

Without Thinking

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By Steve Cavin

Travellers's Note 1: Examples

The ideas in this book have come down to me from others, many of whom I'll never know, through many hours of patient training and explanation. The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Charles Berner, Peter Ralston, Forest Dalton, Osha Reader, and Ed Riddle.

Their example is an inspiration for us all.

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Chapter 1 - The Mind

If you are like most of us, you have spent most of your life developing your mind. The Mind is a useful tool for understanding the world, making plans, and staying out of trouble. It is also a tyrant and a judge, analyzing behavior, demanding obedience, and constantly insinuating itself between you and the real world.

Most people are not aware of their own mind. In fact, they have confused their mind with themselves. They believe that their thoughts and identifications, feelings and attitudes, body and relationships are who they are. This is not the case.

In fact, people have mostly been taught to use their mind for thinking, classifying, remembering, lying, and other forms of cleverness. Very few have been giving basic instruction on the use and maintenance of the Mind, and its proper place within the greater body-being. This book contains techniques that, if practiced, will tame the mind and restore your consciousness to its rightful owner.

Because of the unconscious identification with the mind, there is usually a strong dependency built up that keeps you wanting to be the one you think you are. If you challenge this assumption you will encounter resistance. The Mind will not let go willingly, and you may find the journey uncomfortable, scary, and probably very disturbing. Ultimately, there is a moment when your desire to know will be greater than your fear of knowing, and you will break free.

Travellers's Note 2: Roller Coasters

If you don't want to ride, don't get on the Roller Coaster. Put this book down right now, and find something more enjoyable to do. Life is a gift to be enjoyed, not a lesson to be learned. You buy your ticket, and take your chances.

The techniques in this book are interesting to read about, but will not work unless you actually do them. Every technique in this book has been repeatedly tried and refined by thousands of people over many thousands of hours of actual practice. They do work, and they will change you, if you let them. If you think you're getting yourself into trouble, it is usually just your mind refusing to surrender its hold on you. However, if you get really frightened or upset, there is nothing wrong with stopping for a while. We are not pumping iron, or beating ourselves into shape. Take a deep breath, go for a walk with a friend, and pick it up later.

Be good to yourself, love your life, and be excellent to each other.

Chapter 2 - Time

It is unclear whether time is real or just an impression created by our minds to give order and sequence to our experiences. In any case, the only time you can actually experience is now, and most of us skip right over that. We alternate between regretting the past and fearing the future. This will not do, and it is the source of endless suffering.

Travellers's Note 3: The Past

The Past doesn't really exist, at least not anymore. It may have existed before, but is now merely a memory, a thought circling 'round your mind, resurfacing from time to time. If a past memory troubles you, make up a new one!

The first technique we will learn is called “Thinking Of Rabbits”. It is an exercise to bring your awareness closer and closer to now. Now is the only time there is. You may think that is just a clever phrase, but it is literally true.

Choose a simple object to think about (I like rabbits). Now, get ready to deliberately think about that object. Notice that you are not yet thinking about that object (if you are, just let it go and start again). Ready, set, think “rabbit”. Did you think “rabbit”? Notice that you remember thinking “rabbit” but are no longer thinking that now.

Good. Now, try it again. This time, pay attention to the little bit of time leading up to the actual moment when you think “rabbit”. Then notice the little bit of time between the moment that you thought “rabbit” and the moment that you knew you’d done it. With a little practice, these two intervals will quickly get shorter and shorter, usually less than a second each.

Now, something interesting may happen. As you continue to practice, the interval between “about to think” (future), “thinking” (present), and “already thought” (past) will continue to shrink. At some point, if only briefly, they will fuse, and you will have a timeless experience of Now.

Travellers' Note 4: The Future

The Future doesn't really exist, at least not yet. Something will surely happen next, but by the time you catch up with it, it's not the future any more. You can't get there from here, ever.

Now is the timeless moment, the eternal present, the only time you can ever be directly conscious of. Spend some time there, sometime!

Chapter 3 - Fear and Anger

We'll take fear and anger together, because they are opposite ends of the same phenomenon. They are both effective strategies for escaping the present. Anger is associated with the past, and fear is associated with the future.

Travellers's Note 5: Anger

If you don't want to accept something that happened in the past, you may deny reality by becoming angry instead. Because it is a ruse, your mind knows and will maintain sufficient intensity to keep you in anger as long as you desire.

Anger seems real and intuitively just. After all, that shouldn't have happened to you, and now you're angry about it. Right. Anger is a strategy, a false solution to the problem of dealing with things as they are. There is of course, an easy remedy for this; just accept things as they are! For most of us, this is easier said than done.

