use that will like inner hands to push away thoughts and emotions if they don't feel right. Surely you have done that. That resistance is an act of will. Will is an innate power you have—it is actually a power that emanates from consciousness. Just as the Sun stays where it is in space, but it emanates rays that have great power, so consciousness remains at its source, but its awareness emanates out onto whatever it focuses on. There is great power when consciousness focuses on something, just as there is great power when the Sun's rays are focused through a magnifying glass. You can feel the power of one-pointed concentration. It is, indeed, concentrated consciousness. That is the source of the power of will.

The power of will plays a very important role in understanding how the mind developed from a place of clarity to one of confusion. You have surely noticed that your awareness does not fall evenly on all objects that render in your mind. You pay attention to some objects more than others. If the vibration of the object was more comfortable or uncomfortable, you either "liked" it or "didn't like" it. This is the foundation of how the personal mind got built: like and dislike. It happens at a very primal level. Basically, it depends on whether you in there have the ability to experience something

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that comes in without doing anything about it—other than fully experiencing it. This is the ability to allow objects to simply pass through.

If an inner experience is not neutral to you, it draws your consciousness to focus on it. The moment that happens, the things passing through your mind are no longer even; one has stood out from the rest. All it took was for you to focus your consciousness on it. Your consciousness is a force, and you are focusing that force on a particular mental object. When the force of consciousness is focused on a mental object, that object cannot pass through the mind like the other objects. Just as the solar winds interfere with objects passing through space, so focused consciousness is a force that affects objects passing through the mind.

When you focus consciousness on a particular mental form, you impede that form's ability to pass through the mind. The very act of concentrating on it makes it stay in your mind. You know this. When you want to do math in your mind, you concentrate on the numbers so they stay long enough for you to manipulate them. In fact, anytime you want to hold something in your mind, you must focus your consciousness on it so it does not just fade away. Concentration of consciousness freezes forms in the mind so that they don't just pass through. Thus, when you saw a rattlesnake, it might as well have been a standalone item in your mind. The truth is there were trees, grass, sky, and other items rendered in your mind aside from the snake. But you focused your consciousness on the rattlesnake and let the rest pass through. Interestingly, because you focused so much consciousness on it, you froze the experience of the snake in your mind. There was no way you were going to let this uncomfortable experience *all* the way in, and that is the birth of resistance.

Do you know what that means, "letting it all the way in"? We discussed this earlier regarding the beautiful sunset and the perfect romantic experience. You wanted to fully experience these beautiful moments, so you opened up and let them pass all the way into your being. These are the special moments in life, when something touches you to the core of your being. No way this rattlesnake is going all the way in there. You don't have to think about it. Resistance is simply a natural response to something that's not comfortable. You try to keep it at a distance.

Have you ever kept something at a distance in there? Perhaps something someone said that hurt you in the past, maybe an awkward stage you went through when you were young, or even a terrible divorce. Of

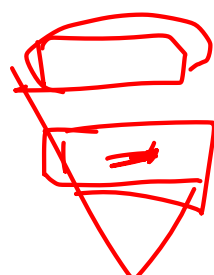
course you have, but that doesn't mean the event didn't happen. It wouldn't be in there if it hadn't already happened. You can't stop the event from having happened, but you don't have to let it all the way in. Mind is a big place. There's plenty of room between where the experience is first imaged in your mind and where you actually fully experience it. You can use will to keep the mental image at a distance from you. This is a very primal act of resistance.

Now that you have resisted experiencing the rattlesnake, and let the rest of the moment pass through, here comes a butterfly. It lands on you, which is such a beautiful experience that you naturally focus on it. When it starts to fly off, you don't want it to go away, so you use your will to hold on to the mental image. This is what Buddhists call clinging. You can't hold on to the butterfly itself because it flew away. So you try to hold on to the mental thought pattern of the butterfly. You push away what it was like to experience the rattlesnake and you cling to what it was like to experience the butterfly. Neither of these mental patterns can finish their natural journey through the mind. Not only do you lose out on fully experiencing them to the depth of your being, you are also left with these mental patterns stuck in your mind. Neither rattlesnake nor butterfly remain before you, but they are left as patterns in the mind's energy field. Such is the power of like and dislike.

Both clinging and resisting keep the mental renderings in your mind. This is very important to understand. Experiential mind was meant to be like a clear TV screen: it renders the image being sent to it. But now you've held on to images that are no longer being generated by the outside world. They got stuck in your mind as mental patterns, and as a result, you're out of harmony with reality. You were in there experiencing the gift of reality; now you are also experiencing the patterns you held on to in your mind. These patterns in your mind are totally different from the patterns in other people's minds. Each person's trapped mental patterns are unique and very personal. They come from how we interacted with our past experiences. Since we've all had different past experiences, and interacted with them differently, the impressions held in our minds are totally different. This is the birth of the personal mind.

The problem is: reality is not personal. As you've already seen, we didn't create this world. We are simply experiencing the miracle of creation unfolding around us. Yes, there are rattlesnakes and butterflies in the world,

Resist → Resist
B → Clinging



along with lots of other things. But now there are RATTLESNAKES and BUTTERFLIES in your mind, even when they are not actually in front of you. Now that you've held these leftover mental impressions in your mind, reality has to compete with them for your attention. Your ability to fully focus on the outer world is going to be hindered by the constant distraction of these inner impressions.



Chapter 13.

Fall from the Garden

Resistance is the beginning of what can be considered the fall from the garden. You were just fine being aware of this awesome, everchanging creation. It presented constant gifts of experiences for you to learn and grow from. Take the gift of music. When you are deeply absorbed in music, there are no stray thoughts, only the music effortlessly coming in and feeding the depth of your being. You can be raised to the state of ecstasy while listening to music. When the mind is clear, everything comes in that way. You are either in a heavenly state experiencing what is pouring into you, or you are deeply absorbed in the inner stillness of your being. You have returned to the garden—everything is effortlessly beautiful.

Once you hold on to rattlesnakes and butterflies in your mind, you are unable to stay in that pure state of consciousness. These two mental patterns have become powerfully charged objects that draw your attention toward them. When the mind was clear, what attracted your consciousness was the rendering of the outside world as it passed through. This rendering was very entertaining and fulfilling, but since you had nothing going with it, it just came and went. In contrast, the powerfully charged objects you have held in your mind do not come and go. The world in front of you comes and goes, but these mental objects remain because you are holding them in your mind. Furthermore, since they are differentiated as more important than the rest, your consciousness becomes more distracted by these mental objects.

Everything is no longer equal, and this creates a major problem. Next thing you know, you're walking down the road, and there's a rope. But the rope no longer feels the same as it would have before you saw the rattlesnake. The rope reminds you of the rattlesnake. What does "reminds you of" mean? It's not a rattlesnake; it's a rope. Nonetheless, when the rope comes in, consciousness now has a choice: pay full attention to the rope that



came in, or be distracted by the negative rattlesnake image stuck in your mind. The mind will immediately join these two mental objects together as one, and you will get scared. Scared by a rope? Yes, terrified by a rope.

A similar thing happens with the image of the butterfly stuck in your mind. After the butterfly flies away, you're still focusing on the image in your mind. **You're still feeling good about it and trying to hold on to it, even though it is no longer part of your here-and-now reality.** Then something new comes in from the outside, like a person walking by. Your mind may be rendering this new image perfectly, but your consciousness is not fully seeing it. Your consciousness is still distracted by the butterfly image that got left in your mind. It used to be that the moment in front of you was the experience you were having inside. Now you have a preference—you would rather experience the mental image of the butterfly than the reality in front of you. There has become a whole new world for consciousness to focus on—the world you built in your mind. That world does not match the reality of creation. That inner world is your own personal creation made out of the mental objects you didn't let pass through. That's what those images in your mind represent: things that happened in the past that you willfully kept in your mind. As we shall see, these impressions are the initial seeds that eventually grew into the self-concept or personal self.