There is a technique for exposing anger for what it is. First, get a really clear idea of the past, present, and future (see earlier exercises). Now, decide for one day that that the past does not exist. That is to say, anytime you find yourself in the past, thinking of the past, or doing anything related to the past, just stop it. Keep the present and the future, you'll still have lots to do.

Once you get very solid on “no past”, try getting angry about something, anything. You may have trouble getting angry at this point, but just try. If you do start to get angry, check and see if you’ve allowed the past back into your life. Or if anger just appears on its own, ask yourself whether what you’re angry about can be forgiven. What you are getting out of remaining angry?

Travellers' Note 6: Fear

If you are uncomfortable in the present, you can escape by worrying about the future. Since the future never comes, you can remain in fear as long as you desire.

Fear seems real and unavoidable. After all, isn't it reasonable and prudent to fear the things that might cause you harm? Right. Fear is a strategy, a false solution to the problem of not being able to control what happens in life. There is of course, an easy remedy for this; just accept things as they come! For most of us, this is easier said than done.

There is a technique for exposing fear for what it is. First, get a really clear idea of the past, present, and future (see earlier exercises). Now, decide for one day that that the future does not exist. That is to say, anytime you find yourself in the future, thinking of the future, or doing anything related to the future, just stop it. Keep the present and the past, you'll still have lots to do.

Once you get very solid on “no future”, try getting fearful about something, anything. You may have trouble getting fearful at this point, but just try. If you do start to get fearful, check and see if you’ve allowed the future back into your life. Or if fear just appears on its own, ask yourself whether what you’re fearful about can be avoided. What you are getting out of remaining fearful?

Chapter 4 - Identity

If you ask almost anyone “Who are you?”, they will tell you their name, or where they live, or what they do for a living. Perhaps they will tell you their role or relationship or title, or maybe they will tell you what they hope to be someday. This is only an identity, a marker they or someone else in their life has applied to define the qualities and boundaries of their personality.

Travellers's Note 7: Personal History

While you probably remember a fair portion of your personal history, it is not who you are. Your prior experiences have certainly shaped your concept of who you are, but your true self is independent of what has gone before.

The biggest problem with identifying oneself with what has happened in the past is that it is absolutely impossible to change the past. Any past misfortune or loss hangs around one's neck like a heavy stone, making change difficult indeed. Past injuries remain, inflicting new pain and misery in the present, appearing permanent and inescapable.

Ask yourself who you are, even better find a person to sit facing you, a comfortable distance apart (about a meter), and have them ask you who you are. They should make good eye contact with you, and in a calm, firm voice say "Tell me who you are". As you hear the question, allow their words and the force of their intention to penetrate deeply into your mind. Don't answer right away; intend to experience the truth of who you are, and remain open and attentive to whatever may arise in your consciousness as a result.

Be patient. Something will come up. Whatever it is, describe it as honestly and accurately and completely as possible to your partner. Their job is only to understand what you say, to the best of their ability, not to help you or judge you or fix you in any way.

Now, something interesting may happen. To the extent that you accurately and completely communicate what came up, whatever came up will tend to naturally dissipate on its own, breaking the cycle of habitual ideation and identification. It may persist for an hour or a day, but it will eventually yield.

Travellers's Note 8: Peeling The Onion

Our identity, or self-concept, was built over the course of a lifetime, laid down, layer by layer. As each layer is peeled away, a new layer is uncovered, one you may not have seen for years. Don't be surprised if it seems familiar, you're the one who put it there.

Initially, one's experience of who they are will change fairly rapidly. With regular practice, these changes will be slower, deeper, and sometimes charged with emotion. Don't let it frighten you away. You are waiting for you at the core.

Chapter 5 - Sleep

Sleep is an interesting state. Some folks think of sleep as unconsciousness, but our minds and bodies are quite active during the various phases of sleep, as can easily be measured by the EKG patterns recorded by numerous subjects while asleep.

Travellers's Note 9: Dreams

Your dreams, while you're in them, are just as "real" as any other experience, with one important exception. If you are injured or die in dreams, you awake into the very same body you had when you fell asleep.

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Choose a simple object to think about (I like rabbits). Now, get ready to deliberately think about that object. Notice that you are not yet thinking about that object (if you are, just let it go and start again). Ready, set, think “rabbit”. Did you think “rabbit”? Notice that you remember thinking “rabbit” but are no longer thinking that now.

Good. Now, try it again. This time, pay attention to the little bit of time leading up to the actual moment when you think “rabbit”. Then notice the little bit of time between the moment that you thought “rabbit” and the moment that you knew you’d done it. With a little practice, these two intervals will quickly get shorter and shorter, usually less than a second each.