To see this more clearly, let's once again look at the example of a flat-screen TV. When the first plasma screens came out, they had "afterimages." Manufacturers warned that if you paused an image for too long, it would actually burn a shadow of the image into the plasma screen. When the show continued, the old image would still be there. Would you enjoy watching TV like that? You've finished the news, but when you turn on a movie the afterimage of the newscaster is still superimposed on top of your movie. That's exactly what is happening with the butterfly and the rattlesnake. You can no longer clearly see what is going on in front of you because you have these other images on the screen of your mind. You've messed up your screen. You didn't mean to. It seemed innocent to push experiences aside when you didn't find them pleasant. Where do you think they went when you resisted them? They got stored as lasting impressions in your mind.

It is worth looking at the effect of these leftover images in slow motion. In the beginning, the miracle of creation took place. It created form that is coming in through your senses so you can experience it. Apparently, at some point you didn't like certain vibrations, so you pushed them away

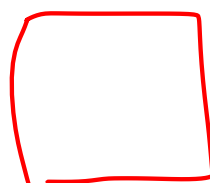
when they rendered inside. That willful resistance caused them to stay in the mind. This is where *personal* comes from. We said earlier that nothing is really personal. But you have chosen to fill the sanctity of your mind with frozen images from your past. These impressions will stay in your mind and will pull your consciousness toward them. You now have a limited and biased view of reality that will distort all of your experiences for the rest of your life. That is the power of the personal mind.

So far we have only focused on the rattlesnake you resisted and the butterfly you clung to. Those alone are sufficient to distort your experience of reality. But be honest with yourself: How many of these charged impressions do you have? You've done this your entire life. Plus, these stored impressions build on each other. Now that you have a stored rattlesnake impression in there, you can easily get scared by the sound of a baby's rattle. In fact, if the discomfort is bad enough, you may choose not to be around babies. That's a personal preference, and this is where all personal preferences come from. Once you create preferences, they will dominate your entire experience of life.

These impressions that stay stuck in the mind are called *samskaras* in yogic science. They are discussed in the ancient Upanishads texts. How could people know about this thousands of years before Sigmund Freud discussed his theories on suppression? It is because they were meditators. They didn't need someone to teach them about this—they saw it going on in their own minds. If you are quietly centered in conscious awareness, you can see what is passing before you. You are the ultimate experiencer of your mind; you're just not paying attention.

Instead of paying attention, you're getting so uptight about wanting butterflies, and not wanting rattlesnakes, that you're losing your centered awareness. When the world around you comes in and hits, or activates, your stored patterns, you can no longer observe reality objectively. Your consciousness gets drawn into the activated *samskaras*, and everything becomes distorted. This is the foundation of the *psyche*, your personal self.

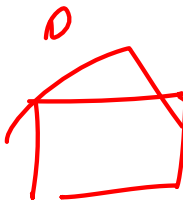
→ What is the psyche? It's something you build inside of the mind that's about you: "I'm the one who doesn't like rattlesnakes. I'm the one who likes butterflies." You just built a self-concept. Someone else doesn't have that. They have a psyche built around thunderstorms, dogs that bite, and kittens that snuggle. Everyone has had different experiences, and therefore, everyone is building a different personal mind inside. No one is doing it



purposely; it's reactive. It happens quite naturally because you're not ready to openly experience life. The highest state is to be comfortable learning and growing from life's experiences. But if you're not comfortable with some experiences, you use your will to resist them. That merely means you're not evolved enough in that area. There is physical evolution and there is spiritual evolution. They both involve adaptability to your environment. The former for your body, and the latter for "you" in there, the soul.

When events come in, they are meant to be experienced by you. If you have trouble experiencing them, that's the whole purpose of learning to accept. What right do you have to either cling to or resist reality? You didn't make reality, and you weren't here for the billions of years that created it. We're back to, "Do you like the fact that Saturn has rings?" Your answer was, "It's none of my business." That's the correct response for every bit of reality that took billions of years to end up in front of you.

The real question is not whether you like things, it's why are you not okay with them? The reason is actually quite simple: because you can't digest them. It's hard to let some experiences just pass through without residual disturbance. But you need to learn how to do it. You learned to play tennis. You learned to play the piano. You've learned all kinds of things, maybe even calculus. You didn't know how to do these things to start with. They were surely uncomfortable until you learned to be comfortable with them. The soul can learn. You in there, the consciousness, can learn to experience reality. In order to do so, you must not resist. Otherwise, you're going to immediately push reality away. That's what acceptance is: nonresistance. It is having the commitment to fully allow reality to pass directly into the highest part of your being. In the end, all you are surrendering is your resistance to reality. You learn to let it come in, even if it is not comfortable as it pours into you.



→ The same thing is true with positive experiences, like the butterfly. Somebody you like comes up to you and says, "You know, I really like you. You're very attractive to me, and I enjoy being with you." That is such a nice experience that you immediately cling to the beautiful things they said. They go back to what they were doing, but you can't. You can't focus on your work because the impressions left in your mind keep distracting you. This is the opposite of *Be Here Now*; you're practicing *Be There Then*. [You just had a beautiful experience, and you ruined it. You ruined it by holding on to it, like the butterfly. You ruined it by creating a preference about one

of life's experiences. Now every time the phone rings, and it's not the person who said the nice things, you get disappointed. Be aware that you did this. Somebody said something nice to you, and you couldn't handle it. You couldn't just let it be a nice experience. Instead, you clung to it in your mind, and it actually messed you up.

Whether you use your will to resist or cling, these leftover impressions will stay in your mind. You've now created an entire layer of mind that's holding your samskaras, your unfinished patterns from the past. You will come to see that these acts of clinging and resisting determine the quality of your life. These impressions distract your consciousness from the reality of the current moment. What is more, if you are constantly distracted by these samskaras in your mind, you're never going to experience who you really are.

There is a vast difference between memory and a samskara. Just as your computer has memory storage capability, so does your mind. It is a natural function of the mind to store compressed versions of what was received by the senses in its long-term memory. These stored memories can be retrieved with the slightest intent. You learn a person's name, meaning it is stored in long-term memory. When you see them again, the name normally comes up into the forefront of mind without any effort, though admittedly, sometimes we have to apply willful effort to bring the memory back. These are fairly normal ways memory is stored and recalled.

In drastic contrast to normal memory, if you experience an event that you have trouble handling when it renders in your mind, you use will to either consciously or subconsciously suppress it. You don't want it in your mind at all, not presently or long-term, so you try to push it out of the mind completely. When you do this, you are resisting the entire event: what came in through the senses, what you felt emotionally, and what your thoughts were about it. This resisted "package" of the experience cannot pass through you in the normal fashion—because you won't let it. The entire energy of the event is locked inside of your mind, and it does not sit there quietly. Because it keeps trying to release its blocked energies, it can distort your memories of the past as well as disturb your experience of the present. Blocked energies in the mind are like a computer virus that distorts both the conscious and subconscious minds. In later chapters we will deeply explore how these blocked energy patterns, samskaras, also block your natural energy flow.



When you commit to spiritual growth, you work on letting go of the stored blockages from the past and not storing any more from the present. This does not mean the mind's normal memory storage process does not take place. You are not willfully forgetting life's experiences. You are simply not resisting or clinging to the experiences, and thus not storing them as samskaras. They remain harmless, objective memories.