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Travellers' Note 10: The Future

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Chapter 6 - Negativity

Negative feelings are caused by negative thoughts, not the other way around. Most of us think we are having unpleasant thoughts because we are experiencing negative emotions (sadness, anger, frustration, etc.), but in fact our feelings follow our thinking.

Travellers's Note 11: Feelings

Your feelings, or “moods”, seem terribly real and horribly inescapable. If you don't lead your horse, you are bound to go wherever it goes.

This is actually great news, because it means ***we are not stuck with how we feel.*** Feeling follows thought. It may take some practice, and it may take some time, but one can consciously and deliberately condition oneself to plant positive thoughts and uproot negative thoughts.

The next time you feel bad, notice your negative thoughts. Immediately upon identifying a negative thought, say to yourself “cancel, cancel” (yes, exactly that, twice). How did that feel? Did you think “cancel, cancel”? Notice any shift in your overall sense of well-being. It may be a very, very small difference, but it will grow with practice.

Good. Now, try it again. This time, pay attention to the little gap in time between the ending of the previous negative thought and the start of the next. Then notice that during that bit of time between the thoughts, you didn’t feel so bad. With a little practice, this interval will grow longer and longer, until one negative thought does not automatically lead to the next one.

Now, it may take some time before you see results. Patience. Fruit trees don’t grow in a day. But given time and attention, they may yield wonderful, tasty fruit.

Travellers's Note 12: Magic

Don't expect magic! Trust yourself instead to hard work and persistence.

Magic may occur, but don't count on it. Work is the vessel you build to

hold that which is gained. That which is obtained without work may

leave just as easily.

You are not the slave of your feelings, or even your thoughts.

Learn to think deliberately, and free yourself!

Chapter 7 - Meditation

Meditation is a practice, not a technique. It is about using the mind in a deliberate, directed fashion. It is not about surrender, devotion, mysticism, or magic. It can help you clear your mind, relax your body, and enrich your experience of the here and now, but it will not heal you. You have to do that.

Travellers's Note 13: Trying

Trying to meditate is like trying to ride a bicycle. You just have to get on, do your best, and fall down a lot until you get it right. Like Yoda said,

“There is only do, or do not. There is no try.”

There are three principal forms of meditation, Koan, Mantra, and Zazen. They all involve taking control of the mind, but in radically different ways.

Koan meditation is the practice of focusing on a single thought or question, to the exclusion of all else. Any thought or question will do, but it is best if the question cannot be answered by mind alone. For example, you might ask “Who am I?” While this question may have a rational answer, that is not the objective. The objective is to keep the mind focused on a single point, burrowing deeper and deeper. Since the question has no answer, the mind will eventually exhaust itself. It is at this point that one’s natural or true self can be directly experienced.

Mantra meditation is the practice of repeating a simple word or phrase internally, over and over. With consistent repetition the mantra will take on a life of its own, becoming a sort of background mental process. This will force the mind to stop periodically, creating gaps of no thought during which habitual or undesirable thoughts can be replaced by healthier, wholesome thoughts.

Zazen meditation is the practice of focusing on nothing at all, but instead maintaining an alert awareness of whatever comes up in the mind. One by one, things will arise, only to be recognized, observed, and then allowed to dissipate on their own. Most people find this very difficult at first, as their minds are awash in a deluge of ever-shifting thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Nonetheless, with practice, one begins to detach from each thought, gradually working through an edifice of thought and identifications built up over a lifetime, “peeling the onion”, layer by layer, until arriving at the center. Of course, at the exact center, there is nothing at all!

Meditation should NOT be undertaken in a lighthearted or frivolous manner. You will experience changes, new ways of thinking and being that you are not yet prepared for. The best way to protect yourself is to join a group or tradition of people who will be there to support you as you attempt to integrate what you have experienced into your daily life.

Travellers's Note 14: Hazards

Meditation, if practiced regularly, can be beneficial, even therapeutic. But it is not without its hazards. You are changing your operating system, rewiring your brain. You will never be the same again.

If one practices Koan meditation seriously, they will eventually exhaust their mind and have a direct experience of union (“kensho”) with all that is. While mind-blowing, this can also leave one temporarily dysfunctional, especially for performing mundane tasks like driving a car or walking down stairs!

If one practices Mantra meditation constantly, they will eventually stop their mind, allowing them to finally drop old patterns of thought or feeling which are no longer useful. Of course, they may also find themselves temporarily dysfunctional, especially when it comes to forming coherent sentences or taking exams!

If one practices Zazen meditation patiently, they will eventually gain mastery of their attention, allowing them to experience whatever appears in the here and now, without attachment. This is the undifferentiated “one taste” experience of equanimity with all experience of everything that is. Of course, they may also find themselves temporarily dysfunctional, especially when it comes to dealing with the sadness or depression of world events, interpersonal trauma, and a diseased society!