Let's take an example very close to home for some people. You have an ex-husband: "I don't want to see him. I don't want to talk about him ever again. I don't even like it when someone says his name. It makes me uncomfortable, even years after the divorce!" This is not objective memory talking—it is definitely a samskara. You say you divorced your ex-husband, but you really didn't. He's still inside bothering you. You don't even want to go to a party if you think he might be there. You have kept these impressions blocked in your mind, and ultimately you have created an alternate universe in which you are still dealing with your ex. Normal memory is not like this; it is well behaved. Like a computer's memory, it does not pop up by itself. It does not have blocked energies that need to be released. Normal memory is there when you need it—it does not haunt you throughout your life.

Fortunately, most things you encounter in life are neutral to you. They pass through unblocked and are available for recall when appropriate. You have driven by white lines on the road many times, but they don't come back up by themselves at inopportune times. Neither do the cars, trees, buildings, and myriad other objects you encounter each day. They come in, and they pass through. But there are a few things that are harder to deal with inside, and therefore you resist them or you cling to them. This is how you fell out of the garden of reality. Impressions stayed inside your mind and became the foundation blocks upon which you built your psyche.

Chapter 14.

The Veil of the Psyche

Your psyche is like a computer program running in your mind based on your **samskaras**. It's in there talking to you about things that happened before, what you wish would happen now, and what you hope does or doesn't happen tomorrow. You've actually created an alternate reality inside your mind that is very complex. It's a tremendous menagerie of the stored moments you were not able to let go of. At this point, you don't even need another rattlesnake to get you disturbed. The fact that the experience of the snake is stuck in your mind means other things will remind you of it. In fact, you can remind yourself of it without the need of an external reminder. You're driving down the street, minding your own business. Suddenly, you remember how scary that snake was, and you get scared again. We're not dealing with reality anymore. We have such a mess built up in there that it's no wonder we have so much trouble with life. Such is the nature of the personal mind.

Regardless of how messy it gets in there, the fact remains that the **personal mind is not you—no more than your TV screen is you**. But it's much more difficult to objectively watch your mind than your TV screen. This is because of the power of the impressions you have stored in your mind. These past impressions compete with the image of reality coming in from the outside and make it hard to tell which is which. It is difficult to maintain a seat of objective observation when it gets so confusing in there. Samskaras are not to be taken lightly; they seriously distort your experience of life.

Let's take the example of a psychological Rorschach test, often referred to as an inkblot test. The psychologist holds up an inkblot and asks what you see. You immediately respond that you see people making love or, perhaps, mommy and daddy fighting. In other words, the Rorschach test

stimulates the patterns you've stored inside your mind, causing you to see what's not actually there. The truth is the whole world is a giant Rorschach test. The world is a flow of atoms unfolding in front of you. It's no more personal than the inkblots. But it's hitting your samskaras, and that stimulates stored mental and emotional reactions. Now, instead of experiencing what is passing by outside, you are experiencing the likes, dislikes, beliefs, and judgments stored inside. These impressions are so strong that you actually think they are what is really out there, just like the inkblots. The personal mind has taken over your entire life. You are no longer free to enjoy the experiences that are actually happening—you are forced to deal with what your mind says is happening.

Let's look a little deeper into how samskaras affect your life. We have discussed that what is coming in from the outside stimulates your mental blockages from the past. Past experiences were uncomfortable when you first resisted them, and they are going to be uncomfortable when they come back up. To make matters worse, just as with the Rorschach test, you are not seeing what is actually outside—you are seeing your inner issues projected onto the outside. That's why life seems so scary and why it seems to always be hitting your weak spots. *The truth is, life is not hitting your weak spots, you are projecting your weak spots onto life.* Yet not everything you stored in there was negative. You held on to some positive things from the past. The problem is they're not happening anymore, and that is disappointing. If you go back to the same place where you saw the butterfly, and it's not there, it becomes a negative experience.

Understand, you have just made life a lose-lose situation. If anything reminds you of what bothered you before, you lose. If you are not getting to reexperience what you liked before, you lose. This is in drastic contrast to what Zen calls beginner's mind. If you are not expecting anything in particular from a situation, and then something special happens, it can touch you really deeply. It could be a beautiful sunset, the first unexpected kiss, or some other welcome surprise. If it touches you so deeply because you have no samskaras in your mind about the event—you have beginner's mind. Otherwise, you will be expecting something based on prior experiences, and that will interfere with the spontaneity of the event.

The end result is that these samskaras have ruined your life. You've made it so that unless something drastically different happens to pull you out of this preference system, you can't feel anything fully. That's why

some people must go to the extremes to get a rush. It is also why some people try to keep everything exactly the same so life doesn't disturb their *samskaras*. In either case, trying to keep the mind a decent place to live in can force people to look for escapes, such as drinking and drugs. You get to the point where you're running around trying to appease your mind.

Eventually, you will come to realize that it's not the job, the spouse, or the car that gets old—it's listening to the mess in your mind that gets old. While all of these patterns from the past are blocked in your mind, you in there can neither experience the miracle of life unfolding before you, nor can you experience the natural beauty within you. Your awareness is completely distracted by these stored mental patterns, and you must devote your days and nights to serving them. You can no longer experience reality—you are stuck experiencing yourself.

→ There's a concept in Zen known as "just tree." It fits perfectly with our discussion. The story goes as follows: There was a young Buddhist monk in a monastery who would go for daily sessions with the Zen master. The master would ask him some questions, and the monk would leave. One time when the young monk walked in, the master looked at him and remarked, "What happened to you? You look so alive and filled with light."

The monk was surprised. "What do you mean?"

"I see a difference in you, my son. What happened?"

The monk told him, "I was walking across the courtyard and saw the big oak tree. I stopped and looked at it. I had seen it many times before, but this time I saw *just tree*. I just saw the tree. Somehow, it took me to such a deep place that I felt an awakening. I felt a moment of enlightenment. It took me beyond myself."

"That tree has been there for a hundred years," the master reflected. "You have walked by that tree every single day since you've been here."

"Yes," the student said, "but when I previously walked by the tree, it often reminded me of the tree Buddha sat under when he reached enlightenment. Other times, the tree reminded me of the one I fell out of when I was little. The tree always stimulated thought patterns from my past. This time I saw *just tree*."

The master smiled.

“Just tree” is what we talked about in the beginning of our discussion of mind. The tree comes in, renders in your mind, and that’s all you see. In contrast, the tree comes in, renders in your mind, and stimulates any past samskaras you have about trees. Your samskara mind becomes activated, and your consciousness is scattered between the primary image of the tree and the secondary explosion that takes place inside. The secondary explosion is the reaction within your mind due to the stored patterns there. You can’t have pure experiences anymore. The young monk did—he saw “just tree.” If you didn’t understand this before, hopefully you do now. A Zen master would be pleased with you, because “just tree” is a very deep concept in Zen Buddhism.

There is nothing wrong with the mind itself. Just like there is nothing wrong with a computer, per se. It is how you use these powerful gifts that can cause a problem. There is almost no limit to the brilliance of mind. People think Einstein was smart, but they don’t understand their own brilliance. We all have the human mind, every single one of us. We don’t have a possum mind, a squirrel mind, or even an ape mind. We have the human mind, and the human mind is brilliant.

Chapter 15.

The Brilliant Human Mind

What's so special about the human mind? Let's take a look. For billions and billions of years, while the planet Earth was spinning through space, the process of evolution took place. There were minerals, then plants, then animals, all formed from atoms created in the stars. The planet had been floating in space for 4.5 billion years before modern humans showed up. It is worth noting that before humans showed up, life on Earth for the other species stayed pretty much the same. Food, shelter, and survival were the name of the game. Things haven't really changed that much for them. The monkeys lived in trees for tens of millions of years, just as they do now. The fish swam in the waters for hundreds of millions of years, just as they do now. Everything on Earth stayed pretty much the same until you humans showed up with your human mind. You discovered electricity and made the nighttime bright. You built giant skyscrapers and machinery that never existed before. You even dug into the earth, extracted minerals, and developed advanced materials like silicon chips. Then you built a rocket ship, got in, and flew to the moon.

Compare that to what any other animals have done. They are living exactly the same as they did a thousand years ago, a hundred thousand years ago, a million years ago. You're not. You used to live in caves; now you're planning to live on Mars. What did that? Did God hide a rocket ship, and you found it somewhere? No, your mind did that. Your mind figured out everything was made of atoms, then you figured out how split the atom. The human mind actually figured out how the universe was made, all the way down to the quantum level. Your mind put up the Hubble Space Telescope that can see back to the beginning of creation. The Hubble can pick up light that has been traveling through space for more than thirteen billion years. This allows us to see what was happening thirteen billion years ago. Can

you even think about that? The fact is you can because you have a human mind.

The human mind is an amazing thing. That is some serious stuff we've figured out. You're back in there, deep inside, and you have the use of a brilliant mind. That said, what is the average human doing with their mind? Einstein used his mind to ponder "thought experiments" about the behavior of light, gravity, and the physics of outer space (even though no human had ever been there!). Meanwhile, you keep your mind busy with relationships, what people think of you, and how to get what you want and avoid what you don't want. You may not have Einstein's mind, but compared to any other living thing on Earth, your mind is brilliant. The question is not whether your mind is brilliant; the question is what are you doing with that brilliance?

What we see so far is that the mind by itself, without you interfering, is doing what it's supposed to be doing. It's giving you the gift of rendering the outside world for you to experience. But you had some trouble accepting that gift. You started resisting when it felt a little too uncomfortable and clinging when it felt a little too good. This caused the buildup of mental patterns inside of you. Now, processing current external experiences becomes distorted by the reactions of past samskaras.

You can think of this as layers of the mind. The first layer is where the rendering of the present external experience is taking place. We can call that the *here-and-now layer*. The next layer is the stored patterns from the past that you did not release when the external experience was over. We can call that the *samskara layer*. But there is yet another layer. This layer is what you are doing with your brilliant mind to try to solve the discomforts created by the samskaras. This is the *personal-thoughts layer*, and it is the one you identify with the most—you think this is who you are. The combination of these three layers is what we call the *personal mind*. Yours is completely unique to you and you alone.

We create the personal-thoughts layer when we use the tremendous intellectual power of our mind to conceptualize an outside world that will not bother us and will, in fact, make us feel good. It seems perfectly logical. The problem is, what we think will make us feel good or bad is simply the result of blocked mental patterns from the past. If we use our mind's brilliance to develop thought patterns based on how everyone and everything needs to be for us to feel okay, we have limited our life to

serving our samskaras. And our personal thoughts don't stop here. What good is it to analyze how you need things to be if you're not also going to think about how to get them that way? First we figure out the strategy of how to be okay, then we figure out the tactics of how to make it happen. Strategy and tactics—that's military training. In essence, we are at war with the world.

The personal mind has taken on the task of how to get the world unfolding in front of you to be the way you want. That should set off alarm bells because we've already discussed in great detail where the world in front of you comes from, and it has nothing to do with what's going on inside your head. The moment in front of you is the result of all the natural forces that caused it to be as it is. The preference system in your mind is the result of the past experiences that you couldn't handle. These are two totally different sets of forces that have nothing to do with each other. For example, there are current impersonal forces that are causing it to rain. There are past personal forces causing you to not like the rain. You have just pitted yourself against the universe, and you are going to lose. Nevertheless, the personal mind thinks it's right. You actually think that the universe should be the way you want it to be.